

# RUDOLF BAUER: A NON-OBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW

Steven Lowy

*The main thing is that the picture be organic. . . . A decisive factor is whether the picture is simply a plane or a shaping of space. . . . When I limit myself to the plane I see nothing but the canvas, which is not what I see when I am working in the cosmic.*

—Letter from Rudolf Bauer to Hilla Rebay, August 1917<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Early in the twentieth century in Berlin, in the tradition of famed French illustrator and painter Honoré Daumier, a German caricaturist and political cartoonist named Rudolf Bauer began to make his mark. While Bauer's illustrations delighted his audience and paid the bills, it was his avant-garde experiments in Cubism, Futurism, and Constructivism that stirred his soul. So accomplished was Bauer's hand that he caught the attention of Herwarth Walden, founder of the famed Galerie Der Sturm in Berlin. Walden mounted three solo shows of Bauer's paintings amid exhibitions of works by Marc Chagall, Vasily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Franz Marc, and other modernist luminaries.

In America Bauer's work was introduced to the American public in the early 1920s through Société Anonyme co-founder Katherine Dreier, one of America's foremost collectors, whose curator was the legendary artist Marcel Duchamp. Bauer's work was featured in the exhibition bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, as early as 1933. Solomon R. Guggenheim became Bauer's champion and patron and purchased more than three hundred works for his collection. A 1937 article in *Time* magazine cites a Bauer painting as Guggenheim's favorite and pictures the copper magnate sitting proudly in front of it.<sup>2</sup> Guggenheim established a foundation for Non-Objective painting and committed to the construction of the now-famous museum on Fifth Avenue, efforts that can be argued were the direct result of Bauer's ideas.

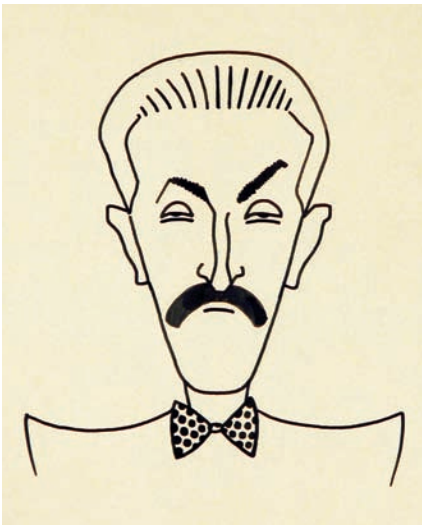
Bauer's work *The Holy One* (1936) was the inspiration for the main attraction at the 1939 World's Fair, the Trylon and Perisphere buildings.<sup>3</sup> Art historian Robert Rosenblum has also noted the striking similarity of Bauer's *Blue Triangle* (1934) to Barnett Newman's Abstract Expressionist sculpture *Broken Obelisk* (1963–69), one of the centerpieces of the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.<sup>4</sup>



Solomon R. Guggenheim and Rudolf Bauer, c. 1940

The curator and art historian William Moritz has noted that “Bauer’s work during the thirties and forties . . . was very much seen and quite influential, so no responsible history of abstract art can fail to discuss his work.”<sup>5</sup> Why then have the name Rudolf Bauer and his work disappeared into near oblivion? Was his erasure from the annals of art history intentional and malevolent? These are the questions that continue to stir debate, as the art world begins to rediscover the work of this visionary artist.

Clearly, an artist’s reputation is not cast in bronze. Fame can be as ephemeral as music and equally vulnerable to the vagaries of taste. Often the museum and the marketplace are slow to recognize the genius of an artist. Occasionally, historical corrections are made, and a person whose work was popular fades slowly into obscurity. Whether an artist’s body of work enjoys lasting esteem or disappears from view is a complex equation of luck, timing, patronage, and politics, as viewed through the mutable frame of art history.



RUDOLF BAUER *Caricature Self-Portrait*  
Ink and pencil on paper  
11½ x 8⅝ inches c. 1920

Nor does the history of art take personality into its equation, which is fortunate. If it did, then we might not be familiar with works by Michelangelo, Caravaggio, van Gogh, Gauguin, or Pollock, all of whom were possessed of notorious temperaments. Sensibly, an artist’s charm is not a primary criterion for inclusion in the great art collections of the world. What may be crucial to the fate of an artist’s work, or even an entire art movement, however, is the popularity of its champion, curator, or patron.

Bauer’s place in art history is linked to the lives of two people: Solomon R. Guggenheim and Hilla Rebay, the Guggenheim Museum’s founding director. Bauer and Rebay had met in Berlin. Rebay, in turn, had come to America and introduced Bauer’s work to Guggenheim. The charismatic Baroness Hilla Rebay von Ehrenweisen was an eccentric and passionate woman who alienated a number of people, some incredibly influential. No one disputes that she over-promoted herself and Bauer during her tenure as Guggenheim’s

personal curator, and aspects of her behavior would be deemed outrageous by today’s museum standards. That she was Guggenheim’s mistress during her ascendancy no doubt polarized opinion about her even further.

Yet Rebay’s conviction, coupled with Guggenheim’s financial resources, built her a prominent place in the history of art. Nearly single-handedly, she introduced “Non-Objective” art to the American public.<sup>6</sup> Rebay was instrumental in establishing not only the Guggenheim collection but also the iconic building designed to house it, as she was the one to arrange for Frank Lloyd Wright to design this new “temple” of art on Fifth Avenue. Inside the helical walls, the spiral ramp was to be an educational timeline of Non-Objective art. Sadly, however, the opening of the museum in 1959 was colored by a purge of many of Solomon Guggenheim’s prized works. This change of direction, in which much of the Non-Objective art was relegated to the basement, was enacted by Harry Guggenheim, Solomon’s nephew, who helmed the Foundation following Solomon’s death in 1949. It is a change that in retrospect appears to be personally motivated, as there is no artistic or art-historical precedent for such a wholesale omission. As

one scholar stated, “Changing the focus of the museum appeared to Rebay as a betrayal, not only of her own designs but of the founder’s intentions as well.”<sup>7</sup>

No artist suffered a more dramatic rise and fall in this chapter of the Guggenheim’s history than Rudolf Bauer. He has long been portrayed as a “difficult personality,” whose arrogance was great and ingratitude to Rebay and Guggenheim even greater. The intention here is to correct the historical record through information found in the Rudolf Bauer Estate and Archives, the Hilla Rebay Archives, and newly found primary sources in order to fairly present the art and genius of Germany’s greatest abstract painter of the twentieth century—Rudolf Bauer.

## EARLY YEARS

Alexander Georg Rudolf Bauer was born in 1889 in Lindenwald, a town in a border region between Germany and Poland that is now part of Poland. Bauer’s family was of the Evangelical faith. His father, Theodor Bauer, was an engine fitter, who likely moved his family to Berlin in the 1890s.

Anecdotal evidence and a large body of highly accomplished, realistic student works suggest that Bauer was an avid artist from an early age (see below). When the moment arrived for the fledgling artist to discuss his desire to go to art school, his father, disapproving of this choice, beat him so brutally that Bauer ran away from home, never to return.<sup>8</sup> Bauer did enter art school in Charlottenburg, a suburb of Berlin, in 1905, but he was never able to count on support from his family again.

RUDOLF BAUER *Römisches Wagenrennen von Ulpiano Chéca* Ink and gouache on board 11¼ x 19⅝ inches 1905







**Mondkränk**

Ich seh es wohl, wie sich dein Auge fruchtet,  
und muß so weh, so bitter weh dir tun.  
Doch wenn die bleiche Vollmondsichel leuchtet,  
dann darf ich nicht in deinen Armen ruhn.

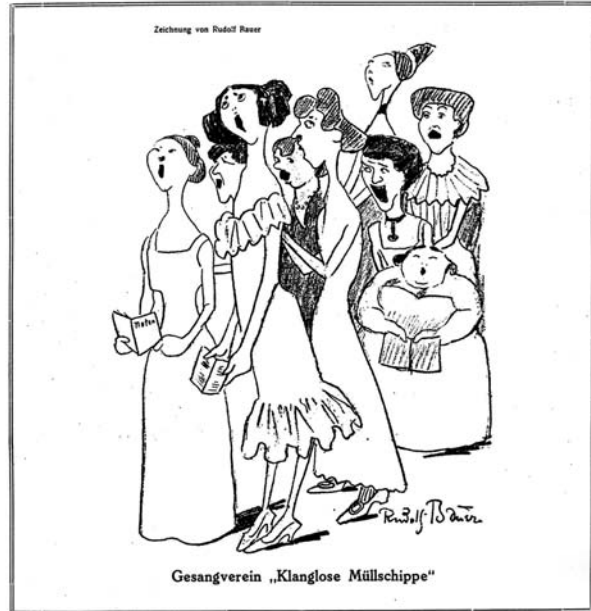
In diesen weißen, vollmondschwangren Nächten  
blüht eine fremde Sehnsucht mir im Blut,  
ich bin verfallen dann den fremden Nächten,  
und einmal heißen sie den Herztribut.

Ich bin ja dein, — dein bist du, — dein für immer,  
laß dich nicht schrecken jene Mäuselgur,  
so bald verlischt der geisterhafte Schimmer,  
— drei kurze Nächte strahlt der Vollmond nur.

Dann leb ich wieder nur für dich mein Leben,  
nur dir gilt dann der Seele Flügelweh,  
kann denn ein Menschenherz noch mehr dir  
geben?

— — — — —

Nur wenn der Vollmond leuchtet, —  
muß ich von dir gehn . . .  
Eugen Stangen



**Au!**  
Otto (im Restaurant): „Papa, hier steht:  
Weinessig. Das ist doch falsch, nicht wahr?“  
Papa: „Aber warum denn?“  
Otto: „Nus, man sagt doch: Wein  
trink ich.“

**Auch etwas**  
„Der Schauspieler Bellermann soll ja in der  
vorigen Woche eine Glanzleistung vollbracht  
haben!“  
„So?“  
„Ja, er hatte sich seine Stübel mal —  
blank geputzt.“

**Ein Wiedersehn**  
Sie sahen sich wieder zum ersten Mal,  
nach Jahren, nach trüben, bängen;  
nach Jahren, erfüllt von Sehnsuchtsqual  
und Zueinanderverlangen.

Und was sie bewegte im Augenblick,  
das lag in dem einen Satze:  
Er dachte enttäuscht: „Wie ward sie dick!“  
Und sie: „O . . . welche Glatze!“

Sascha





Herr (zu seinen beiden Nachbarinnen, die sich fortwährend laut über eine befreundete Familie unterhalten): „Entschuldigen Sie, meine Damen, von den Meiers habe ich genug gehört. Jetzt möchte ich auch 'mal 'n bißchen von Beethoven hören!“

— 8 — Zeitbild. — 8 —

„Was ist denn bei Dir los, daß alle Deine Damen so eifrig memorieren?“ — „Nun ja, meine Frau spricht morgen in einem Verein über die Aufklärungsfrage. Meine Tochter nimt nächsten Sonntag bei einer Liebhabervorstellung eine geschiedene Frau und meine Schwiegermutter tritt heute im Wohltätigkeitsbazar auf der Märchenbühne als Fee auf.“



According to his hand-typed resume (see Appendix B), Bauer started working as a cartoonist at the age of twelve and over time became widely published. Between 1910 and 1914 the young artist was able to support himself by doing illustrations and caricatures for various magazines including *Muskete*, *Fliegende Blätter*, *Ulk*, *Figaro*, and many others. He created clever compositions and had a tremendous facility for visual satire (see previous pages).

## DER STURM AND STIRRINGS OF NON-OBJECTIVISM

Galerie Der Sturm was founded by Herwarth Walden in Berlin in 1912, two years after the founding of the magazine of the same name. Bauer was initiated into Der Sturm (The Storm) circle around 1915 and, with his participation in a number of group exhibitions, began to put aside his commercial illustration work in favor of painting.<sup>9</sup> In addition to Bauer, gallery artists included Vasily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, Paul Klee, Marc Chagall, members of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter, various French Cubists, and the Italian Futurists. It is likely that it was at Der Sturm that Bauer first saw the work of Kandinsky, an artist whose philosophy and approach would have a strong impact on Bauer's artistic direction. In a letter of August 1917 he wrote: "The strongest and most advanced of all—theoretically and practically, synthetically and analytically—is Kandinsky."<sup>10</sup>



VASILY KANDINSKY *Rose im Grau (Rose in Gray)* Oil on canvas  
16 x 20½ inches 1926

Bauer would become a fixture at Der Sturm, working as Walden's assistant and being given solo shows in 1917, 1918, and 1920. He taught at Walden's Der Sturm School, where Klee was also an instructor. This was a prolific period for Bauer. The Austrian curator Susanne Neuburger described this period in Bauer's artistic growth:

*He was very busy with his associations at the Sturm Gallery as well as his teaching activities at the Sturm School; that is to say, during this time he could probably follow his inclinations and exclusively devote himself to the problem of Non-Objective art. The periodical Der Sturm regularly featured drawings by Bauer,*

*often as cover illustrations. One can see more easily in the drawings than the paintings of that time that Bauer went through a Cubist/Futurist phase before he turned to the Expressionist vocabulary of form that characterizes his "Sturm" period.<sup>11</sup> (See pages 8–9 for examples of his *Der Sturm* cover work.)*

In addition to his Non-Objective work at Der Sturm, he completed a series of representational pastels depicting the horrors of World War I (see pages 162–63). According to art historian and dealer Freerk Valentien, negative portrayals of war or the German army were forbidden during both world wars under threat of serious punishment. It is unknown whether any of these works by Bauer were ever exhibited during his lifetime. Bauer's conscientious objection to war is conveyed not only through the subject matter but often through the wordplay in his titles. A

Right: *Der Sturm* brochures and artwork price list for the exhibition at Georg Kleis Kunsthandel, Copenhagen, 1918

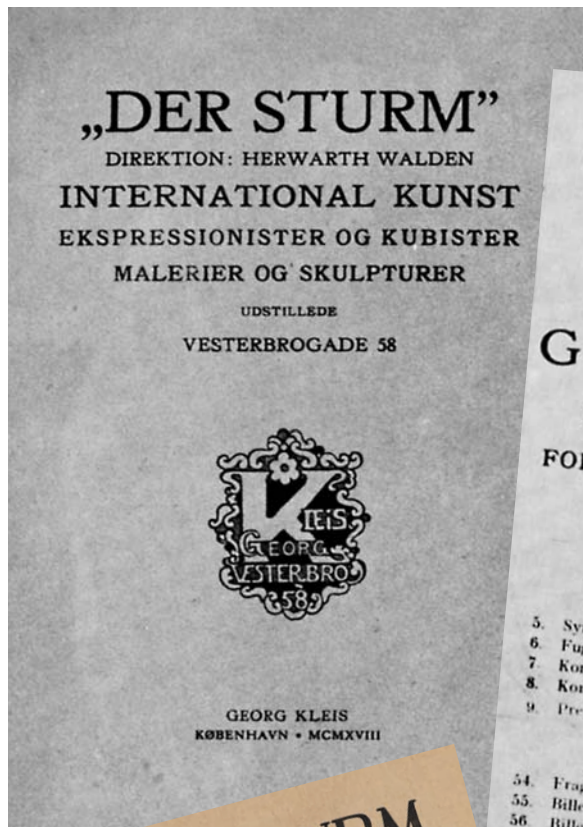
caricature of two unhappy-looking soldiers is titled *Feldgraulich*, a word coined by Bauer that translates as “miserable field gray.”

References to the war may also be found in his Non-Objective art of the period. Several paintings include floating crosses—symbols, perhaps, of casualties of war. *Composition 32* (1918) (page 58) pictures what appears to be barbed wire running through the center of the composition. The masterpiece of this Expressionist period is *White Cross* (1919) (page 62), a painting that Bauer considered one of his finest.<sup>12</sup> In this exuberant work a single small white cross floats in a sea of intense expressionistic energy.

#### ENTER HILLA REBAY

The Baroness Hilla von Rebay, also a young artist, moved in 1917 to Berlin from Zurich, where she had been studying. Her former lover the sculptor Hans (Jean) Arp had given her an introduction to *Der Sturm* the previous year. No longer romantically involved with Arp, Rebay met Bauer at the gallery and was courted by him. Described by some of her male colleagues as the best “woman artist” they knew, Rebay was invited to join the Novembergruppe (of which Bauer was a co-founder) and exhibited with them in 1918.

For the next year and a half Rebay traveled outside Berlin, maintaining contact with Bauer through the post. During this period he was her champion at *Der Sturm*. In his letters Bauer mentions his efforts on her behalf, including having her works framed, setting prices, and arranging for favorable placement in group exhibitions.<sup>13</sup> In 1919 one of Rebay’s engravings was published on the cover of *Der Sturm*, and she was featured in a two-person show at the gallery. That same year she returned to Berlin to move into the studio Bauer had found for them at 25 Ahornallee in Berlin’s fashionable Westend. This marked the beginning of their tempestuous lifelong relationship.



GEORG KLEIS KUNSTHANDEL FORGYLDERETABLISSEMENT VESTERBROGADE 58	
<b>Rudolf Bauer (Tyskland)</b>	
<i>Malerier</i>	
5. Symfoni XII	Kr. 2.000
6. Fugale III	3.000
7. Komposition 28	3.000
8. Komposition 20	500
9. Presto IX	8.000
<b>Kandinsky (Rusland)</b>	
54. Fragment 1913. (Centrum)	4.000
55. Billede med hvid Rand	4.000
56. Billede med hvid Form	5.000
57. Improvisation XIII	3.000
58. Improvisation 22	3.000
59. Billede med Bueskytten	3.000
<b>Paul Klee (Tyskland)</b>	
60. Taarnenes Idé	500
61. Composition af transparente Oranger og blaåt	400
62. Komposition	500
63. Havnebillede, Nat	400
64. Komposition	500
65. Fest paa Vandet	500
66. I. D.	400
<b>Franz Marc † (Tyskland)</b>	
78. Symene	Kr. 5.000
79. Den røde Kvinde	6.000
80. De tre Heste	8.000
<b>Jean Metzinger (Frankrig)</b>	
81. Kvindehovede	2.000
82. Kone med Hest	3.000





# DER STURM

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ACHTER JAHRGANG

BERLIN OKTOBER 1917

SIEBENTES HEFT

**Inhalt:** Lothar Schreyer: Sehnte / Kurt Liebmann: Tierspiel / Kinner v. Dresler: Gedichte / Kurt Heynicks: Gedichte / Günther Mürr: Gedichte / Kurt Striepe: Maya / Mynona: Der sichtbare Mensch / Eine Antiwellsäde / Rudolf Bauer: Fünf Zeichnungen



Rudolf Bauer



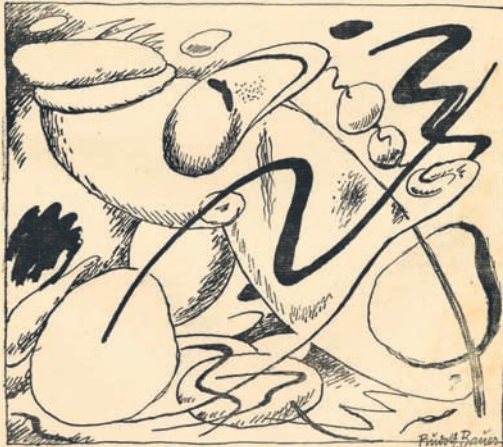
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ACHTER JAHRGANG BERLIN OKTOBER 1917 SIERENTES HEFT

Inhalt: Leher Schreyer: Selbste / Kurt Liskmann: Tierpöbel / Klaus v. Dreyer: Gedichte / Kurt Hryszka: Gedichte / Günther Mier: Gedichte / Kurt Söjger: Mays / Mysens: Der sichtbare Mensch / Eine Antwerpbild / Rudolf Bauer: Vier Zeichnungen



Rudolf Bauer: Zeichnung

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NEUNTER JAHRGANG BERLIN SEPTEMBER 1918 SECHSTES HEFT

Inhalt: Herwarth Walden: Maria Uhlen / Herwarth Walden: Das Wunder / Ein Spiel über Sinnen / August Stramm: Gedichte / Kurt Hryszka: Gedichte / Klaus von Dreyer: Gedichte / Franz Miksa: Reduziert / Maria / Günther Mier: Wie / Mysens: Die Grotte in der Veranschaulichung / Herwarth Walden: Von Sonne Graden / Rudolf Bauer: Drei Zeichnungen



Rudolf Bauer: Zeichnung

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NEUNTER JAHRGANG BERLIN OKTOBER 1918 SIERENTES HEFT

Inhalt: Adolf Albert: Gedichte / Kurt Hryszka: Traum am Abend / Leher Schreyer: Gedichte / Mysens: Die heilige Frau / Walter Mehring: Braut der Erde / Sebaste / Wilhelm Ranga: Gedichte / Rudolf Bauer: Drei Zeichnungen



Rudolf Bauer: Zeichnung

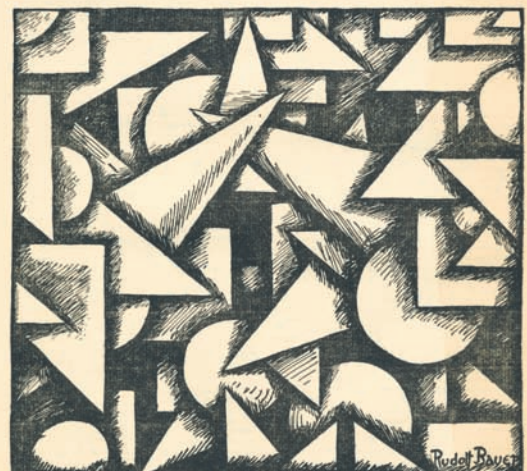
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ACHTER JAHRGANG BERLIN MAI 1917 ZWEITES HEFT

Inhalt: Leher Schreyer: Das Bildbekenntnis / Gerhard Ausberg: Tod des Mannes Heiter Frau Mays / Kurt Hryszka: Gedichte / Adolf Kautsch: Grotte / Entführung / Wilhelm Ranga: Lieder / Franz Richard Böhrens: Gedichte / Rudolf Bauer: Zeichnung / Marc Chagall: Vier Zeichnungen



Rudolf Bauer: Zeichnung

## DIE KRATER

In 1919 Bauer, Rebay, and the artist Otto Nebel formed the short-lived group Die Krater, das Hochamt der Kunst, with a manifesto written by Bauer incorporating ideas contributed by Rebay and Nebel.<sup>14</sup> They began publishing print editions intended as a series, whose guiding principle was to help educate the viewer about the history of modern art by rendering the subject matter in a progression of artistic styles. Their first print edition featured drawings of dancers by Bauer:

*The prints "Step One" are the first portfolio in a cycle of portfolios intended to show how the figurative motif passes through the phases of the Impressionist, Secessionist, Caricaturist, Cubist, and Expressionist approach until it finally reaches the point where it severs its ties to the object, i.e., where art exists as art.*<sup>15</sup>

Rebay would apply this concept of art history as a progression culminating in "Non-Objective" art to her curatorial program at the Guggenheim Foundation years later. Some of the most famous works purchased by Solomon R. Guggenheim were earmarked for the "study collection," meant to educate the museum visitor on the roots of abstraction and non-objectivity.

## SOCIETE ANONYME

Katherine Dreier, co-founder of the Société Anonyme (with Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray), visited Galerie Der Sturm in 1920 and purchased the Bauer oil *Andante V* (1915–17). Bauer was one of many European artists whose work was first introduced to the American public by Dreier. Later Dreier would say of Bauer, "We had no artist in those early years whose work so appealed



**Rudolf Bauer and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti at Bauer's Das Geistreich Museum in Berlin, 1930s**



to the public in general and which received so much response.”<sup>16</sup> Dreier noted that Bauer’s work was unusually popular, because its quasi-organic forms and allusions to undersea life provided a handle to help the public grasp this new form of art. Inspired by the general public’s approval of Bauer, Dreier, whose reputation as an art collector is unsurpassed, acquired a large group of his watercolors and lithographs in 1923. She attempted to correspond with Bauer intermittently throughout his lifetime in an effort to purchase more work for the Société Anonyme collection.<sup>17</sup> Sadly, her later attempts during the 1940s were unsuccessful, because by then Bauer was bound by exclusive agreements with the Guggenheim Foundation.<sup>18</sup>

## FROM EXPRESSIONISM TO LYRICISM

From 1921 until 1924 Bauer’s painting evolved from an expressionist to a more lyrical abstract style. The compositions became simpler, less biomorphic, and more elegant and uplifting as compared to the expressionistic work from the war-torn teens. The watercolor *Improvisation* (1924) (page 157) and the oil *Composition 121* (1921) (page 69) are stunning examples from this period.

One senses that Bauer in his early thirties was shrugging off his expressionist vocabulary and allowing more room for the imagination of the viewer. Bauer had always acknowledged a debt to Vasily Kandinsky, the Russian master twenty years his senior, but in this period he began working in a very different direction. While the works from before 1920 tend to be dense with form and energy, the space opens up in the 1920s, and the non-objective forms float in a three-dimensional cosmos of his creation. It is Bauer’s exploration of deep abstract space that begins to differentiate his style from that of the elder artist. The pictures are clean yet airy and convey a much different feeling than do Kandinsky’s works, which focus on point, line, and plane.

By late 1925 or early 1926 Bauer became completely absorbed with a geometric style that would define the remainder of his career. The period seems to have been launched with the watercolor *Allegro* (c. 1925) (above and page 159) and a group of similarly sized works on paper. Paintings such as *Colored Swinging* (1935) (page 83), the four-paneled *Tetraptychon* series (1926–30), and his *Symphony* triptych (1930–34) (page 78) are typical of this period’s geometric forms and vibrant colorful compositions.

## A DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIP

Bauer’s early relationship with Rebay was affectionate but difficult. One of the factors straining the relationship was that Rebay’s parents did not find Bauer to be a suitable match for their daughter. If Bauer’s fabulous cabaret-themed output from the period is any indication, Bauer



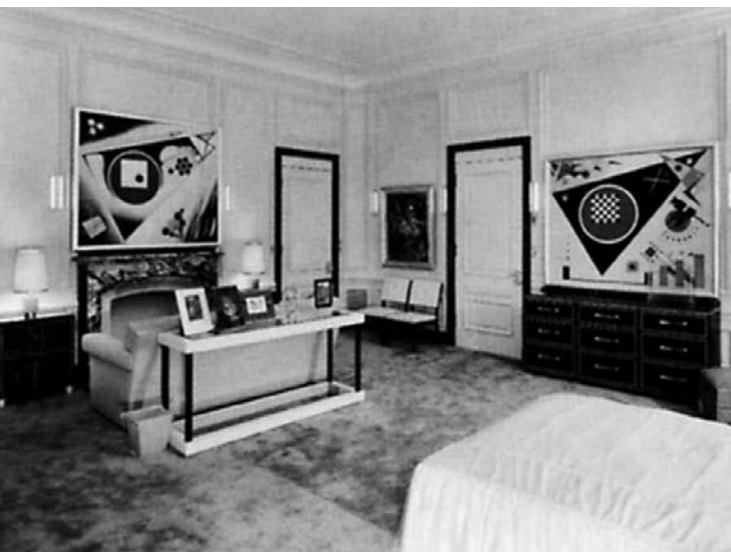
RUDOLF BAUER *Allegro* Mixed media on paper (watercolor, ink, and pencil) 18<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 14<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches c. 1925

was a regular on the cabaret scene in the teens and 1920s. In these works naked ladies dance with men in white tie and tails. Scantily clad women sit on the laps of men, and fire emerges from the nether regions of a female performer (see Works on Paper section, beginning page 89). Bauer documented the wild nightlife with wit, humor, and Germanic precision.

Other lifestyle preferences challenged the relationship early on. Runaway inflation and the high cost of living in Germany had a negative impact on art sales. And while Bauer was willing to suffer privation in order to focus on his Non-Objective art, the bohemian lifestyle of a struggling artist was not for Rebay. Rebay had the means to escape and, ultimately, she did. In the early 1920s, while Bauer was making breakthroughs in lyrical abstraction, Rebay embarked on a restless journey through Europe, staying at a spa-sanatorium, skiing in Switzerland, living with her parents in the country, and finally settling in Italy to paint. As late as 1926, when living in Rome doing society portraits and selling her "ballet pictures," Rebay would exclaim upon receiving a letter from Bauer, "He is my boy. He was too poor to marry me."<sup>19</sup>

#### HILLA REBAY IN NEW YORK

In 1927 Rebay sailed to the United States armed with letters of introduction from Gertrude de Paats (Irene Rothschild Guggenheim's sister) and other important European friends and colleagues. She established herself quickly as an avant-garde, and outspoken, New York artist. Through her connections she met Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Irene Guggenheim, who was Mrs. Solomon Guggenheim. Both women purchased work from Rebay's exhibition at the Marie Sterner Galleries. Eventually Rebay became friendly with the Guggenheims, and Solomon, charmed by her, asked her to paint his portrait.



*Solomon R. Guggenheim's apartment at the Plaza Hotel, showing two of Rudolf Bauer's paintings, c. 1936*

Solomon Guggenheim probably first encountered Non-Objective art at Rebay's studio in Carnegie Hall, which she had set up as an informal gallery. Rebay owned watercolors by Bauer, Kandinsky, and Klee, and her own collages, of course, would have been plentiful in the studio. Rebay wrote to Bauer that Guggenheim had fallen in love with one of Bauer's watercolors and wanted to buy it. The opportunity for Rebay to prove that she was right about Bauer and Non-Objective art had arrived. Intrigued by and infatuated with her, Guggenheim hired Rebay as his personal curator.

Before Rebay entered his life, Guggenheim had collected Old Masters, early Italian Renaissance, Barbizon, and work by Jean-Antoine Watteau. Once inside his inner circle, the irrepressible

baroness did not waste any time telling the copper magnate that a man of his vision and means should seek out contemporary art and help living artists. Instead of the art of yesterday, he should collect the "art of tomorrow."



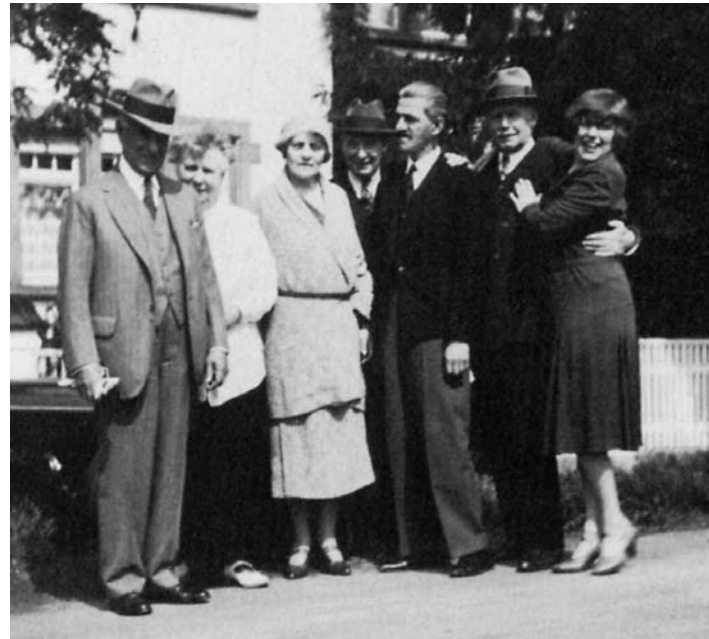
Over the next several years Rebay helped Guggenheim amass what would become one of the world's greatest collections of modern art. Guggenheim collected predominantly works by Bauer and Kandinsky, many of them acquired directly through Bauer in Germany. As she described to Bauer, "Mr. Guggenheim likes the Kandinsky very much but (he likes) yours better. He would like all your most recent works. He is very excited and wants nothing else in his bedroom."<sup>20</sup>

## BAUER AS CURATOR

Rarely has it been acknowledged that Bauer was a *de facto* co-curator of Guggenheim's collection of modern art. When Rebay began her official role as advisor to Solomon Guggenheim she realized that Bauer, with his connections to *Der Sturm* artists and proximity to Kandinsky and the Bauhaus, would be a useful advocate to have working on her behalf in Berlin. The fact that Solomon Guggenheim loved Bauer's work only served to deepen the trust Guggenheim would place in him to assist with the collection. The responsibility that Bauer felt toward Guggenheim to provide the finest work available cannot be underestimated, when one considers that Bauer himself was to become the focus of the collection.

Vivian Endicott Barnett, in her essay titled "Rereading the Correspondence: Rebay and Kandinsky," confirms that it was Bauer, in fact, who was the true architect of Guggenheim's Kandinsky collection. Kandinsky, who was teaching at the Bauhaus, had sold out his entire studio of paintings in 1929 to various collectors and, in so doing, decided to double his prices. When the stock market crashed a few months later, collectors desperate for cash (Guggenheim excepted) threw Kandinsky paintings back on the secondary market for *pfennigs* on the *mark*. When Rebay wrote Bauer to say that Guggenheim wanted a new Kandinsky, Bauer now had an intriguing choice. He could purchase a masterpiece in the secondary market at a greatly reduced price, or he could heed Rebay's wishes, go to Kandinsky's studio, and buy new paintings at substantially higher prices. Like a good curator, Bauer did both, favoring masterpieces from earlier periods. Rebay became annoyed with Bauer for buying earlier works, not fully understanding the historic opportunity in his arbitrage.<sup>21</sup> She decided that the Guggenheims must visit the artists' studios themselves.

In July of 1930, as part of a studio tour of Europe organized by Rebay, the Guggenheims traveled to France, then on to Germany to meet Vasily Kandinsky and Rudolf Bauer for the first time. During their stay the Guggenheims also met the Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius, as well as László Moholy-Nagy, the youngest instructor at the Bauhaus. While Guggenheim purchased works by Albert Gleizes, Fernand Léger, Chagall, and others in Paris, this trip cemented the art patron's appreciation of the work of Bauer and Kandinsky.



**Solomon R. Guggenheim, Rebay's mother, Irene Guggenheim, unidentified man, Rudolf Bauer, Rebay's father, and Hilla Rebay in Germany, 1930**

# DAS GEISTREICH

Die Kunst im neuen Jahrtausend

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CHARLOTTENBURG   
 An der Heerstraße 78  
RUDOLF BAUER

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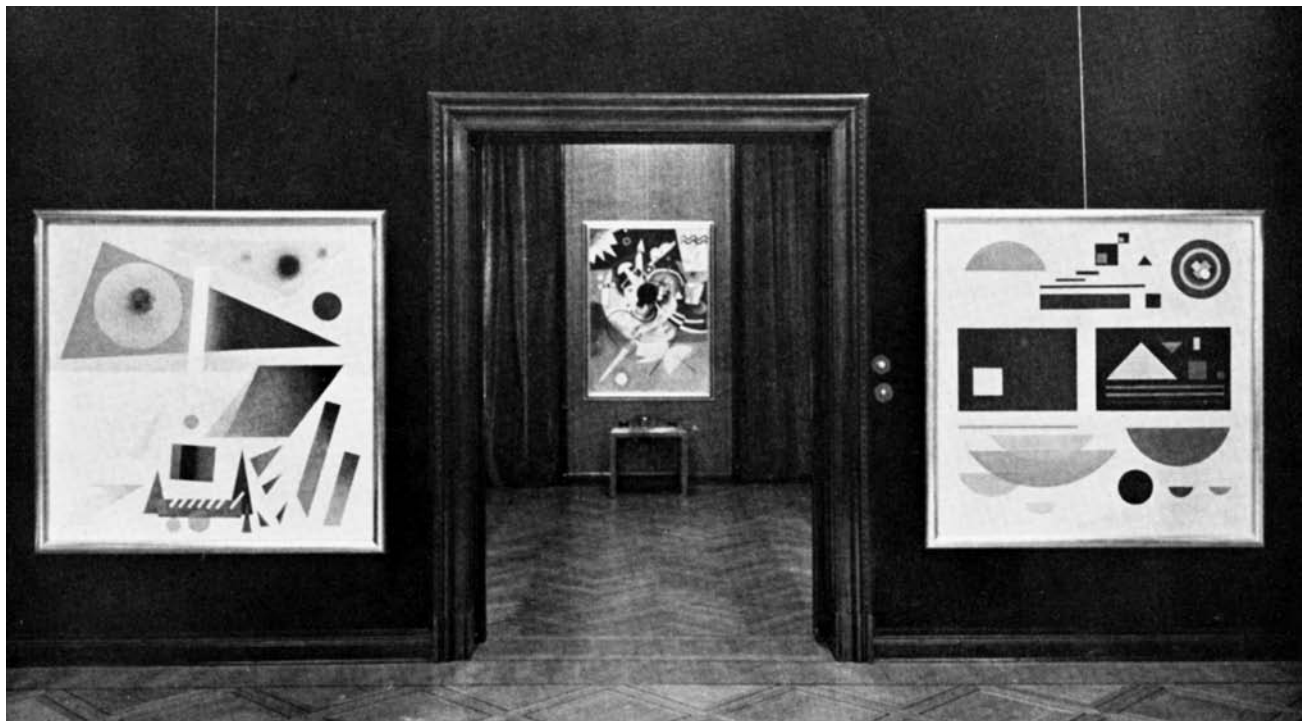


## DAS GEISTREICH

In September of 1930, flush with money from sales of his work to Guggenheim, Bauer decided the time was right to establish a new art salon in Berlin. Named Das Geistreich (The Realm of the Spirit), Bauer conceived it as a "temple of non-objectivity," a sanctuary where Guggenheim and other well-heeled buyers would congregate to choose works for their collections. It was the first museum in the world dedicated to Non-Objective art, featuring primarily the works of Bauer and Kandinsky. As Neuburger has noted, "It was the first germ of the idea that was to become the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum."<sup>22</sup>

As passionate as ever, Bauer wrote Rebay:

*I consider the salon so important that I shall invest all my money in it, up to the last penny. Therefore, as of October 15, I will be leasing a villa on the Heerstrasse, for three years. . . . It makes me happy to think of Guggi's (Guggenheim's) beaming face as he strolls through the salon. I like him so much that I enjoy the salon even more because he will enjoy it.<sup>23</sup>*



*Das Geistreich Museum entrance (above) and interior, c. 1930*

# THE BULLETIN

*of the*

# MUSEUM

# OF

# MODERN

# ART

OCTOBER  
1933

# 2

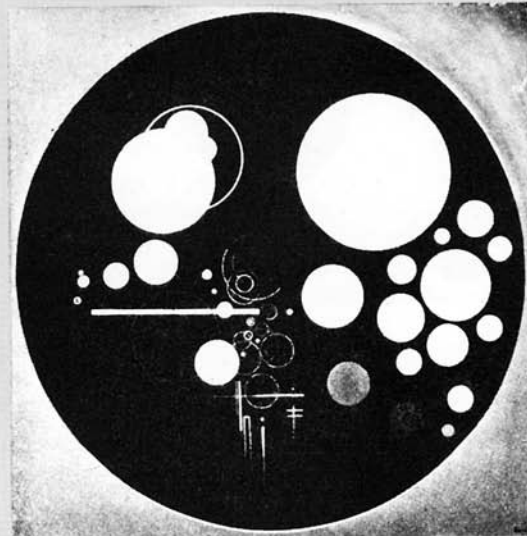
## SUMMER SHOW

The Summer Exhibition\* has aroused such interest and enthusiasm that much of it will be retained in the brief exhibition of Modern European Art, opening to the public on October fourth. Many of the pictures included represent the experiments of the European vanguard; others are among the masterpieces of the last half century. Through study we may come to appreciate the unfamiliar and then, afterwards, we may turn with fresh eyes to look again at these old friends which many of us have known a long time.

### *Cubism and Abstract Painting*

The most striking room in the exhibition is unquestionably the group of "Abstract" paintings. Most of us are by this time fairly familiar with the Cubism of Picasso and Juan Gris, Braque and Léger. Cubism has now passed its 25th anniversary and Cubism's founder, Picasso, has recently been honored by Cubism's champion, Gertrude Stein, on the highly respectable pages of the Atlantic Monthly. The Cubists, inspired with a passion for design, broke up the objects they painted, and rearranged the fragments into compositions which they called *Sill Life*, *Compote with Eggs*, or *Violin* just as if the fruit or fiddle were still quite recognizable instead of being mere points of departure. This is exasperating to those who

\*The Exhibition was assembled by a committee which included: Mr. Stephen C. Clark, Chairman, Mrs. John Parkinson, Jr., Mr. Frank Crowninshield and Mr. Edward M. M. Warburg; assisted by Miss Ernestine Fantl of the Museum Staff.



*Rudolph Bauer "Symphony"*  
Collection S. R. Guggenheim, Port Washington  
Exhibition Modern European Art

*Bauer's painting Symphony on the cover of The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1933*



The influx of money from Guggenheim went a long way for Bauer in the depressed Berlin economy. After all his struggles Bauer embarked on a lifestyle to which he had never been accustomed, with chauffeur and servants. Not only did Bauer hope to impress collectors, such as Guggenheim, but also artists in his circle, who hoped that they too might benefit from Guggenheim's largesse. Bauer had become a conduit to the Guggenheim coffers.

Few people in Germany were buying art, which made Bauer especially reliant on collectors from other countries. What Bauer could not anticipate was that as the decade wore on, collectors, including Guggenheim, were less and less inclined to visit Germany because of the deteriorating political situation. By February 1932 Bauer had run through all of his Guggenheim monies and was put on a strict budget. True to his word, he had "invested" every penny.

### PATRONAGE AND POWER

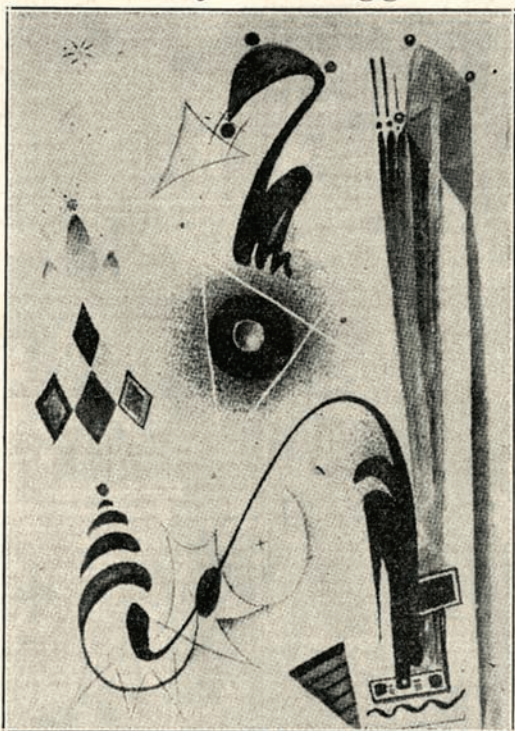
During the early 1930s Rebay was bombarded by letters from artists and galleries throughout Europe with whom she had done business, all of them desperate for sales. Even the proud Kandinsky wrote Rebay in 1935 to ask whether Guggenheim would consider a stipend. Rebay continued to make major purchases that she believed made sense for the Guggenheim collection. With each Guggenheim acquisition came gifts of watercolors or small oils to Rebay from both Guggenheim and the artists themselves. As Guggenheim's curator, Rebay began to amass her own large collection of modern art.

Guggenheim had discovered Non-Objective art through Bauer's work and, according to his comments and letters from Rebay, liked Bauer's work best. This fact has often been slanted to imply that Bauer's work was foisted upon Guggenheim by Rebay, but it is significant to note that Rebay recognized other great artists, such as Piet Mondrian, whose work she was unable to persuade Solomon to purchase.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of Guggenheim's clear admiration for Bauer's work and its inclusion in major exhibitions in Europe at Galerie Der Sturm and in the United States with the Société Anonyme, Rebay still felt compelled to trumpet his praises compulsively. Her overpromotion of the artist became notorious. Rebay featured Bauer's work on the cover of all five Guggenheim Foundation catalogues and consistently opened and closed her catalogue essays about Non-Objective art with references to Bauer and his genius. Almost every advertisement for the collection pictured a sole work by Bauer. Rebay practically demanded fealty to Bauer's work from the other artists she considered for the collection, which only served to diminish Bauer's favor in the art world. Contrary to her intentions, her determination to make him world-famous by the force of her will hurt Bauer's reputation and created great resentment. Her overzealous letters of the period to Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy, and others were particularly overbearing and transactional in this regard. Bauer's reputation would likely have withstood the test of time had she not insisted on this rarified position for his work.

Responses from these artists to Rebay's letters highlight this problem clearly. Moholy-Nagy wrote, "You cannot blame me for not mentioning Bauer in my books. I am a painter, and not an art critic. I believe that you do him a disservice when you try to establish a privileged position for him by force."<sup>25</sup> He also wrote to her, "Your reproaches are motivated by your great love and

**Museum for 'Non-Objective' Art  
 Is Planned by S. R. Guggenheim**



*A scatercolor, unnamed, by Rudolf Bauer, in Guggenheim collection*

**Collector Endows Foundation to Promote Popular  
 Appreciation of 'Modern' School of Painting;  
 New Artistic Forms, He Says, Are No 'Bunk'**

Establishment of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation for "promotion and encouragement of art and education in art and the enlightenment of the public especially in the field of art" was announced yesterday at the law offices of Stanchfield and Levy, 1 South William Street.

The charter of the foundation sets forth a broad range of purposes and objects, including art exhibitions, lectures, scholarships and publications in the field of art. The primary project, however, is understood to be establishment of a museum in New York City to house Mr. Guggenheim's collection of "non-objective"

**Amelia Earhart  
 Quits Australia  
 For New Guinea**

admiration for Bauer's work. That is why you are so surprisingly biased. You suspect rejection without grounds, even when one is prepared to support him—as I am."<sup>26</sup>

THE GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION

In contrast with Berlin, the art scene in New York in the mid-1930s was bustling. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney had established the Whitney Museum of American Art. The Museum of Modern Art had been founded with large support from the Rockefeller family and Alfred Barr as its eminent director. Katherine Dreier and A. E. Gallatin were looking for homes for their respective art collections.<sup>27</sup> In this fertile atmosphere Rebay, inspired by Bauer's *Das Geistreich*, lobbied Guggenheim to consider founding his own museum. In 1936 Guggenheim's collection became the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, with Rebay as its director. The establishment of a not-for-profit foundation served as the first legal step toward creating a museum to house the collection.

While looking for suitable real estate and architects, Rebay began to organize exhibitions of the "Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-Objective Paintings." The collection had its public debut in 1936 at the Gibbes Memorial Art Gallery in Charleston, South Carolina (where Solomon spent the

*Clipping from the New York Herald Tribune about the establishment of the Guggenheim Foundation, June 29, 1937*

winter months), followed by exhibitions at the Philadelphia Art Alliance, Arts Club of Chicago, and Baltimore Museum of Art. Each exhibition was accompanied by an ever-expanding color catalogue, with essays written by Rebay. On a mission to illuminate Bauer's genius to a public who may never have seen Non-Objective art before, Rebay's essays, like her letters, displeased other artists in the collection such as Robert Delaunay and Kandinsky. They felt that she was not only placing too much emphasis on Bauer but also rewriting art history to suit her purposes.

In 1936 Bauer traveled to the United States to attend the opening of the Guggenheim exhibition in Charleston. Since he spoke no English, Rebay served as his interpreter. This was Bauer's first visit to the United States and the first time he saw his work installed so prominently outside Germany. He visited Charleston in April, attended an exhibition of his work in Chicago in May, and spent the rest of May in New York, before returning to Germany in early June. It is clear that this



trip left a favorable impression on Bauer and led him to believe that his dream of a permanent museum for his work was possible through Guggenheim.<sup>28</sup>

## PRISON

Back in Berlin, Das Geistreich had become a lonely island of individualism in a menacing sea of Nazism. The Bauhaus had been closed down by the government in 1933, and artists such as Bauer were increasingly ostracized. Many had already fled the country. Rebay wrote Bauer in August 1937 to report that she had visited the *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Munich, which featured many artists from their Der Sturm days, including works by Kandinsky, Klee, Moholy-Nagy, and, of course, Bauer. The intent of the exhibition was to display artwork that the Nazi government had deemed to be corrupt, decadent, and un-German. Among artists, however, it was likely an avant-garde badge of honor to be included. Ironically, the works in the *Degenerate Art* show were made available for sale. Rebay wisely arranged to purchase the best pieces for Guggenheim's collection. Why Bauer lingered so long in this hostile environment remains a mystery. He was not Jewish, yet his patron was one of the richest Jews in the world. This association would not go unnoticed in Nazi Germany.

In July 1937 Bauer traveled to Paris because his work was included in an exhibition called *Origines et développement de l'art international indépendant*, organized by the Musée du Jeu de Paume. In this large survey of the period, his painting was shown alongside the work of Picasso, Georges Braque, Léger, Chagall, and Joan Miró. It is believed that while he was in Paris he received word from friends that it was too dangerous to return to Berlin; yet he ignored the warning. Soon after his return he was arrested for being a degenerate artist and for speculating on the black market with American dollars.<sup>29</sup> According to the Rebay documentarian Sigrid Faltin, it is likely that his sister, a Nazi zealot who had disowned him, turned him in to the authorities for his art. In an excerpt from a letter to him his sister stated:

*I am totally convinced that you are completely and entirely under the influence of Jews and Free-Masons. You called our dear Dr. Goebbels a little, crippled chap. It seems that you prefer all the money that the filthy Jewish pigs are paying you for your paint blotches to the money a German worker would pay for a decent picture. This is Ellie writing you, your former sister, as under the circumstances I am no longer one.<sup>30</sup>*

Bauer, who had been living like a prince for the past decade, was suddenly a prisoner in Berlin. Defiant, he scavenged scraps of paper and pencils while in prison, so that he could continue to draw. There are many prison drawings that remain, studies for future canvases that he must have hoped to paint once released from jail (see page 164).

Distraught by the news that Bauer had been imprisoned, Rebay implored Guggenheim to help free him. The baroness traveled to Germany with a suitcase filled with cash to rescue the "king" of Non-Objective art.<sup>31</sup> To help broker a deal with the Gestapo, Rebay asked her brother, General Franz-Hugo von Rebay, to meet with Bauer's captors, and he agreed to do so.<sup>32</sup> Rebay's nephew, Roland von Rebay (who lives in Bavaria and helped organize the 2005 Rebay exhibition, *Art of Tomorrow: Hilla Rebay and Solomon R. Guggenheim*, at the Guggenheim Museum), traveled with his father for this fateful appointment with the prison warden. According to

NON-OBJECTIVITY IS THE REALM OF SPIRIT

The Non-objective picture stands by itself as an entirely free creation conceived out of the intuitive feeling of space and the will for the rhythmic essence of balance. The simplicity of style, refinement, elegance, and cheerfulness which is the original expression of our present epoch, has its origin in the daring works of great painters, often ridiculed and misunderstood, some of whom died in almost poverty fifty years ago.

Non-objective pictures contain no intellectual subject nor any similarity to any known object. Colors, forms, and themes are combined by measurement of line and interval to create a will of rhythm and beauty. It does not represent anything, and no form is supposed to look like anything known in nature. It is like music; it means nothing. It must be felt to be liked. With line given to their influence a sudden intuition and appreciation happens even to those who at first could not respond to them at all. It is their spiritual life which gets hold of all who live with them.

The accidental result that children get by banging on the piano, or filling a space with color and forms have neither the spiritual value of art nor a faculty to uplift and strengthen intuitive development. Many painters trying to create Non-objective paintings, achieve merely dull decorations or simple patterns with not any spiritual meaning. The creative spirit of genius is needed to make intuition visible or audible which is art.

Non-objective paintings are not geometry. Geometry is not art. The most perfected artistic form in the ancient world of the sun, existed long before geometry. Science uses artistic forms like circles or triangles to describe its calculations, but it creates no order of rhythm and beauty with them as art does.



ART OF TOMORROW

Most everyone will prefer one to many of these different compositions. It is advisable to linger to see its details and different forms of form and color.

The exhibition is opened to the public with the special intention of being a helpful guide for the youth of America in its urge for creativeness and culture. Top of culture is where art is. Due to restricted space one representative part only of the collection of 726 pictures listed in the big catalogue can be temporarily displayed until a final home for the complete collection will have been constructed.

Outstanding paintings of the development of painting from Academicism through Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Abstraction, up to Non-objectivity can be seen occasionally upon application.

First public exhibition in New York City of one representative part of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-objective paintings. Opening June 1st, 1939, at 24 E. 54th St., New York, N. Y.

OPEN DAILY EXCEPT HOLIDAY  
HOURS 10 A. M. TO 6 P. M.  
SUNDAY 12 TO 5 P. M.  
ADMISSION FREE

Teachers, artists and students the exhibition will  
open Tuesday evenings from 8:00 to 10:00 P.M.  
on application. Admission with cards only.

Music by Bach, Beethoven, Chopin rendered  
by famous musicians will be heard with a  
Capehart record reproducing instrument.

Invitation for the opening exhibition of the Guggenheim Museum of Non-Objective Painting, 1939, featuring Orange Accent, shown on page 76 of this monograph

Roland, who was very young at the time, he was seated outside the warden's office atop the suitcase of money as if on a high chair, while his father debated the warden behind a closed door. After what seemed to be hours of unsuccessful debate, the venerable general revealed the suitcase, which would help secure Bauer's freedom.<sup>33</sup>

Two months later Bauer was still not free, necessitating a return visit to the prison by Franz-Hugo. This time a new Gestapo official, a fellow Bavarian, was more sympathetic to Bauer's case and released him unconditionally a few days later. Unwelcome and unsafe at home, Bauer made the choice to emigrate to the United States. Beset by bureaucratic difficulties in securing an exit visa and by the challenge, both emotional and physical, of packing up the contents of his home and studio, Bauer finally set sail for New York a year later in August 1939.<sup>34</sup>

THE MUSEUM OF NON-OBJECTIVE PAINTING

Two months before Rudolf Bauer arrived in the United States from Germany, the Museum of Non-Objective Painting showcasing the Guggenheim collection opened in New York City on June 1. The exhibition, titled *Art of Tomorrow*, was displayed in a former automobile showroom at 24 East 54th Street, a welcoming, comfortable, even luxurious environment where one could escape from the hubbub of New York, listen to classical music, and see the new art.<sup>35</sup> The sole image adorning the invitation for the opening exhibition of the museum was a color reproduction of Bauer's c. 1929–31 masterwork *Orange Accent* (page 76). Bauer's and Kandinsky's work continued to dominate the collection, with 215 works by Bauer and 103 works by Kandinsky.

One important newcomer included in the exhibition was the Canadian-born artist Rolph Scarlett, who was living in New York. Scarlett's memoirs provide much of the information we have about the inner workings of the Guggenheim Foundation during Rebay's tenure. Once Bauer was settled in the United States, he and Scarlett would become great friends. Armed



with a stack of preparatory drawings on paper, Scarlett would visit Bauer for critiques of his work. According to Scarlett, Bauer provided sensitive and insightful criticism, which helped him tremendously. Scarlett's memoirs are filled with laudatory passages about Bauer, the man and his art. There is no question that Scarlett agreed with Rebay that Bauer's work held the stamp of genius. His descriptions of the somewhat shy and retiring painter reflect the respect that each artist had for the other:

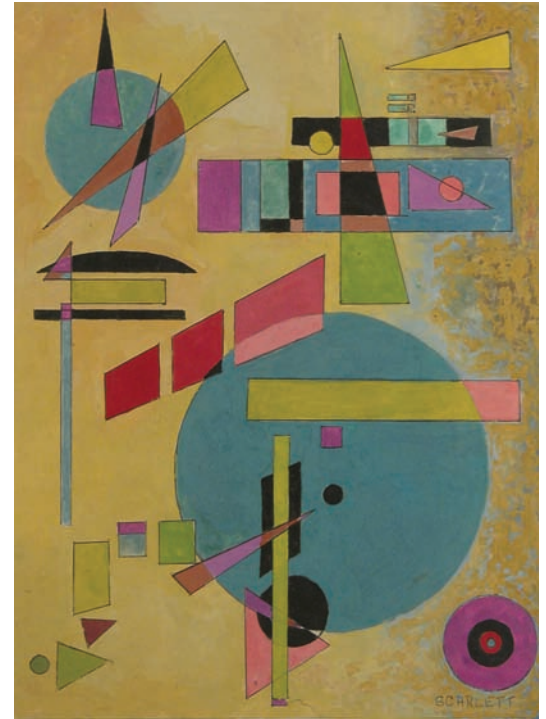
*(Bauer) used to visit me often when I went to lecture in the museum on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Often when my lectures were going full swing I would suddenly discover him sitting there smiling as if he was enjoying the efforts I made to make the visitors feel at home with his and Kandinsky's works. Afterwards when the visitors had dispersed, he would seek me out, grasp my hand, pat me on the back and say, "Gut, gut. Tell me more I did not know." Then he would laugh with glee. I think it was great fun for him to hear me trying to explain his brain children.<sup>36</sup>*

This joyful aspect of Bauer's time in the United States would be severely compromised by a fateful decision in fall 1939.

#### BAUER'S FOLLY: THE CONTRACT

Bauer arrived in America in August 1939 to a hero's welcome. The newly freed artist stayed with Rebay at her home in Connecticut during his first four months in the U.S., after which time he suggested, probably to Rebay's dismay, that he would like a home of his own. In order to make his wish a reality, it was necessary for Bauer to settle his accounts with Solomon Guggenheim and the Foundation. Guggenheim conveyed to Rebay and Bauer the financial support he was willing to provide. In a letter from Bauer to Guggenheim, responding to Guggenheim's letter dated November 14, 1939 (see Appendices E and F), Bauer outlined some concerns he had regarding the purchase of his work by the Guggenheim Foundation. "It is not clear to me whether the capital invested for this purpose is to be considered the purchase price of the pictures and is to belong to me or whether I am merely to enjoy the interest." Bauer went on to discuss block discounts, leaving his estate to the Foundation in the event he was paid the cash price requested, and other matters. Perhaps the most critical point that the artist made in his letter concerned the word "output," which Bauer was unable to find in his dictionary but "the translation of which sounds bad." The implication of this wording, which Bauer sensed but did not fully grasp, was that Guggenheim was planning to lay claim to the artist's future work as well.

A few weeks later, on December 9, 1939, Bauer signed the contract, which "he believed, because of Rebay's solemn vow, was as had been outlined verbally to him."<sup>37</sup> Not speaking the language and perhaps not wanting to insult his patron, who had just saved him from night



ROLPH SCARLETT **Abstraction in Yellow**  
Gouache and ink on paper 22 x 16 inches c. 1940

Ehefrau



Unterschrift des Passinhabers  
*Rudolf Bauer*  
 und seiner Ehefrau

Es wird hiermit bescheinigt, daß der Inhaber die durch das obenstehende Lichtbild dargestellte Person ist und die darunter befindliche Unterschrift eigenhändig vollzogen hat.

Berlin-Charlottenburg den 14. MÄRZ 1936  
*Waldeck*

2

No. 1753  
 American Consulate at *Germany Berlin*  
 SEEN For the journey to the United States  
 Date: **MAR 17 1936**  
 Valid for presentation at any time during twelve months from date provided passport contains to be valid for such period  
 Visa granted as Non-Immigrant under Section 3 (2) of the Immigration Act of 1924  
*Temporary Visitor*  
 Service No. *1724+1725*

AMERICAN CONSULATE BERLIN  
 FEE STAMP  
 50¢  
 1936

Admitted at New York, N. Y., under Paragraph Section 5, Immigration Act of 1924, for  
*Immigrant Inspector*

Hamburg, Hafen- ausgereicht am 25. JULI 1939

12

*Polizeipräsident*  
 GELTUNGSBEREICH DES PASSES  
 Gültig auch für Reisen nach und durch Oesterreich.

Der Polizeipräsident in Berlin  
 123. Polizeirevier  
 Berlin den 22. JULI 1937.  
 14. März 1941.

wenn er nicht verlängert wird:  
*Polizei*

Ausstellende Behörde  
 Der Polizeipräsident in Berlin  
 123. Polizeirevier  
 Datum  
 14. März 1941  
 Berlin-Charlottenburg, den  
 Unterschrift  
*Waldeck*

4





*Opposite: Pages from Rudolf Bauer's passport showing exit and entry stamps for his 1936 trip to the United States, reentry into Germany after visiting an exhibition in France in 1937, his departure from Hamburg on July 25, 1939, and his admission to the U.S. on August 3, 1939. Above: Bauer photographed in New York, c. 1941*

and fog, Bauer signed the document, even though it had not been translated into German. In it Bauer agreed to relinquish ownership of the 110 works of art listed in Schedule A of the contract, mostly major oils, to Guggenheim in exchange for the following:

- Payment of \$41,000 to purchase a grand beach house in Deal, New Jersey;
- Cancellation of a debt of \$12,400;
- Payment of the \$7,000 balance due on a modernist body for Bauer's Duesenberg automobile;
- Interest on a trust fund of \$300,000 in Chilean Nitrate Sinking Debentures, paying 5% per annum.

The contract further dictated that Bauer was to leave his entire estate to the Foundation upon his death. It also appears that as part of this negotiation the artist was obligated to produce "ten extra large pictures special to the museum."<sup>38</sup>



*Rudolf Bauer's modernized Duesenberg*

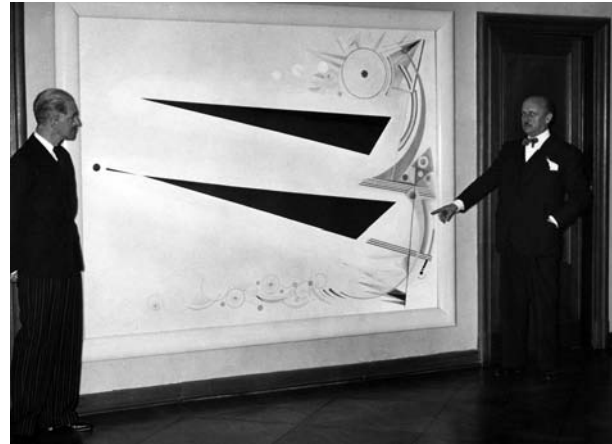
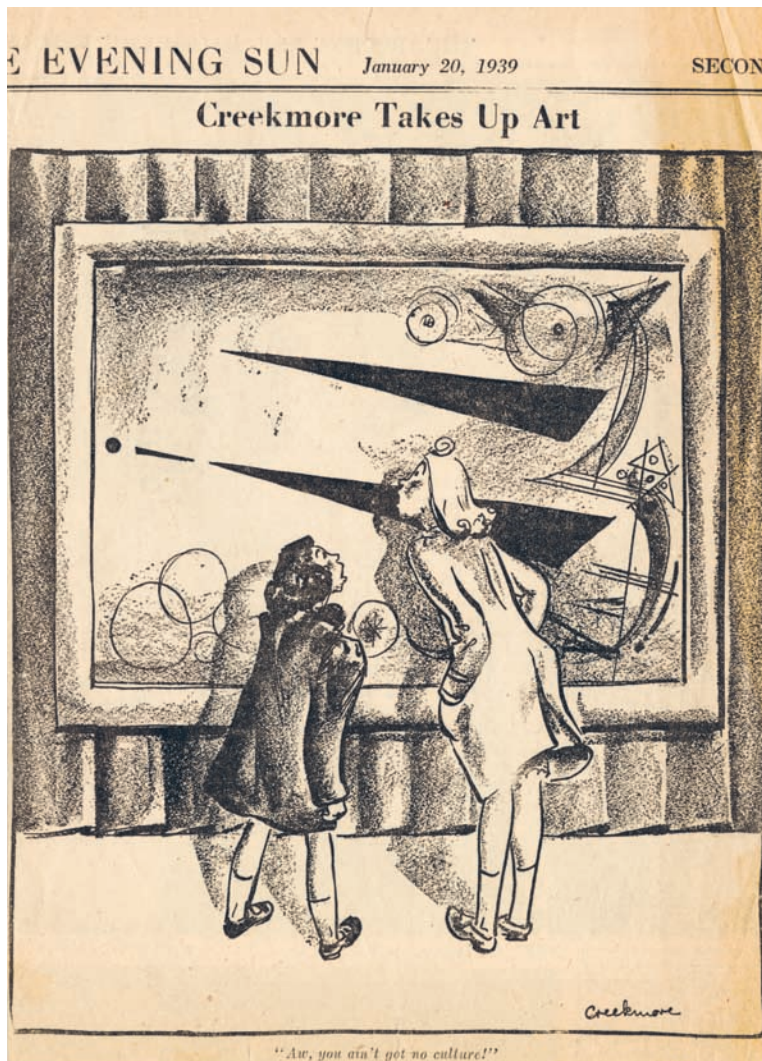
Bauer, trusting Rebay, signed the document, purchased the mansion in Deal, and began a new life in America, complete with an attractive, Austrian-born maid named Louise Huber hired for him by the Foundation. Shortly thereafter Bauer began translating the contract himself. He discovered that instead of a lump-sum payment of \$300,000, which he had expected, the contract provided him with only \$15,000 a year in interest on bonds that Guggenheim had placed in trust for him. While this was a lot of money in 1939, it is decidedly not what the artist had expected. (At this rate he would not receive the equivalent \$300,000 for twenty years.) Moreover,

at the end of Bauer's lifetime these debentures, along with the house, would revert back to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

While one might speculate that Guggenheim and Rebay considered this trust fund approach a good idea, the fact that Bauer had signed away his life's work for \$15,000 a year, a house, and a car was too much for Bauer to bear. So began a frustrating and fruitless stage of Bauer's life. Crushed by what he perceived to be a terrible betrayal, he lost his will to paint.<sup>39</sup> At the age of fifty, at the height of his artistic powers, instead of focusing on painting, Bauer became a man obsessed with protecting his creative legacy.

Bauer disputed the contract, but details of the dispute and settlement are not clear. What we do know is that Bauer incurred a substantial tax burden (\$40,000) based, ironically, on the assessed "selling" price of \$300,000 for his work. The tax and resultant penalties alone represented nearly three years of interest from the trust.<sup>40</sup> We also know that long after Bauer's death his widow left behind an estate containing mostly early paintings and a large body of works on paper, contrary to Section 3 of the contract. Mrs. Bauer and the Guggenheim Foundation





Above: Rudolf Bauer and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti viewing Bauer's oil painting *Top Point Efficiency* from 1931, at *Das Geistreich Museum, Berlin*. Left: Same painting pictured in a *Baltimore Evening Sun* cartoon, 1939

reached a settlement after Bauer's death in which Mrs. Bauer paid the Foundation \$20,000 to keep the pieces that remained in the artist's estate.<sup>41</sup> Bauer's library and some of his personal papers were eventually donated to the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian.

We can conjecture that Bauer's attorneys were paid in barter, as another substantial portion of his estate not in his widow's possession was sold at auction in the 1980s. This group of works consisted mostly of representational prints and early drawings, with one small, highly sophisticated, unsigned oil painting titled *Black Accents* (page 88). Its skewed horizon line evokes the surface of a faraway planet, and two ovals in red and purple suggest craters. A cold winter sun hangs over the horizon of this alien planet. What is most intriguing about this late work is that a circle with a cross in the lower-left corner remains unfinished. It is likely that Bauer executed *Black Accents* in the United States and, in light of his onerous contract with Guggenheim, left it unsigned and unfinished intentionally.

## THE 1940S

For more than a decade Bauer had been Guggenheim's favorite artist and had played a prominent role as advisor to both Rebay and Guggenheim on what to collect. He was their man on the front lines, finding and purchasing some of the most important paintings in the collection. Numerous letters exist discussing how Bauer and Rebay would "share" advisory duties to Guggenheim. The museum was to be "erected under the personal direction and plans of

Rudolf Bauer as the mastermind of the new era plan.”<sup>42</sup> In spite of these plans, as his relationship with Rebay began to deteriorate, it became clear that Bauer was to have no say in the running of the Foundation that now controlled his art.

He began writing letters to Rebay and the Foundation, which were at first thoughtful and polite, but over time became less lucid, very dense, and more like James Joyce prose than business letters. Most of these stream of consciousness letters are written to Rebay and the Foundation, although he addressed a couple of them to Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>43</sup>

Below is an excerpt of a letter from Bauer to Rebay dated November 10, 1943 (see Appendix G):

*Dear Missfoundation,*

*It shall be drilled into your neglectful knowingness, that, after I worked almost thirty years now for the mission of Das Geistreich, which is my Creation and whose purposes, plans and ideas have been not only used, but also misused and spoiled and sabotaged and degraded and cheapened demonstrably by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Commission, I have been honoured and solemnized by said personification as a “poor simpleton”. . .*

The intrigue between Bauer and Rebay, triggered by Bauer’s contract with Guggenheim and Rebay’s unwillingness to share administration of the Foundation with Bauer, reached Shakespearean



*Hans Richter, Fernand Léger, and Rudolf Bauer at Hilla Rebay’s home in Greens Farms, Connecticut, c. 1941*



proportions around 1942. Bauer intimated to the FBI that Rebay was a Nazi spy. Rebay was investigated by the FBI and ultimately placed under arrest for hoarding coffee and sugar in her garage—the only crime they could unearth. Four days after Rebay was arrested, Bauer tried to “start a putsch” to remove the baroness from her position through an onslaught of letters to Guggenheim. This “declaration of war” was backed by members of the Foundation staff, many of whom were struggling artists too fearful previously to speak up against Rebay for fear of losing their jobs.<sup>44</sup>

Lonely and isolated, Bauer found a sympathetic and willing companion in Louise Huber, his maid, and a relationship ensued. They married in 1944. This relationship provoked scathing letters and comments from Hilla, who referred to Louise in writing as a streetwalker and a whore. On behalf of Huber, Bauer sued Rebay for slander for the sum of \$250,000.<sup>45</sup> According to Scarlett, when Rebay won the suit in 1945, primarily through the eloquence and connections of her attorney, Bauer lost the “struggle for power.”<sup>46</sup>

The battle for control of the Foundation between Bauer and Rebay coupled with Rebay’s intimate relationship with her boss were no doubt an embarrassment to the extended Guggenheim family. Peter Lawson-Johnston, Solomon’s grandson and honorary chairman of the Guggenheim Foundation, has discussed openly his uncle’s relationship with Rebay. He stated that family members used to refer to Hilla as “the B” when he was a child, and that “B” did not stand for baroness. Lawson-Johnston appreciates Bauer’s work and purchased a Bauer watercolor for his private collection upon its deaccession from the Guggenheim Museum.<sup>47</sup>

When Guggenheim died in 1949, the collection that Rebay and Bauer helped shape for over twenty years, and the legacy that Guggenheim had sought to establish through its exhibition, was at the mercy of the Foundation’s trustees. In an effort to emphasize his wishes, Guggenheim had included an adjunct but—critically—unbinding letter to his will. In it he stated very clearly: “It is my further wish that during the lifetime of Miss Rebay the Foundation accept no gifts and make no purchases of paintings without her approval, and that after her death the Foundation make no addition to its collection of paintings, *unless they come from Mr. Bauer.*”<sup>48</sup>

From the beginning of recorded history, men of power have sought to secure immortality through the art and architecture they commission during their period of influence. And yet projects not completed during their lifetimes are often abridged or cancelled by their successors. This was the case in part with Guggenheim’s Foundation.

The creative legacy left by Solomon Guggenheim, while expanded since his death to an empire of five museums throughout the world, was shaped and shifted by his successors into a program at odds with his vision. There is strong evidence that the resentment held by so many against his curator, Hilla Rebay, and the jealousy leveled against his favorite artist—Rudolf



**Louise Huber, who married Rudolf Bauer in 1944**

Bauer—were influential in instigating a dramatic change in curatorial program. Three years before construction of Wright’s building began, Rebay was asked to step down as director and resign from the board of trustees.

Concerned about the trustees’ plans for the museum itself, Wright wrote to Harry Guggenheim, Solomon’s nephew and the new president of the Foundation:

*His (Solomon’s) fate seems to be to get what his trustees wanted him to want to get. The elimination of the curator he had in mind I sympathized with because it was only too evident she could not handle, with good sense, the affairs of the bequest. . . . But to eliminate the building also would leave his memory a matter for the jokesters and the I-told-you-so-ers. Instead of the far-sighted unusually gifted man he truly was, he will become a sad warning to the philanthropist.<sup>49</sup>*



**Film still from a 1941 newsreel of the celebration of Solomon R. Guggenheim’s 80th birthday, promoting the Museum of Non-Objective Painting. Left to right: Hilla Rebay, Guggenheim, and Rudolf Bauer**

The building plans were thus preserved, but the name on the structure’s facade would be different—perhaps the clearest signal of the museum’s about-face. Upon Solomon’s death, the Museum of Non-Objective Painting became the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. While one could assume the reason was to expand the mission of the museum to better and more broadly serve the public through both art and education, another, less altruistic and more personal, agenda was at play. Staffers reported a clear mandate issued by Harry Guggenheim to downplay the significance of the museum’s founding director, Rebay, as well as Bauer and the movement they had dubbed the “Art of Tomorrow.” Only the work of Kandinsky would be exempt from this abrupt change in curatorial direction.<sup>50</sup>

We learn more from Scarlett’s memoirs: “When the new museum opened, I wasn’t invited, but I went anyway. I stopped at the desk to get a catalog and went

through it page by page. I saw there were no Non-Objective paintings.”<sup>51</sup> Scarlett continued, describing that Bauer’s works “had literally changed the face of art in the world. Yet they were put away in storage in the basement (of the Guggenheim Museum) where nobody could see them. Not because they are not good art, but because Harry Guggenheim hated Hilla Rebay.”<sup>52</sup> Bauer died in November 1953, spared the humiliation of witnessing the total suppression of his work from the collection he had helped to define.<sup>53</sup>

## THE ART OF TOMORROW, TODAY

Art history is able to self-correct, as subsequent generations of curators, dealers, and collectors are uninfluenced by the power struggles that may have preceded them.<sup>54</sup> If the recent acceleration in the number of exhibitions that have included works by Bauer is any indication, then



this generation is bearing witness to just such a correction. In the mid-1980s the Moderner Kunst Museum in Vienna partnered with the Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin to mount a solo show of Bauer's work. That exhibition led the Moderner Kunst Museum to add a 1924 Bauer oil to its permanent collection, where it has remained on continuous display. Since 1990 works by Bauer and other Guggenheim artists removed from view in the 1950s have been included in dozens of museum exhibitions and gallery shows. In 2005 the Boca Raton Museum of Art mounted a solo survey exhibition of Bauer's drawings and prints, which included oils lent by local collectors. As we go to press, there are major oils by Bauer hanging in the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.

Thomas M. Messer, director emeritus of the Guggenheim Foundation, may have been prophetic when he said in 1987: "There was a time when the works of Rudolf Bauer were exhibited too often at this institution. I believe we are now coming out of a time when his work has been exhibited too little."<sup>55</sup>



HILLA REBAY *Rondo* Oil on canvas 94<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 78<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches c. 1943



*Louise and Rudolf Bauer, Deal, New Jersey, c. 1945*

Nearly three generations after Bauer's banishment, the Guggenheim Museum has begun to reassess. In 2005–06 the museum on Fifth Avenue mounted a show titled *Art of Tomorrow: Hilla Rebay and Solomon R. Guggenheim*, which traveled to museums in Munich and Murnau, as well as the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin. A large group of works by Rebay and Bauer and an oil by Scarlett were hung with choice works by Kandinsky and many of the original selections from the 1939 *Art of Tomorrow* exhibition. Numerous major Bauer oils were added and given prominent placement at the Munich venue, Museum Villa Stuck, by museum director Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker. This show marked the first time that the Guggenheim Museum had exhibited this material on such a grand scale, giving hope that Solomon Guggenheim's vision of Non-Objective art might still be realized on the helical ramp in the museum that bears his name.

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*An artist and independent curator living in New York City, Steven Lowy has studied the work of Rudolf Bauer since 1988. He credits his mentor at the University of Pennsylvania, Leo Steinberg, for opening his eyes to the mutable nature of art history.*



**Rudolf Bauer, *Deal*, New Jersey, c. 1940s**



NOTES

1. Quoted in Joan M. Lukach, *Hilla Rebay: In Search of the Spirit in Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1983), p. 29. Subsequent general biographical references to Rebay come largely from this source and will not be cited.
2. "Non-Objects," *Time*, February 15, 1937, pp. 36, 38.
3. In a statement written c. 1954, Louise Bauer, Rudolf Bauer's wife, references the fact that Bauer's painting was the model for these two signature buildings of the 1939 World's Fair. Bauer was never credited by the building designers. Louise Bauer's statement is found in the Rudolf Bauer Archives, San Francisco, and is reproduced as Appendix L in this volume. In his essay "The Music of the Spheres," Robert Rosenblum points out this striking correspondence. *Art of Tomorrow: Hilla Rebay and Solomon R. Guggenheim* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2005). Essay is reprinted in this monograph, see pp. 35–42. A 1939 *Art of Tomorrow* catalogue includes an image of *The Holy One* with a caption that cites it as the inspiration for the World's Fair buildings.
4. Robert Rosenblum, "The Music of the Spheres," pp. 224–25.
5. William Moritz, "You Can't Get Them from Now," *Journal: Southern California Art Magazine* 29 (summer 1981), p. 31.
6. The term *non-objective* derives from the German word *gegenstandslos*, an adjective often used by Bauer and Vasily Kandinsky to describe work not abstracted from nature but derived strictly from the artist's imagination. See Lukach, *Hilla Rebay*, p. xli.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 296.
8. This incident was recalled by the artist's sister and relayed to the author by Bauer's great-niece, Patricia M. Geib, around 2003.
9. There may have also been less demand for caricature during the war because of strict wartime censorship.
10. Letter from Bauer to Rebay, quoted in Lukach, *Hilla Rebay*, p. 29.
11. Susanne Neuburger, "From 'Sturm' to 'Geistreich': Rudolf Bauer in Berlin," in *Rudolf Bauer: Centennial Exhibition* (New York: Portico New York, 1989), p. 3.
12. See Bauer's undated letter to Solomon R. Guggenheim (Appendix F) from the Rudolf Bauer Archives, San Francisco.
13. Lukach, *Hilla Rebay*, p. 28.
14. *Krater* has a double meaning, either *crater* (the Greek drinking vessel) or *cauldron*. It is unclear which meaning was preferred by the group. The entirety of the phrase then means approximately: *The Craters, the High Mass of Art*. Translation by Bernhard Geyer.
15. From *Die Krater Portfolio*. Translation by Bernhard Geyer.
16. Robert L. Herbert, Eleanor S. Apter, and Elise K. Kenney, eds., *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 56.
17. These letters are in the Rudolf Bauer Archives in San Francisco and are also alluded to in the *Société Anonyme* catalogue raisonné. Two of them are reprinted in this volume, Appendices I and K.
18. This point remains a speculation based on what we have been able to learn from the various documents available.
19. Lukach, *Hilla Rebay*, p. 43.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
21. Vivian Endicott Barnett, "Rereading the Correspondence: Rebay and Kandinsky," in *Art of Tomorrow*, pp. 88–91.
22. Neuburger, in "From 'Sturm' to 'Geistreich,'" p. 5.
23. Lukach, *Hilla Rebay*, p. 80.
24. Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, "The Art of Tomorrow," in *Art of Tomorrow*, p. 179.
25. Letter from László Moholy-Nagy to Rebay, May 1, 1938, in Lukach, *Hilla Rebay*, p. 112.
26. Danzker, "The Art of Tomorrow," p. 180.
27. Dreier's Société Anonyme collection, including fourteen Bauer pieces, was eventually donated to Yale University Art Gallery.
28. Lukach, *Hilla Rebay*, pp. 83–86.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 166–67.
30. Quoted in Sigrid Faltin's film *The Guggenheim and the Baroness: The Story of Hilla Rebay*, 73 minutes, 2004.
31. Lukach, p. 166. For information on this event, see also *Rudolf Bauer: The Art of Tomorrow* (New York: Borghi & Co., 1986), p. 44.
32. Sigrid Faltin, *Die Baroness und das Guggenheim: Hilla von Rebay, eine deutsche Künstlerin in New York* (Lengwil, Switzerland: Libelle-Verlag, 2005), pp. 164–65.
33. Conversation between Roland von Rebay and the author, 2005.
34. Faltin, *Die Baroness*, pp. 169–73.
35. At an opening of his work at Leo Castelli Gallery in the early 1990s, the artist Roy Lichtenstein confided to the author that he and his friends often visited the museum. They loved the quiet, the art, and the fact that the place was, in his words, "a little weird."
36. Rolph Scarlett, *The Baroness, the Mogul, and the Forgotten History of the First Guggenheim Museum As Told by One Who Was There* (New York: Midmarch Art Press, 2003), pp. 31–32.
37. Written statement from Louise Bauer, c. 1954, see Appendix L.
38. *Ibid.* This statement and the contract itself are in the Rudolf Bauer Archives.
39. There exists no evidence that Bauer ever painted again. Although Bauer never stated explicitly, the documents and circumstantial evidence point strongly to the fact that he "abandoned painting in 1940 to prevent Guggenheim from acquiring all his future work through a disputed contract." See *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, edited by Jennifer Gross (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 168. Donald Karshan also comes to this conclusion in his Chronology in *Rudolf Bauer: The Art of Tomorrow* (New York: Borghi & Co., 1984), p. 45. In actual fact it was probably Bauer's contractual obligations paired with his extreme displeasure in the running of the Guggenheim Foundation which together probably prompted this drastic course. Rolph Scarlett writes tellingly, "I do think Bauer was never happy or at home in America. To the best of my knowledge, he never painted anything here. I have no answer as to why, not even a guess, and he never spoke of it, but he must have felt storm clouds gathering." He goes on to talk about Bauer's careful response to Scarlett's own work: "He took his time with each piece, looking carefully and at each commenting in German which the delightful young woman who was his housekeeper (Louise Huber, to become Mrs. Bauer) would translate. . . . He never suggested or even hinted at anything that might alter the spirit of the study, but with uncanny sureness pointed out some detail. . . . The deftness of his analysis and acuteness of his eye were wizardly. Later when I had finished the large painting from the study, how splendid it was, based on his suggestions." Scarlett, *The Baroness*, p. 33. We might postulate that these pictures by Scarlett somehow function as the last paintings of Bauer.
40. Though there is no single source spelling out the exact circumstances of the Treasury Department's case with Bauer, there is enough evidence in the Rudolf Bauer Archives, including an extensive summary written by Bauer, that allows us to have a sense of the circumstances and facts.
41. Faltin, *Die Baroness*, p. 249.
42. See statement from Louise Bauer, c. 1954, Appendix L.
43. It is unclear whether these quite lengthy letters were ever mailed.
44. Faltin, *Die Baroness*, p. 196.
45. Cf. Faltin, *Die Baroness*, who cites \$250,000, as does Scarlett, *The Baroness*. Various other accounts, including Rebay's obituary, cite \$100,000 as the lawsuit amount.
46. Faltin, *Die Baroness*, pp. 202–08. For description of the trial, see also Scarlett, pp. 46–47.
47. Conversation between Peter Lawson-Johnston and the author.
48. Letter dated March 19, 1949, cited in Lukach, *Hilla Rebay*, p. 290. Present author's emphasis.
49. Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Guggenheim Correspondence*, edited by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer (Fresno: The Press at California State University; Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 204.
50. Obtained through conversations the author had with Ward Jackson and other staff members. See also Scarlett, *The Baroness*, *passim*.
51. Scarlett, *The Baroness*, p. 62.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
53. At least a dozen additional artists, including Scarlett, suffered from this restructuring of the collection.
54. One artist who has already benefited from this kind of reconsideration is Moholy-Nagy, whose work was collected in modest quantity by Guggenheim and who suffered a fate similar to Bauer. Ironically Moholy-Nagy's career was resuscitated by photography curators and dealers, although the artist considered himself a painter primarily.
55. Conversation between Thomas M. Messer and the author, 1987.

*It is my further wish that during the lifetime of Miss Rebay the Foundation accept no gifts and make no purchases of paintings without her approval, and that after her death the Foundation make no addition to its collection of paintings, unless they come from Mr. Bauer.*

— Solomon R. Guggenheim, March 19, 1949  
(adjunct letter to his will)