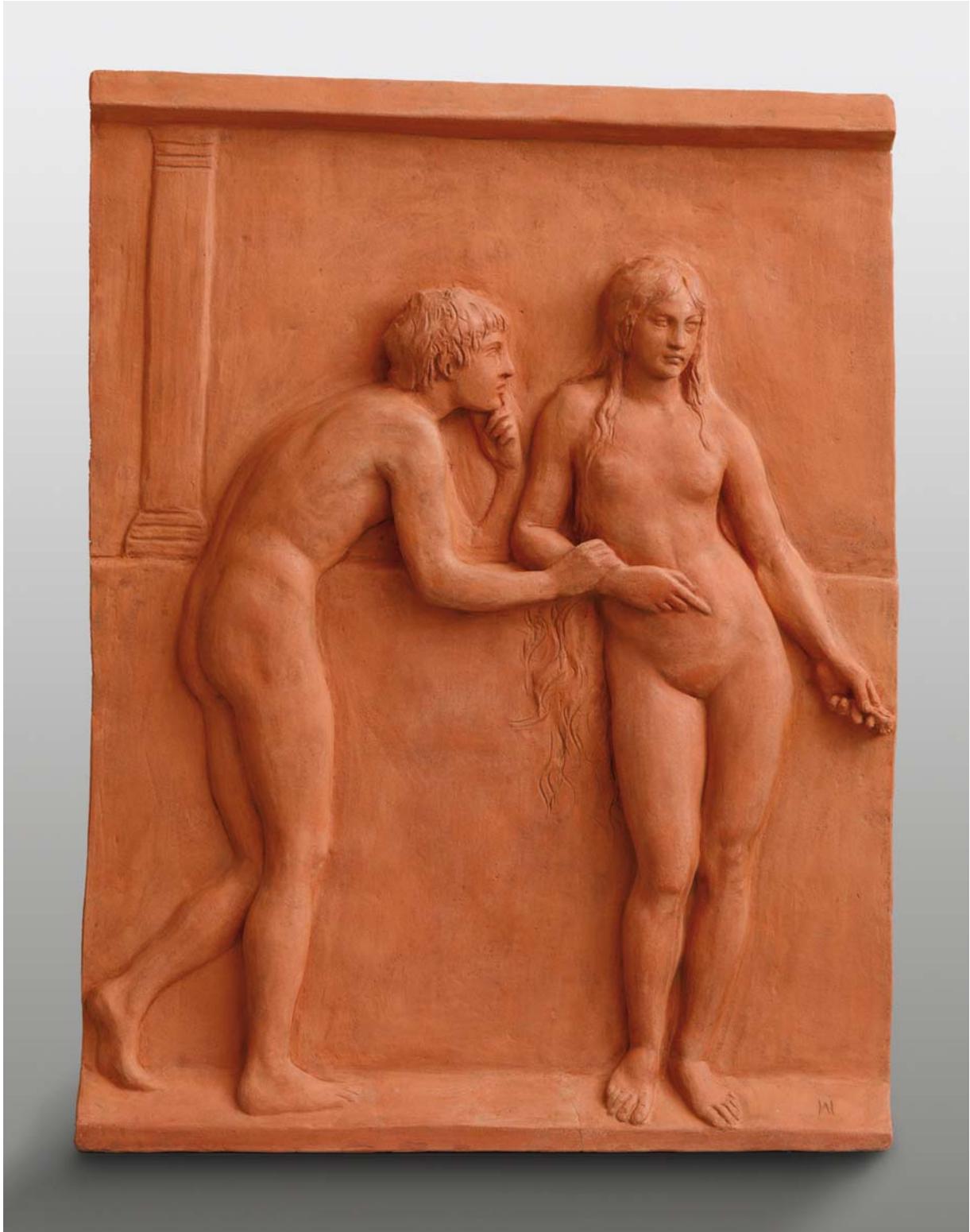


LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



ADOLF VON HILDEBRAND

1847 Marburg – Munich 1921

Werbung [Courtship]

Terracotta relief. Signed lower right with the monogram: AH; executed c.1886.

One of only two known versions in terracotta. A slightly later, unfinished version in marble is recorded. It is now housed in the former monastery of San Francesco di Paola in Florence where it is set in a wall. 97 x 72 x 12 cm.

PROVENANCE: The artist's estate – Thence by descent in the artist's family – Karl Bäßler (1888-1973), Munich (architect, administrative director of the Deutsches Museum, Munich, whose reconstruction he led after World War II) – Private collection, Munich (received as a gift from the above) – Thence by descent

LITERATURE: H. Knackfuß (ed.) 'Künstler-Monographien' LX: Alexander Heilmeyer, *Adolf Hildebrand*, Bielefeld and Leipzig 1902, pp. 33 and 53, fig. 31 (probably an illustration of a terracotta relief before the monogram, incorrectly captioned: *Relief. Gips. 1 m.* [Relief. Plaster. 1 m.]) – Alexander Heilmeyer, *Adolf Hildebrand*, Munich 1922, p. 31, plate VI (illustration of a terracotta relief without monogram, captioned: *Werbung. Terrakotta. 1880*; description in the text: *1879-80 Werbung. Terrakotta. 97 x 72 cm. E.[ntstanden (executed)] Florenz. St.[andort (location)] Bei Hildebrand, München*) – Sigrid Esche-Braunfels, *Adolf von Hildebrand 1847-1921*, Berlin 1993, pp. 146-9, where two versions are listed: a terracotta relief ('97 x 72 cm, Pforzheim, Privatbesitz') and a version in marble ('100 x 80 cm, Florenz, San Francesco'); see p. 147, fig. 165 for an illustration of the version in marble.

Adolf von Hildebrand was hailed by his contemporaries as the leading sculptor of the period 1880 to 1910 in Germany. Like his friends Hans von Marées, Arnold Böcklin and Anselm Feuerbach he was one of the *Deutsch-Römer*, a group of German artists working in Italy. Hildebrand's work is marked by a search for formal clarity and a classical ideal of perfection. His figures are characterized by a timeless, somewhat austere objectivity. He adamantly rejected the notion of references to literary, historical and religious sources in his sculpture.¹

Hildebrand was largely self-taught. He trained for eighteen months at the Krelingsche Kunstgewerbeschule in Nuremberg before moving to Munich in 1866 where he continued his training under the sculptor Kaspar von Zumbusch. In 1867, he travelled to Italy with Zumbusch, making stops in Verona, Florence, Rome and Naples. Hildebrand soon resolved to set up on his own in Rome, where he struck up a friendship with the painter Hans von Marées. Through Marées he came into contact with Konrad Fiedler, a patron of the arts and a leading art critic, theorist and philosopher. Hildebrand's formal approach was profoundly influenced by the theoretical ideas of Marées and Fiedler and their quest for 'pure form'.² All three were absorbed with the culture of

¹ Esche-Braunfels, 1993, p. 9.

² Hildebrand's essay *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst*, first published 1893 and reprinted many times, exerted a considerable influence on the art world at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. This essay represents the theoretical basis of Hildebrand's work. Central to his thinking was the concept of form, which is based on reality but simplifies and idealises it. In his view the objective of art was to discover a purity of form in which relief and outline would find their ultimate expression. His guiding principle of artistic achievement was the Greek classical tradition.

classical antiquity and studied Renaissance and Baroque sculpture intensively. In 1873, Marées invited Hildebrand to work with him on a decorative scheme for the library of the Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn in Naples, one of the world's oldest research institutions of its kind. The library murals are considered to be among the finest examples of German fresco painting of the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1874, Hildebrand purchased the former monastery of San Francesco di Paola near Florence, where he set up studios for himself and Marées.³ When the friendship broke down in 1875 Marées returned to Rome but Hildebrand's friendship with Fiedler remained unaffected. His work was very well received at exhibitions in Berlin in 1884 and Munich in 1891. He received his first major commission in 1891 for the *Wittelsbacher Brunnen* [Wittelsbach Fountain]. From then on, patrons beat a path to his door, heaping him with commissions for fountains, monuments and portrait busts.

This terracotta is one of a group of reliefs known as the 'Florentine Reliefs' produced by Hildebrand in the years 1876 to 1890. The group consists of approximately twenty-three figural reliefs executed in plaster, terracotta and marble, none of which were executed as commissions. Almost all focus on the relationship between man and woman.⁴ Many of the reliefs show a clear debt to Florentine Renaissance sculpture. The date of execution is in most cases uncertain since only very few of the reliefs bear a signature and date.

The present relief depicts a young nude couple standing beside a parapet. The young man leans across towards the young woman, his hand resting lightly on her right arm. He fixes her intently, attempting to read her expression. The strain of his struggle to narrow the gulf between them is mirrored in his curved back and slightly hunched shoulders. The young woman is hesitant. She has averted her face and has a distant stare. The young man's conciliatory gesture fails to soften the woman's rigid, almost dismissive stance. Hildebrand's relief exploits the emotive possibilities of the situation. It is a powerful expression of the emotional tension between two people, the urgency of the young man's courtship of the young woman, her doubt and hesitation.⁵

Hildebrand made a number of preparatory studies for this motif. He began by using a sketch he had made in the early 1870s and returned to it later to make corrections. In this first sketch the female figure is shown seated, with Cupid at her side [Fig. 2]. In the 1880s he produced a further group of sketches in which he focuses mainly on modifications to the female figure. One of these is a pen-and-ink drawing over pencil [Fig. 3]⁶ and another, a pencil drawing [Fig. 4]. Cupid is depicted in both drawings but does not appear in the relief. Hildebrand may have preferred to use physical gestures to convey the emotional dynamics of the situation, rather than an allegorical figure. All the preparatory studies discussed above reflect a strong stylistic link with the draughtsmanship of Marées. He also addressed the present theme in his drawings and paintings.

Recent research findings show that only two examples of the terracotta relief titled *Werbung* [Courtship] are known to exist. One is the present relief, while the other is a relief held in a private collection in Pforzheim. The unfinished version in marble, which he made slightly later for himself,

³ For details of the former monastery and the establishment of the artists' studios [*Künstlerhaus*], see Felicitas Ehrhardt, *Ästhetisches Utopia. Adolf von Hildebrand und sein Künstlerhaus San Francesco di Paola in Florenz. Untersuchungen zu seiner Geschichte und Bedeutung*, Regensburg 2018.

⁴ See Esche-Braunfels, 1993, 'Reliefs der 80er Jahre, Auseinandersetzung mit Marées', pp. 140-71.

⁵ Ead., op. cit., p. 147.

⁶ *Adolf von Hildebrand 1847-1921, Zeichnungen eines Münchner Bildhauers*, exhib. cat., Thomas le Claire Kunsthandel, Hamburg 2000, no. 8, repr. on title page.

is now set in a wall in the former monastery of San Francesco di Paola in Florence which Hildebrand purchased in 1874 and where he set up studios for himself and Hans von Marées.

Esche-Braunfels writes: *The terracotta relief developed out of a revised conception of the motif, a variant design which Hildebrand went on to realise in stone [marble]. ... Some areas of the stone version were left unfinished, ... notably the detail of the hands, which are only rendered in a generalised manner*⁷ [Fig. 5]. It is not unreasonable to surmise that Hildebrand had a preliminary plaster made after this variant design, and that it served as a model for the two terracotta reliefs and for the slightly later marble version. The illustration on page 33 of Heilmeyer's 1902 publication on Hildebrand is captioned *Relief. Gips. 1 m.* (Relief. Plaster. 1 m) [Fig. 6]. This 'plaster relief' could very well be the supposed preliminary plaster. But it is more likely that there is an error in the caption, since plate VI of Heilmeyer's 1922 publication illustrates a relief captioned *Werbung. Terrakotta. 1880* with an identical defect – both illustrations show the same small defect at the upper right edge of the relief. This leads to the conclusion that the relief illustrated in the 1902 publication is not plaster, but terracotta. If the 1922 caption is indeed correct it must be assumed that the relief illustrated in both Heilmeyer publications is the terracotta relief now held in a private collection in Pforzheim.

The present terracotta relief is a highly finished work with finely modelled detail, its surfaces bearing the hallmark of Hildebrand's distinctive aesthetic. The presence of the artist's monogram legitimizes it as the definitive version of the motif. The only differences with the marble relief are found in the detail. The two versions equal each other in their artistic and expressive qualities.

*For on shrewd reflection, bas relief is of unparalleled superiority to sculpture in the round and it approaches, to some degree, the greatness of painting since it requires perspective.*⁸ Leonardo's remarks on the art of the relief⁹ were almost certainly an important source of inspiration for Hildebrand in his quest for purity of form and expression in relief sculpture. To achieve a perspectival effect he employed a system of vertically layered parallel planes and carefully planned overlap, in combination with considered figural configuration. These techniques lend the present relief a sense of depth and three-dimensionality. The different levels of the background planes and the contrasting areas of raised modelling heighten the impression of space surrounding the two figures. Their feet are clearly positioned on a ledge-like strip of ground which projects out from the lower background plane. This plane represents the parapet of a loggia. The woman's wavy hair is modelled in relief and undulating incisions in the terracotta are used to depict the long strands that emerge beneath her right arm and flow down the side of the parapet. The young man leans his left elbow on the top of the parapet. Beyond the two figures is a void formed by the upper background plane. This represents the outlook from the loggia. The sculpted roof overhang at the upper edge of the relief projects out from the upper background plane. Like its counterpart, the strip of ground under the feet of the figures, it serves as a compositional element and as a sculpted framing device. Hildebrand handles spatial recession with clarity, confidence and remarkable economy of means.

⁷ Esche-Braunfels, op. cit., p. 146.

⁸ Leonardo da Vinci, *Das Buch von der Malerei*, I-III, Vienna 1882, trans. Heinrich Ludwig, p. 81.

⁹ Hildebrand had met the painter Heinrich Ludwig in Rome in 1867. At the time, Ludwig was working on his translation of Leonardo's writings on art theory.



Fig. 1: *Courtship*, pencil sketch, 1870s, with corrections in pencil dating from the 1880s, 346 x 280 mm.
Private collection



Fig. 2: *Courtship*, sketch in pen and black ink over pencil, 185 x 140 mm.
Formerly: Le Claire Kunst (2000); private collection



Fig. 3: *Courtship*, pencil sketch, 138 x 101 mm.
Private collection



Fig. 4: Hans von Marées, *Courtship*, study for the central panel of the triptych of the same title, c.1884-5, 440 x 600 mm.
Formerly: Mary Fiedler-Balling, Partenkirchen

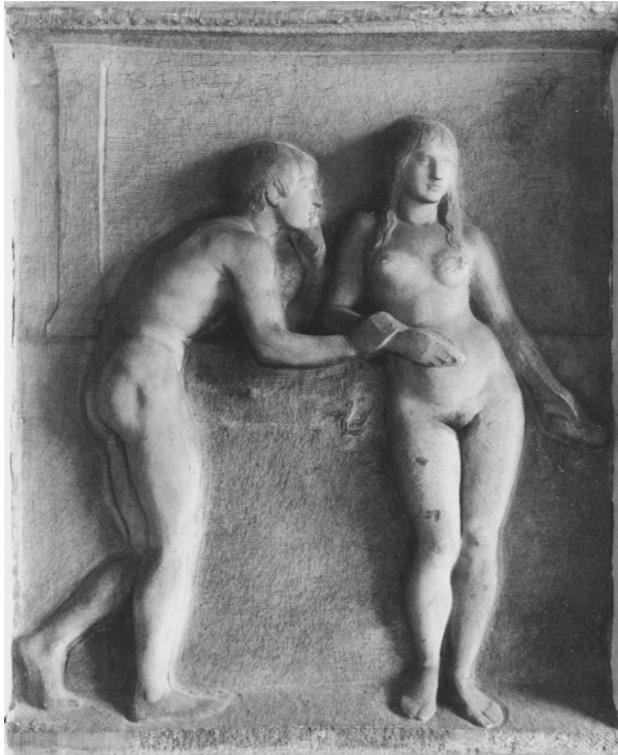


Fig. 5: *Courtship*, marble relief, 100 x 80 cm.
Monastery of San Francesco di Paola, Florence (set in a wall)



Fig. 6: *Werbung* [Courtship], plaster or terracotta, height: 1 m.
Photograph published in H. Knackfuß (ed.), *Künstler-Monographien*, LX:
Alexander Heilmeyer, *Adolf Hildebrand*, Bielefeld and Leipzig 1902, pp. 33 and 53, fig. 31