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HEINRICH VOGELER

1872 Bremen - Kazakhstan 1942

The Curved Flight of Steps at Barkenhoff, Worpswede

Oil on board; executed in 1923.

Signed: *H Vogeler* and dated: 23 (lower right)

41.5 x 55.0 cm

PROVENANCE: Irma Assenheimer, Antwerp (acquired in the 1960s) – Thence by descent

LITERATURE: Bernd von Küster, *Das Barkenhoff Buch*, Lilienthal 1989, n.n. – Rena Noltenius, *Heinrich Vogeler 1872-1942*, Fischerhude 2013, no. 274 A., illustrated in colour (as dating from 1925 and with incorrect medium)

It's a part of me . . . my whole soul resides here
Heinrich Vogeler

The house where Heinrich Vogeler lived in Worpswede was named ‘Barkenhoff,’ the Low German word for *Birkenhof* [translatable as ‘birch tree cottage’]. Originally a rustic farm cottage, the building was comprehensively remodelled by Vogeler and transformed into a work of art which uniquely documents a long and productive period of his life.

In 1895, Vogeler began work on his transformation of the building, applying ‘Jugendstil’ principles. Out of a simple thatched cottage he created the perfect artist’s residence – an aesthetic meeting place which he filled with furniture, wall coverings and tableware after his own designs. A garden was laid out with symmetrically arranged flower beds and hedges. Around it a large number of birch trees were planted. The property, with its unique synthesis of architecture, art, interior decoration and garden design, perfectly complemented Vogeler’s chosen philosophy of life and provided a harmonious background to his artistic output.

Barkenhoff was Vogeler’s base for nearly thirty years, and for almost as long – namely from 1899 to 1924 – it provided one of the central motifs in his oeuvre.

In the years around 1900 when his artistic reputation was at its zenith, Barkenhoff was a favourite meeting place for the artistic community of Worpswede. Before World War I it became a hub of creative exchange in Germany, drawing prominent artists, musicians and writers [Fig.1]. Among Vogeler’s closest contacts were the painters Otto Modersohn, Paula Becker and Clara Westhoff, the writers Gerhart and Carl Hauptmann, and the poet Rainer Maria Rilke.¹

When war broke out Vogeler volunteered for military service and was posted to the Carpathian Mountains as an intelligence officer. His participation in the war led to a shift in his style and an increasing sympathy for the struggles of the proletariat. This is reflected in his active support of revolutionary socialism. In 1919, he founded the Barkenhoff ‘Kommune und Arbeitsschule’ [commune and school for work instruction] with a group of like-minded friends.

¹ Richard Pettit, ‘Der Barkenhoff und der Freundeskreis um 1900’, in *Heinrich Vogeler, Kunstwerke, Gebrauchsgegenstände, Dokumente*, exhib. cat., Berlin, Staatliche Kunsthalle and Hamburg, Kunstverein 1983, p. 15 ff.

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In 1923, the socio-utopian experiment of a workers' commune and school failed. Vogeler placed the house in the hands of the Rote Hilfe Deutschlands, the German affiliate of the International Red Aid, and an orphanage was set up for the children of political prisoners and workers who had died in the revolutionary struggles. In 1924, Vogeler gifted Barkenhoff to the Rote Hilfe. The orphanage was forced to close in 1932 and the house was sold to Max Karl Schwarz, a landscape designer.²

In the early 1980s, the district of Osterholz and municipality of Worpsswede purchased Barkenhoff and a Heinrich Vogeler Museum was founded. After extensive restoration the Museum was reopened in 2004 according to a new concept [Fig.2].



Fig.1: Heinrich Vogeler, *Summer Evening (The Concert)*, 1905.

Oil on canvas, 175 x 310 cm.

Heinrich Vogeler Museum, Worpsswede



Fig.2: The Heinrich Vogeler Museum, Worpsswede

² Rena Noltenius, *Heinrich Vogeler (1872-1942) Ein Leben in Bildern*, p. 219.