

***CHILD PORTRAIT (PETER IN SICILY) (KNABENBILDNIS [PETER IN SIZILIEN])*, 1925**

Georg Schrimpf

Many of the era's artists favored portraiture. The genre has been popular for thousands of years, but for New Objectivity artists, portraiture was a means to keep art firmly in their own era rather than tied to the past. Subjects were depicted unflinchingly—as were urban landscapes, industrial facilities, and other subjects. These portraits tended to be unsentimental and unidealized—in fact, they often exaggerated what their subjects looked like in real life.

Children were no exception. In portraits such as *Child Portrait (Peter in Sicily)*, young children were accurately but impassively rendered, with the suggestion that beneath their placid expressions lurked something sinister or disturbed. Children were coming of age in a time characterized not by joy, play, and innocence but by alienation.

This child, the artist's son, stands at a balcony railing, with a pastoral landscape stretching behind him. Dressed in the proper fashion of the time, he looks at the viewer with a puzzling expression. No childlike wonder registers on his face; instead, we see wariness, or a reserve that would be more characteristic of a much older child, or an adult. The child's size in relation to the painting—he nearly fills the vertical dimensions of the canvas—imparts an almost surreal presence. As a German art historian pointed out, Georg Schrimpf's work is disconcerting because it includes both monumentality (in this case, the scale of the child's figure) and simplicity (an innocent child, with no narrative content). Yes, this is a child, but what lurks beneath the surface?



*Child Portrait (Peter in Sicily)* (Knabenbildnis [Peter in Sizilien]), 1925

Georg Schrimpf (German, 1889–1938)

Oil on canvas, 24 1/2 × 17 in. (62.2 × 43.2 cm);

framed: 30 3/4 × 23 1/8 × 2 in. (78.1 × 58.4 × 5.1 cm)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by the Robert Gore Rifkind Foundation, Beverly Hills, CA (M.2013.18)

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**WAR VETERANS' ASSOCIATION (KRIEGERVEREIN), 1921**

Georg Scholz

New Objectivity artists took as their subjects both the victims of the Weimar Republic and those in power who benefited from the era's deprivation and chaos. They often cast a critical eye on rampant profiteering and extremism on both ends of the political spectrum. Employing satire and exaggeration, these artists, through their creations, offered close observations that emphasized the ugly and the grotesque as an intentional affront to comfortable bourgeois society.

*War Veterans' Association* embodies Georg Scholz's distaste for the conservative members of German society who participated in the war and later prospered in its aftermath. Literally fat with their success, these rotund veterans are armed with symbols that identify them as conservative anti-republicans. The building behind them—a pub—is named "To the Iron Hindenburg," a reference to Paul von Hindenburg, a top German field

marshal during the war. (A few years after this painting was completed, Hindenburg served as the second president of Germany). Behind the three figures is a war memorial, not to the World War I war dead, but a monument to the Franco-Prussian War of the 1870s, in which Germany was victorious over France. Thus, these men represent nostalgia for Germany's glorious pre-World War I past. The town depicted is quiet and undamaged by the war, but the three veterans and other figures (see the child in white holding flowers), all with cartoonish faces, suggest Scholz's criticism of social conservatism.

Scholz, himself a wounded war veteran, joined the Communist Party after the war and used his skills as an illustrator to contribute to satirical magazines. Once the Nazis came to power, his art was branded "degenerate" and removed from public museums.





*War Veterans' Association (Kriegerverein)*, 1921

Georg Scholz (German, 1890–1945)

Oil on wood, 27 1/8 × 29 1/2 in. (68.9 × 74.9 cm); framed: 31 1/4 × 33 1/2 × 1 1/8 in. (79.4 × 85.1 × 3 cm)

Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe

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Photo by A. Fischer/H. Kohler, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe Fotowerkstatt

***ALLOTMENT GARDEN LANDSCAPE (SCHREBERGARTENLANDSCHAFT), 1929***

Albert Renger-Patzsch

The Weimar Republic gave rise to the urban metropolis in Germany. For many, the city represented, ironically, both a space for new possibilities emerging from modernization as well as the driving force behind man's alienation from nature and from his fellow man. In both painting and photography, New Objectivity artists captured the frictions at play between the rural and urban—the former seen as connected to the past and, for some, the latter seemingly imbued with the future. Some embraced the changes; others sought to contrast the rapid encroachment of twentieth-century industrialization with nostalgia for the (supposedly) simpler, bucolic life of earlier times. Thus, a sense of displacement often characterized how they related to the landscape. How were the natural and the manmade environments to coexist?

*Allotment Garden Landscape* presents such a dilemma. A self-styled “photographer of things,” Albert Renger-Patzsch rejected the idea that photographs should mimic painting, employing heightened contrast or soft-focus romanticizing. Instead, he advocated a straightforward approach. He rooted his depictions in the idea that nature presented a sense of order, though not a

mechanistic order; he maintained that something sublime was contained within that order. Photographs such as this one clearly exhibit such orderliness: the repeated fence posts rise vertically, and the crop rows stretch neatly into the distance, shapes echoed by the distant vertical factory chimneys. It's difficult to discern if a point of view, positive or negative, is implied here. The photo captures an in-between world of ambiguity.

Some New Objectivity photographers (and painters) used extreme close-ups of factories and machines to transform them into geometric compositions of hard-edged beauty. Here, the focus is not on the surface but on contradiction. Are we to honor the past by maintaining it? For *Allotment Garden Landscape*, the photographer explores the relationship between urban modernity and organic nature, ultimately leaving it for the viewer to determine.





*Allotment Garden Landscape* (Schrebergartenlandschaft), 1929

Albert Renger-Patzsch (German, 1897–1966)

Gelatin silver print, Sheet: 6 1/2 × 8 7/8 in. (16.5 × 22.5 cm); framed: 20 3/8 × 16 3/8 × 1 1/2 in. (51.8 × 41.7 × 4 cm)

Galerie Berinson, Berlin

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Photo courtesy Galerie Berinson, Berlin

***TO BEAUTY (AN DIE SCHÖNHEIT)*, 1922**

Otto Dix

One of the leading exponents of New Objectivity (along with George Grosz and Max Beckmann), Otto Dix was a war veteran who exposed the horrors of war in a searing group of works on paper entitled *War*. He also made paintings like this one, which, while seemingly cool and detached, actually presents a biting satire of postwar Germany.

*To Beauty* is a self-portrait, but it is anything but an accurate representation of the artist, who was staunchly anti-establishment rather than the dandified businessman he portrayed here (center). The figures and symbols of the painting combine to form a portrait of post-war Germany, particularly its urban centers. The jazz musician and dancers evoke the modern age (American jazz became popular in Germany, as elsewhere, in the 1920s, though it was not until years later that jazz bands actually visited the country). The artist holds a telephone, also symbolizing the modernity of the period.

The African-American drummer and the Native American painted on the drum both reference

Germany's interest in American culture, focused most acutely on Native Americans, who, to Germans, represented a romanticized view of Germanic tribes and tribalism.

Taken as a whole, the painting is unsettling, as some of the symbols have multiple meanings. Dix likely was familiar with the telephone, as field telephones were used during the war to pass commands to those stationed on the front lines, including Dix, who was a machine gunner. Thus, it is a symbol of communication but also a reminder of the war. A couple dances in contemporary dress in the background, but what of the figure to the right? She is a dressmaker's dummy, legless and lifeless, perhaps a stand-in for all the armless or legless battlefield survivors. The artist paints himself as older than his chronological age, with a receding hairline. The drummer is about to play, the telephone about to ring. Is this the present? It may be that the artist saw this moment as one of flux, suggesting an uncertain future.





*To Beauty* (An die Schönheit), 1922

Otto Dix (German, 1891–1969)

Oil and collage on canvas, 54 7/8 × 47 1/2 in. (139.5 × 120.5 cm);  
framed: 60 1/4 × 52 7/8 × 2 3/4 in. (153 × 134.5 × 7 cm)

Von der Heydt-Museum Wuppertal, Germany

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