

## **ARTISTS AND PROPHETS** **A SECRET HISTORY OF MODERN ART 1872–1972**

### **WALL PANELS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This exhibition is the first to focus on the rise in the 1870s of artists and prophets in German-speaking Europe who were not just religious dissenters but social revolutionaries of a kind. All of them aimed at effecting a change in the lifestyle and outlook of contemporary man in order to help him solve personal, social, and economic problems. The best known among them were: Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach (1851 – 1913), Gusto Gräser (1879 – 1958), Gustav Nagel (1874 – 1952), Friedrich Muck-Lamberty (1891 – 1984), and Ludwig Christian Haeusser (1881 – 1927). Each of these prophets possessed a high degree of charisma, and each felt called upon personally to propagate their revelations for their own sake, not for fees.

Although the first three were situated on the fringes of society, in the 1920s Muck-Lamberty and Haeusser, who were Gräser's disciples, garnered large crowds and bands of followers until the National Socialists came to power. By then all five prophets had become legendary. That few remember them today owes to the fact that, ever since the Enlightenment, there had been little place for the irrational in German-speaking Europe. And yet these prophets were not just well known in avant-garde circles; they had a profound effect on the development of modern art in Europe.

The pioneering abstraction of František Kupka was kindled by his contact with Diefenbach and his disciples. So was one of the great themes of Egon Schiele's art: the notion of the artist as a martyred prophet. Johannes Baader's Dadaist work is also indebted to the artist's identification with Christ since 1905, encouraged by such Jesus Apostles as Nagel. The rebellious drawings Friedrich Schröder- Sonnenstern made after 1945 were inspired by his own stint as a less-well-known prophet in Weimar Germany. During the 1950s Friedensreich Hundertwasser began to posit himself as an artist-ecologist, roaming to the far corners of the world and making art with a profound holistic edge of deep appeal to a broad-based public. This entire tradition fueled the messianic dimensions of Joseph Beuys's sense of his artistic mission. Encouraged by Beuys's example, Jörg Immendorff took his LIDL art into the streets of Düsseldorf, soon pledging himself to the religion of communism. By then some hundred years had gone by since Diefenbach's initial wanderings in Munich, talking about the sources of human misery. It is high time, then, that this secret history of artists and prophets be told.

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## **KARL WILHELM DIEFENBACH: THE “VEGETARIAN APOSTLE”**

In 1872 Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach moved from Hadamar (near Frankfurt) to Munich, where he entered the Akademie der Bildenden Künste. Hampered by ill health and an operation that impaired his painting arm, the artist began to pay attention to his diet. He soon came across the books of Eduard Baltzer, who had just ushered in the vegetarian movement in Germany, declaring himself its prophet. Then came 1882. On his wedding night Diefenbach fled to the Hohen Peißenberg, where at dawn he had a revelation that changed his life forever. When he came down from the mountain he donned a robe and began to go barefoot, becoming Germany's first artist-prophet. The epic poem he wrote about his vision shortly thereafter is spoken in the adjacent gallery.

In 1891 Diefenbach went to Vienna, where he had been invited to present a large exhibition at the Österreichische Kunst-Verein. The show was a hit. Originally scheduled to close at the end of May 1892, it remained on view until November. By July more than 78,000 people had streamed through its doors! Overnight the prophet became a press sensation. One critic noted: “The biggest artistic attraction in Vienna is currently Master Diefenbach. ... And the most interesting exhibition object in these rooms is without doubt the ‘Master’ himself. ... Christ and Diefenbach, those are the two main apparitions that occupy the painter the most.” Diefenbach and his followers moved into an empty villa in Hütteldorf, on the edge of Vienna, in August 1894. The Czech painter František Kupka and Arthur Roessler, the future promoter of Egon Schiele, joined him there. In 1897 he established a new commune—the Himmelhof, in Ober-St.-Veit. Some twenty-four members lived there, including Gusto Gräser.

Diefenbach left Austria in 1898, leaving behind him a trail of debts. Many of his paintings were sold to cover them. In 1900 he took up residence on Capri, where died thirteen years later. Although the painter may have left German soil, legends about him continued to circulate among younger artists there.

## **FIDUS (HUGO HÖPPENER)**

The two years Fidus spent with Diefenbach in 1887 and 1888 at his commune in Höllriegelskreuth fundamentally affected the direction of his art. Unlike his “master,” Fidus never considered himself a prophet. Instead, he devoted the initial years of his artistry to giving pictorial form to two key precepts that underlay Diefenbach's notion of his prophethood: the cult of the uncorrupted child and a concern with the religious and ethical education of man. Fidus also fused together branches of thought that Diefenbach knew little about—the worlds of Theosophy and Monism. Then he used the vehicles of book illustrations, prints, postcards, and charcoal-toned photographs to popularize his art with unbelievable success. Diefenbach had schooled him well in the art of propaganda.

In 1889 Fidus left Diefenbach and took a room in the home of Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden, an occult writer who lived in a suburb of Munich. He soon came to see Hübbe-Schleiden as his “second spiritual master,” following him in the fall of 1892 to Berlin. There he put Fidus in charge of the graphic elements for *Sphinx: Monatsschrift für Seelen- und Geistesleben*, the occultist magazine he edited. Two years later Fidus struck out on his own. By 1896 he could barely keep up with the demand for his illustrations from such populist cultural journals as *Jugend*, *Pan*, and *Simplicissimus*.

Since 1892 Fidus also had made hundreds of drawings that featured monumental communal temple structures, as well as ones dominated by various transcendental beings. He considered these works precursors of a *Tempelkunst* (Temple Art) of the future, one inspired by Richard Wagner's notion of the Gesamtkunstwerk. By 1902, when Wilhelm Spohr's lavishly illustrated monograph on Fidus hit the market, a broad sector of the German-speaking art world was well aware of that. A year later Fidus's reputation had risen to the point that one critic asked: “What is

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Fidus to us ? What does he want to be ? ... With his actual work, to which he has given the name *Tempelkunst*, he is more than an artist. Fidus is a priest, a prophet.”

## FRANTIŠEK KUPKA

In October 1891, at just twenty years of age, František Kupka moved from Prague to Vienna, enrolling there at the Akademie der bildenden Künste. Two months later Diefenbach arrived in the city. His 1892 exhibition at the Österreichische Kunst-Verein left a deep mark on the young painter. In the autumn of 1894, Kupka and his painting buddy Miloš Maixner paid a visit to Diefenbach's commune in Hütteldorf. Although Maixner decided that day to remain and become a disciple, Kupka was still considering joining in December, as these lines from a letter to “a Dear Brother” in a secret society suggest: “I doted on [Diefenbach] already two years ago. ... [He] is also a first-rate moralizer, painter, musician, and poet. I have been rubbing elbows with him a lot recently.” The same letter reveals that by then Kupka was well aware of Hübbe-Schleiden's journal *Sphinx*, and also of Fidus's illustrations in it. Although shortly thereafter Kupka went to Hütteldorf, he remained at Diefenbach's commune just a few months. Arthur Roessler, who also had briefly resided there, got in touch with Kupka, eager to trade stories with him about the prophet. The two soon became friends, corresponding with one another until at least 1914.

Kupka departed for Paris in the spring of 1896, only to return to Vienna in March 1898. During that brief stay he certainly took in the exhibition of Diefenbach's *Per aspera ad astra* and other of his paintings. The iconography of many of the works on paper he began to make in Paris thereafter — gigantic sphinxes, monumental temples, large water lilies, and huge lotus blossoms — hark back to the esoteric circles he had moved in while in Vienna. In 1906 Kupka began to synthesize all these strands, now making paintings entrenched in theosophical, monistic, and Darwinian notions. Neither completely nonrepresentational nor purely figurative in essence, their origins, too, lay in the years he spent in Vienna.

In 1904 František Kupka turned his attention to a new commission: the making of more than a hundred drawings meant to illustrate six volumes of Élisée Reclus's geographic encyclopedia *L'Homme et la Terre*. Like Reclus, Kupka not only endorsed Haeckel's take on Darwinism but was sympathetic to his monist views as well. A year into the project the artist wrote his friend Josef Svatopluk Machar that the whole of Reclus's tome was based on an idea he found fascinating: “Man is nature becoming conscious of itself.” In his encyclopedia Reclus elaborated on the subject: “Man recollects in his structure everything that his ancestors lived through during the vast expanse of ages.” That idea in turn formed the heart of Haeckel's biogenetic law—ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. Kupka responded to all this in the small vignette *Divisions and Rhythm of History*. The drawing features two figures superimposed on an undulating, wavelike form that seemingly rides through the cosmos. Such imagery underscores this nearby statement by Reclus: “Individuals and peoples ‘experience a turn and then disappear,’ yet they disappear only to return in an ever widening circle. The amplitude of these oscillations has increased progressively since the dawn of recorded time, and the thousands of local rhythms have gradually blended into a more comprehensive rhythm.” Those ideas would gradually sink into the artist's mind, giving birth to such paintings as *Water*, also called *The Bather* (1906), and shortly thereafter helping crack open the door to Kupka's breakthrough to abstraction in such works as *Cosmic Spring I* (1913/14). Both paintings are on view in the adjacent gallery.

## GUSTO GRÄSER: NATURE PROPHET

Gustav Arthur Gräser came to Vienna in 1897, where he enrolled at the Kunstgewerbeschule. A month after *Per aspera ad astra* went on view in the city, Gräser left his studies to join Diefenbach's commune at the Himmelhof. Though he stayed only five months, the days he spent there changed him forever. Within a decade he had attained the status of a guru. Unlike Diefenbach, Gräser had no interest in followers. Instead he hoped that through his personal example he might better the life of his fellow man. He survived on what people gave him, largely

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indifferent to cold and hunger. He sold for a few pennies, or simply gave away, small cards with sayings, poems, letter-size pamphlets, and a few prints.

In the fall of 1900 Gräser co-founded the settlement Monte Verità in Switzerland. Disagreements soon led him to move to nearby Arcegno, where he had been gifted a piece of land. Opposed to owning property, Gräser preferred to live in a cave. Around this time Hermann Hesse encountered him and became a secret disciple. A little later the prophet turned up in the Munich offices of the magazine *Jugend*: “My name is Gräser,” he pleasantly stated, “but just say Gras. I am an individualist. Here are my poems, which are colored according to themes: red for love; green for nature; blue for dream; yellow for the bourgeois, who envy me.” By the outbreak of World War I thousands had glimpsed Gräser passing through their towns, the living embodiment of the “world improvers” they were reading about in the newspapers. Expelled from Germany, Gräser went to Austria, where he refused to join the military—an act that almost got him executed. In 1916 Gräser returned to Ascona, where Hesse renewed his association with him. On occasion the writer tried to raise money to support Gräser and the companion he had chosen: Elizabeth Dörr, a widow with five children! The greatest service Hesse did him, though, were the stories he wrote, inspired in part by Gräser’s example. At the time, and continuing into the 1970s, they propagated ideas at the core of this Nature Prophet’s teachings.

## EGON SCHIELE

In June 1909 Egon Schiele and several others decided to form the “Neukunstgruppe” in Vienna. A month later Schiele broke off his studies at the Kunstakademie for good. Meanwhile, his close painting buddy Anton Faistauer and his friends Robin Christian Andersen and Gustav Schütt departed for Switzerland. Their final destination was the region around Arcegno, the area in which Gräser had settled some six years earlier. As it turned out, the trio from Vienna liked the lifestyle and individualists they encountered there so much that they returned the next two summers. Eventually they met the vagabond writer Emil Szitty, who later revealed that, no later than 1911, both Andersen and Schütt had become Diefenbachers.

Meanwhile, the “Neukünstler” show had opened at the Galerie Pisko late in 1909. It was there that Schiele met Arthur Roessler. He soon became not only his most important promoter but a friend and confidant. Schiele’s yearning for admission into a kind of “monklike artistic brotherhood”—a sentiment that persisted, as evidenced in such watercolors as *The Truth Unveiled* (1913) and *Seers* (1913) on view here—would have reminded Roessler of the very feelings that once had led Fidus, and then Kupka and him, to join Diefenbach’s commune. It wouldn’t have been long, then, before he shared the details with Schiele, who need not have scrounged around in books for fictional or long-dead prophets for inspiration. It was both these factors — Faistauer’s and his friends’ close proximity to the circle around Gräser and Diefenbach, and Roessler’s experience as the latter’s disciple — that by 1910 began to cause Schiele to take up what would become one of the great themes of his paintings: the artist as a martyred prophet.

## GUSTAV NAGEL: A JESUS APOSTLE

Nagel was an extraordinarily striking prophet. With sparkling blue eyes and long wavy hair, he stood nearly six feet tall. He knew how to make the most of those features, too: already in 1898 this young self-proclaimed Jesus Apostle began to seek the services of photographers, transforming the resultant portrait photos into picture postcards. By 1902 he had sold some 50,000 pieces with six different motifs. For a card he usually charged 10 pfennigs, the same as for his writings, of which he had already sold 12,000. When Nagel came into town, banners were posted and the drum was beaten. Whatever artistic inclinations Nagel had he channeled into designing his look, making banners and fairytale-like gardens into which he stepped for appearances when paying visitors dropped by. He had no need for followers. What he was after was a public, willing to give him a few cents to take his visage home with them.

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In the spring of 1902 Nagel left on a tour, largely by foot, that would make his name. It took him from the banks of the Arendsee to Jerusalem and Palestine and then back to his hometown. On the way he stopped at Monte Verità, arriving in the midst of a snowstorm, barefoot as usual and scantily clothed. Next he called on Diefenbach in Capri. Within three days he had become disillusioned with the prophet, after whom he had initially styled himself. On his way back he met the former Diefenbacher Maria Anna Konhäuser and soon took her as his wife. He then baptized their baby in the icy waters of the Arendsee, inadvertently killing it. Nagel featured his next wife playing the harmonium within a mockparadisiacal garden he set up in Arendsee. By 1920 she was unable to go on. That year she tried to drown herself and her youngest boy. Soon Nagel stepped into the political arena, campaigning in 1924 for a seat in the Reichstag, running against Ludwig Christian Haeusser. All the while this Jesus Apostle posed for visitors in his temple and garden: in the year 1927, for example, more than 10,000 people passed through its doors!

## JOHANNES BAADER

In 1899 the twenty-four-year-old Johannes Baader wrote several perplexing letters to the journal *Jugend* that he signed "With kindest regards, God." Six years later Baader set himself up as a freelance architect only to decide to channel most of his creative energies into writing. Soon he proclaimed himself a medium with a direct line to Christ, publishing *Vierzehn Briefe Christi* in 1914. Although he never went about in the streets claiming he was a Jesus Apostle, his identification with Christ was certainly informed by those such as Nagel, who did.

Baader and Raoul Hausmann began to collaborate in 1917. At first they considered establishing a "Christus G.m.b.H.," but later decided upon founding the "Independent Social Democratic Party," a mock political party. Early in 1919 the Club Dada made the press aware that Baader would soon appear to be proclaimed "President of the Globe."

Within a year he had met the prophet Haeusser, whom he calmly told to "go to the Reichstag and, without words, take hold of the government." All of this became the stuff of the few Dadaist collages of his that survive, several of which are on view here.

Next Baader arrived at Ludwigstein Castle, where he announced: "I am the Oberdada, and from now on will take the fate of the castle in my hand. Where can I sleep, and when are meals served here?" The year was 1922. By then two years had passed since his wife's death. Baader now resolved to deposit his youngest son on the doorstep of Otto Buchinger, Germany's first holistic fasting expert. Buchinger, who lived close to Ludwigstein Castle, later commented about this time: "Along with such figures [Haeusser and Gräser], other shady characters such as the Oberdada Baader also turned up, whose sermons to the Wandervogel youth in nearby Ludwigstein began and ended with an Orphic riddle-like question: 'Don't you know that you are in heaven?'" During the 1920s Baader continued to promote himself as a visionary savior, hooking up with prophets of all sorts.

## JOSEPH BEUYS

Nowhere did the aesthetic legacy of the artist-prophet set into motion by Diefenbach and taken up by Nagel, Baader, and Haeusser leave such a deep mark as on the work of Joseph Beuys. Just as the latter three figures had done before, Beuys formed his own pseudo-political parties and invented a unique version of Christianity, playing himself up as a martyred artist after 1964. This was also in keeping with the self-styling of Diefenbach, an artist Beuys not only knew but admired.

The history of Beuys's decision to assume the calling of an artist-prophet began in 1946, when he entered Ewald Mataré's class at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. The pedagogical reforms Mataré initiated there had at their core the philosophy that art could be achieved only from a uniform spiritual basis, essentially Christian in essence. Intent upon reviving the handicrafts, he taught his

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students the geometric principles of Gothic cathedrals. The result was not what he expected. Several of them, Beuys included, began to explore a different religious vision: the precepts of Steiner's anthroposophy, which emphasized a new approach to Christianity and additionally promoted the value of collective working groups and craft communities. Along the way, Beuys found out how much those ideas built upon concerns central to the outlook of the painters and prophets exhibited here.

The best evidence of this is the poster for Beuys's first exhibition at Lucio Amelio's gallery in Naples, which he subsequently made into a multiple, on view here. Like Beuys, the gallerist had long been fascinated by Diefenbach, who sometimes came to Naples, even staying for a few months in 1912. A photograph of Diefenbach taken then, presented in the gallery devoted to him in this show, partly inspired Beuys's posturing in his 1971 poster. Emblazoned with the words "La rivoluzione siamo Noi", it proclaims Beuys's alliance not just with Diefenbach but with all those prophets who had been fueled by his inimitable example.

## HEINRICH VOGELER

In February 1918 Heinrich Vogeler returned from the war and began to infuse his Barkenhoff settlement with a new revolutionary fervor. One can only imagine the havoc wreaked by the transformation of what originally had been a reformist Jugendstil haven for a handful of intellectuals and artists into a kind of open-door anarchist commune. All kinds of radical communists and syndicalists began to drop by the new "Barkenhoff Work Community." There were also such vegetarian, antimilitarist types as Friedrich (Fidi) Harjes, who presently moved there with his family, as seen in the painting on view in this gallery. Vogeler soon booked dates at various universities, lecturing to the youth about the need to change their way of loving and living. Next Vogeler turned up in Eisenach, in connection with the arrival of Friedrich Muck-Lamberty's *Neue Schar* there in the fall of 1920. Vogeler not only joined their singing and dancing but held a talk titled "The Religious Primal Forces of Revolution." In short order, Karl Strünckmann became convinced that there was no better spokesman for his germinating Christ Revolutionary movement. Although Vogeler never joined that group, the deep friendships he formed with those in its circle, such as Theodor Plievier and Gregor Gog, reinforced the messianic premise of his artistic mission.

In the summer of 1922 Vogeler met Zofia Marchlewska, who had come with her family for a short stay at Barkenhoff. It was her Polish Communist father's November initiative that led to the founding of the International Red Aid in Moscow (abbreviated in Russian as MOPR). In 1923, the pair departed for Moscow. There Vogeler broke through to a new style of montage-like painting—the Complex Pictures—creating *Birth of the New Man* on view here. Although typically interpreted as the celebration of the birth of his son in October of that year, the canvas is really about the birth of a new savior that had been hailed in Germany since the 1880s, when Diefenbach first donned the robe of a prophet.

## JÖRG IMMENDORFF

Jörg Immendorff transferred into Beuys's class at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 1964. He soon became his favorite student. It made no difference to Immendorff that Beuys went around positing himself as a "Sender" and his students as "Receivers." It was thanks to this that Immendorff found out the information really worth tuning into was being broadcast from the underground. In the paintings and sculptures that ensued, Immendorff expanded and commented upon the creed of the artist-prophet, as mediated to him through Beuys.

From the outset Immendorff parodied the messianic dimensions of Beuys's art and persona, as in *Eat German Apples* (1965), on view here. This painting's title establishes parallels between the taking of communion and the transformative effect Beuys's art could have on those open to digesting it. Three years later Immendorff made the LIDL object *For Dark Days on the Road* (Ego-

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*Scepter*), also presented here. With this staff, he too now posited himself as a kind of prophet. It not only closely resembles one that Nagel posed with decades earlier—commemorated on one of his picture postcards; its designation as an “Ego Scepter” also revived the revolutionary cult of personality cultivated by both Haeusser and Plievier.

In 1970 Immendorff joined a new community, pledging himself to the Anti-Imperialism League and putting his art in the service of the Maoist party. His work took on a disposition of stringent self-analysis, differentiating it from the playfulness of his earlier “Baby” art and LIDL actions. The central concerns that spawned these images — a commitment to communism and the promotion of a collective working practice — were neither new nor out of sync with their times. For behind them were attitudes common to the painters and prophets featured in this exhibition: a commitment to the cult of self, a belief in the brotherhood of man, and a desire to make art that posited the source of revolution inside the heart of each one of us.

## **FRIEDRICH MUCK-LAMBERTY: THE “MESSIAH” OF THE GERMAN YOUTH MOVEMENT**

In May 1920 Friedrich Muck-Lamberty’s *Neue Schar* (New Flock) began to ignite a frenzy of dancing in Franconia and Thuringia. At first only a few youths joined them. Soon hundreds were dancing to their folk songs, sometimes even gaily singing along. It wasn’t long before the *Neue Schar* became so popular that when it turned up in a town, school was let out. The group spent nights in the fields or woods, seeking shelter in towns only when absolutely necessary. They lived off the land and what was given to them. Alcohol and meat were prohibited. Group meetings, known as “The Thing,” were held regularly, at which any digressions of behavior or self-doubts were to be freely admitted and discussed.

In July the *Neue Schar* reached Jena, where Gräser joined the group. Nearing the end of its tour, Theodor Plievier also linked up with them for a while. But by November the historical event was over: the group now went to Leuchtenburg, taking up residence in a yet-to-be-completed youth hostel. It was there that the trouble started. Like Vogeler, Muck-Lamberty believed that the birth of a new savior was imminent. Unwilling to wait, he began to try to sire “a whole new race of humans with a consciousness of Christ” that finally would “open up an entirely new world.” He therefore saw no wrong in coupling with at least three females, all of whom wanted to have a child by him. The jealousy of one put an end to everything. Early in 1921 Muck-Lamberty and a few followers marched away from Leuchtenburg, heading for Naumburg. There he set up a collective wood-turning workshop. The guiding premises of the “Werkschar Naumburg” harked back to plans the prophet had set into motion already in 1914, when he tried to establish an artisans’ settlement. The later commercial success of the “Werkschar Naumburg” reveals that the “irrational” impulse at the foundation of this Messiah’s vision of a community of youthful craftspersons also could include effective social alternatives that were progressive rather than merely reactionary.

## **LUDWIG CHRISTIAN HAEUSSER: INFLATION SAINT**

The vision that caused Ludwig Christian Haeusser to slip into the guise of a prophet took place in a hotel room in Frankfurt am Main, during a 1912 business trip. For a while Haeusser ignored it and continued the mission that had preoccupied him until then: running a lucrative champagne distributorship based in Paris. By 1918 he was unable to go on. That year he went to Ascona to learn from Gräser what it took to be a prophet. He next took a room in the seedy Hotel International in Pforzheim and hit the streets, armed with a duffel bag full of pamphlets and flyers.

Haeusser’s natural habitat was a lecture hall, stuffed with people eager to hear him. By the fall of 1919 this self-proclaimed “Spiritual Monarch” had become a mesmerizing speaker and designed numerous posters announcing his appearances, a dozen of which are on view here. A year later he arrived in Weimar, where, according to one account, his “procession through the city was a sensation. He was fantastically decked out, with a long black coat, boots, and a fur cap. ... One

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couldn't help but recognize that he knew his business!" Walter Gropius requested that he speak at the Bauhaus: "Everyone who had a name in the world of modern art at the time was there ... Kandinsky ... Schlemmer to Feininger ... Klee. ... Haeusser spoke for almost two hours, and his torrent of words cast even this gathering of intellectuals under his spell."

By 1922 Haeusser was Germany's most celebrated Inflation Saint. Many of his followers were women, eager to be "purified" by sexual contact with him. That year he founded the newspaper *Haeusser*, which would produce some 257 issues. In the May 1924 campaign for a Reichstag seat he garnered 24,451 votes, even though he had been jailed for misdemeanors since late 1923. By the time he was set free in July 1925 his health was broken. Nevertheless he continued to lecture, traveling to Frankfurt, where in 1926 he thrilled listeners in Graf's Garten and at the Römer. The following year he was dead.

## **FRIEDRICH SCHRÖDER-SONNENSTERN**

In 1949 Friedrich Schröder-Sonnenstern began to make art. He was already fifty-seven years of age and had no formal training, but he was not to be stopped. For the previous four years he had survived by scouring Berlin's bombed-out buildings for timber, selling it as firewood to his neighbors. It is not known how he lasted out the war. But before that he had been a small-time prophet between 1919 and 1933, who styled himself partly after Haeusser.

Born on September 11, 1892, in Kaukehmen, near Tilsit, Emil Frederick Schröder had been an unruly child, predisposed to lying. By 1919 he had tramped to Berlin, where he began to revolve in occultist circles. Three years later he took the name "Elliot the Sun King," established a new Christian sect, and soon had numerous followers. Eventually, though, he lost most of them, fell ill, and became so poor that he had to ask for work. No wonder: the hyperinflation largely put all kinds of saints—celebrated and not—out of business. Forced to reinvent himself, he founded an "Institute for the Culture of the Body, Spirit, and Soul" and a "Sonnenstern-Film A. G." Still, he sometimes donned the robe of a prophet until he landed in a psychiatric institute for a time in 1933.

Schröder-Sonnenstern's drawings parody several of the characteristic elements that linked the jargon of the Inflation Saints with that of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich—the superlative, fanatical, ecstatic, and insistent. Their blatant erotic quality also makes visible the link between those given to extreme religiosity and those who bestowed religious dimensions upon the sexual act. With his post-1945 art, Schröder-Sonnenstern critiqued the more famous "Masters" and "Doctors"—including Haeusser, Leonhard Stark, Strünckmann, and Rudolf Steiner—with whom he competed for followers until at least 1925. Subtly, but insistently, many of his drawings let it be known that he blamed those who blindly followed these men for paving the way to the embrace of the false prophet Hitler in Germany.

## **FRIEDENSREICH HUNDERTWASSER**

Friedrich Stowasser was born in Vienna in 1928 to a Catholic father and a Jewish mother. Barely twelve months elapsed before his father died. Eight years later Hitler's troops marched into Vienna. Soon the young boy and his mother were forced to move into a small room in an apartment with his grandmother and aunt in Vienna's Leopoldstadt, where the Jews were being ghettoized. Thereafter the two survived solely by dint of their wits.

After the war Stowasser gravitated toward art, becoming so enamored of Schiele's paintings that he took up Roessler's 1948 monograph on the artist. That year he entered Robin Christian Andersen's class at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna. He stayed just three months, heading in April 1949 for Naples and moving on the next day to Capri. By the winter of 1951 he had changed his name to Hundertwasser and altered his outer appearance, wearing what he

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termed “creative clothing” and making his own shoes, just as Gräser once had done. Concurrently he wrote the poem “I Love Schiele,” which read in part: “Nothing can save you, not Christianity, not Communism, not a bourgeois way of life. Let the children speak, and the painters and architects. Let them talk, those who know of a new religion, ... those who want only to do you good.” Those lines could have been spoken just as readily by Diefenbach.

Soon Hundertwasser was hailed widely as a world wanderer and a kind of guru of alternative lifestyles, and even appeared on network television. “Three Demonstrations of the Window Right,” shown here, was broadcast simultaneously in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria on *Wünsch dir was* in 1972. By then the painter-prophet had achieved something Schiele dreamed of but hadn’t attained in his lifetime: he developed an ornamental aesthetic infused with social commentary that also proved deeply appealing to a broad-based public. Far from being escapist, such paintings offered their viewers a productive way of looking at the world that could be healing.

## SHOWCASE PANELS

### **KARL WILHELM DIEFENBACH IN MUNICH: 1872–1891**

Even while still a student, Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach demonstrated what a skilled portraitist and draftsman he was. Six years after leaving the academy, he moved into a deserted worker's house in what once had been a stone quarry in Höllriegelskreuth. Although his wife accompanied him, bringing their two children, she didn't stay long. He called this commune located on the outskirts of Munich "HUMANITAS, Workshop for Religion, Art, and Science." On the house's gable he inscribed the word Humanity. The year was 1885. Johannes Gutzzeit arrived next, meeting up with his sister there. Diefenbach soon found fault with this nature apostle: by the end of 1885 Gutzzeit was no longer there.

The young art student Hugo Höppener dropped by in July 1887. On the spot he decided to stay and take up Diefenbach's cause. He described his relationship to the prophet in a letter to his mother as one that "corresponds in every aspect with that of Christ and his disciples." That attitude led Diefenbach to nickname him Fidus. In the summer of 1888 the police sneaked up on them as they were sketching, naked, on the porch. The result was probably the first civil nudist case in history. A color postcard from that year reveals that the resulting scandal only made Diefenbach even more visible.

With the help of his mother, Fidus arranged Diefenbach's first two solo shows—in 1889 and 1891—in Munich. Neither took place at a gallery or a museum. The second of these opened at the city's "Lion's Pit," accompanied by a modest catalogue .

### **KARL WILHELM DIEFENBACH IN VIENNA: 1892–1895**

Shortly after Diefenbach's exhibition debuted in 1892 at the Kunst-Verein in Vienna, accompanied by a catalogue, an article about his work and an idealized portrait of the prophet appeared in the large-format *Künstler-Album*. After the show closed Diefenbach moved to nearby Baden, where in January 1893 his frieze *Per aspera ad astra* was finally presented in the abandoned building of the Curhaus. That year also saw the publication of a largeformat foldout book featuring reproductions of the entire work, complemented by Diefenbach's epic poem. Reproductions of his work began to appear concurrently in the magazine *Sphinx*, making his art known beyond the borders of Munich and Vienna. Next Diefenbach brought out *Mein Verhältnis zu dem "Oesterreichischen Kunstverein" Wien* (1895), a tome of some 600 pages. Made up of transcriptions of hundreds of press articles about the prophet and his painting, it was probably the first reception history compiled by an artist. To complete it Diefenbach made use of his disciples, a task force he also relied upon to complete his paintings. The young Arthur Roessler recounted that in an 1895 letter to his parents, written at Diefenbach's commune at Hütteldorf: "I had a chance to observe Diefenbach carrying on the most audacious nonsense. ... Pointing to a visionary painting, he explained to visitors ... that he had created this picture ... even though the same painting had been begun by Kupka and almost finished by [Miloš] Maixner. ... As he was dictating to me the second volume of his book, *Mein Verhältnis zum "Oesterreichischen Kunstverein" Wien*, the daughter of the caretaker of the house came in."

## **DIEFENBACH IN CAIRO, VIENNA, AND CAPRI: 1896–1913**

In the summer of 1895 Diefenbach and a few followers went over the Alps traveling on to Egypt. While in Cairo he painted several works, including *The Colossi of Memnon in a Sandstorm* (ca. 1896) on view here. Diefenbach's visit to Egypt rekindled his long simmering interest in the building of a communal temple topped by a sphinx, as seen in the last panel of *Per aspera ad astra*. In March 1898 the sixty-eight-meter-long frieze and other of his paintings went on view in the cellar of a residence in the center of Vienna. Shortly thereafter the bankrupt prophet and his disciples were kicked out of their commune in Ober-St.-Veit, where they had been living for the past year. The prophet then headed for Capri. There he set up a large atelier, painting on its exterior a version of his monumental frieze.

Gustav Nagel called on him there late in November 1902. For years he had yearned to meet the prophet after whom he had partly styled himself. He recorded his impressions in a diary he kept: "[Diefenbach] is of the opinion that man must work and always labor anew. ... He is trying to form an art academy on Capri, of which he will be chief. ... He wants to collect students around himself and to take in poor children and people." Nagel fled after just three days, shipping off to Messina on his way to Jerusalem. In January 1903 he began his trip back to Arendsee, stopping in Vienna. There he met the ex-Diefenbacher Maria Anna Konhäuser and promptly fell in love with her, marrying her within a year.

## **FIDUS (HUGO HÖPPENER), 1888–1902**

Soon after arriving in Höllriegelskreuth, Fidus brought out the sixteen-page booklet *to the rescue of KARL WILHELM DIEFENBACH and his children*, which emphasized Diefenbach as a martyred artist-prophet. Like Diefenbach, Fidus had been drawn to vegetarianism in part because of illness. His second "master," the occult writer Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden, saw to it that he received an operation in 1890 that helped relieve the pain from a form of lupus localized in his foot. A year later Fidus's drawings began to liven up the pages of *Sphinx*. One of the first of these featured a naked young girl who spreads her arms outward to protect an uneasy deer, which in turn nudges her in affection. This illustration references fundamental principles of Diefenbach's vegetarian ethic and, at the same time, exemplifies Fidus's ability to transform them into an artistic style of his own. Its title, *Thou shalt not kill!*, points back to an 1891 Diefenbach painting of the same name, a later version of which is on view in the adjacent gallery. In 1893 Fidus made a drawing of Lucifer that fuses together two systems of belief: the Theosophic equation of Lucifer with a morning star, as a mediator between mortals and deities, and the folk-Germanic concept of the Hagal rune as a holy sign that connects man and God. Later Fidus turned his attention to making drawings for the journal of the Neue Gemeinschaft, a free-religious community founded in 1900. Its editors, Heinrich and Julius Hart, followed another variant of light mysticism, believing themselves to be godlike visionaries of the sun.

## **FIDUS (HUGO HÖPPENER), 1897–1920**

In 1901 Fidus made several drawings for Bruno Wille's novel *Offenbarungen des Wachholderbaums*, a kind of résumé of free-religious thinking. By then it had been a year since Wille co-founded the Giordano-Bruno-Bund, with Ernst Haeckel as its chairman. *Der Freidenker* became its official organ. Fidus immediately joined, later designing the header for a 1904 issue of the journal dedicated to Haeckel. As *Satana* evidences, Fidus soon fell under the spell of the scientist's exquisite Darwinian prints known collectively as *Art Forms in Nature* (1899–1904).

Fidus continued to make drawings for all kinds of occultist publications until at least 1910. Though they took esoteric ideas as their starting point, the resultant images were far from technical illustrations. His cover drawing for Charles Leadbeater's *Man Visible and Invisible* (1908) exemplifies an idea Leadbeater spelled out in his book that is at the heart of Fidus's vision of his artistic mission: "Out of [man's] causal body streams of this [higher] force pour out in various directions. Man's attitude of unselfishness, of helpfulness and readiness to give, makes it

possible for ... him to reach many who are not yet strong enough to receive [the divine strength] directly.”

In 1913 Fidus targeted a huge new audience for his work. That year he issued a postcard announcing the first meeting of the German Youth. It featured a naked boy stretching his hands outward toward a not yet visible sun, a motif closely associated with his artistry since 1890. That year he had sketched a now-lost image of a naked child, whose point of departure had been a similar figure in the first panel of Diefenbach's frieze *Per aspera ad astra*.

## TEMPELKUNST: FIDUS'S TOTAL WORK OF ART OF THE FUTURE

In 1901 Fidus made a large-format print of *Temple of the Earth* for a lavishly illustrated monograph on his work, issued the following year. There it was reproduced as a foldout. Soon thereafter the buzz about Fidus's Tempelkunst began to make the rounds in the art world. In short order, the wandering prophet Josua Klein invited Fidus to move with his family from Berlin to Amden, Switzerland. After arriving in 1903, the artist began to sketch the structures he planned to have built as well as a monumental temple. Curious, the prophet Gusto Gräser soon dropped by. That same year Fidus decided to use slide lectures to propagandize his notion of Tempelkunst in Germany. By 1914 dozens of these had taken place.

Five years later Walter Gropius wrote to Fidus, asking him to participate in the *Ausstellung für unbekannte Architekten* scheduled to open in April 1919 at J. B. Neumann's *Graphisches Kabinett in Berlin*. Fidus offered him several small sketches and three large prints, including *Temple of the Earth* and *The Temple of the Iron Crown*, exhibited here. In the end they were not shown. Instead only three drawings by Fidus were accepted: two of which are also on view in this gallery: *Temple of Lucifer-Loki*, facade, and *Temple of Lucifer*, side elevation. Disappointed, Fidus wrote Gropius a letter. Reviewers of the show were not impressed: Fidus's name was not even mentioned in the few articles that appeared about it. And yet it was Fidus's vision of a "Tempelkunst of the future" that more than anything informed Walter Gropius's call in the Bauhaus manifesto of April 1919 for a "new structure of the future" that is a "crystal symbol of a new faith."

## GUSTO GRÄSER

Gräser had not been willing to accept the despotic manner in which Diefenbach ran his commune at the Himmelhof, and he was no more accepting of the commercialized course the settlement he'd helped found on Monte Verità soon took. The events that caused him to become an "external" of Monte Verità and to take up the life of a "Nature Man" were summarized by the Zurich pedagogue Adolf Grohmann in a 1904 book. As it turned out, his fellow co-founders Ida Hofmann and Henri Oedenkoven, who became keen to run a profitable sanatorium there, objected to Gräser's reluctance to work and essentially had kicked him out. They even tried to censor certain passages in Grohmann's book. As far as Oedenkoven and Hofmann were concerned, "Nature Men" were bad for business, not only because they had no money but because their habit of wearing next to nothing generated alarm among the villagers.

In the wake of his first visit to Monte Verità, where he encountered "world improvers" of all sorts, Hermann Hesse penned the story "Der Weltverbesserer" in 1906. Hesse returned to Monte Verità in 1907, this time also spending two weeks near Gräser's cave. Soon he published "In den Felsen: Notizen eines 'Naturmenschen,'" a story partly about that experience. Although Gräser never considered himself a "Nature Man" the designation stuck, as a 1908 caricature in *Jugend* attests.

In 1910 Gräser got together with Egon Schiele's close friend Anton Faistauer in Vienna, whom he had met the previous summer in Arcegnò. By then three years had passed since Friedrich Muck-

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Lamberty had become a disciple of this Nature Prophet. In 1913 the two met up at the first Freideutsche Jugendtag at the Hoher Meißner in 1913.

## **ARTHUR ROESSLER, WILHELM HÜBBE-SCHLEIDEN, FIDUS, AND FRANTIŠEK KUPKA**

Arthur Roessler had been captivated by Fidus since he was fifteen years old, as an 1892 letter he sent to Hübbe-Schleiden attests. In it he requested that Fidus come to Vienna, hopeful that the trip would result in more coverage of Diefenbach's art in *Sphinx*. Hübbe-Schleiden replied that Fidus was too busy to come, and in any case there were plans to include an art supplement in *Sphinx* later that year. He kept his promise: the December 1892 issue of *Sphinx* included a full illustration of a panel from Diefenbach's frieze. Three years later Roessler wrote Kupka, requesting a meeting. František Kupka answered: "Do come, but prepare yourself well. ... After all, I am used to having Diefenbach's students come to me after they have suffered disappointment." The two soon became close friends. By then Roessler also had contacted Fidus, hopeful that his idol might illustrate some of his prose.

A year after the enactment of the censorious Lex Heinze in 1900, Roessler penned "Fidus und seine Kunst," arguing that the artist had developed a new aesthetic of naked beauty that was not only courageous but pioneering. Although the nude adolescents that Schiele would begin to draw around 1910 look quite different than Fidus's, the elder artist's concern with the spiritual purity of prepubescent children certainly informed them, a predilection undoubtedly nourished by Roessler. The latter remained an admirer of Fidus for decades to come, requesting illustrations of his work for an article he planned to pen commemorating his 60th birthday. Tellingly, Roessler signed that letter to Fidus "your old ex-Diefenbacher."

## **MAX SCHULZE-SÖLDE, HEINRICH VOGELER, GREGOR GOG, AND THE CHRIST REVOLUTIONARIES**

In 1919 several works by Max Schulze-Sölde went on view at the prestigious Galerie Alfred Flechtheim in Düsseldorf. This was the second exhibition the young artist had there; a few months later the esteemed Galerie Hans Goltz in Munich also included him in a show. Nevertheless, he abandoned this promising career to "become a new, primitive man, firmly rooted in the soil." Early in 1920 Schulze-Sölde turned up at the anarchic-religious settlement Sannerz, in Schlüchtern. This brotherhood of Christian youths believed Jesus had been not just a revolutionary but an archetypal socialist and agitator. Next Schulze-Sölde came to Stuttgart to attend the first gathering of the Christ Revolutionaries. Although Heinrich Vogeler had been billed as a speaker, he didn't show up. Schulze-Sölde jumped onto the stage and spoke in his place. Karl Strücnkmann (whose portrait is on view above this vitrine) then christened him "Johannes of the Youth" and urged him to take word of the movement to the people.

Meanwhile, Vogeler had provided the frontispiece for *Gott in mir*, a volume of poems by Marie Adelheid Prinzessin Reuß-zur Lippe. The result worked well with the theme of Adelheid's poems—God dwells inside woman—a notion in keeping with Vogeler's iconography and religious outlook. Although Vogeler never became a Christ Revolutionary, he sympathized sufficiently with them to send his article "Revolution" to Gregor Gog and Alfred Daniel, the editors of *Weltwende*, the movement's newspaper. Vogeler's continuing friendship with Gog is affirmed by a colored drawing the artist inscribed to him. In 1929 Gog organized the first International Vagabond Congress in Stuttgart, where Gräser, among others, spoke to hundreds of listeners.

## **BAADER: BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER DADA**

Johannes Baader dedicated his *Vierzehn Briefe Christi* (1914) "to the great sponsor of the New Christian Church Ernst Haeckel." Haeckel, who had long since denounced Christian views as out of step with scientific discoveries, must have been surprised. Baader also badgered Haeckel with missives. One of these included a photographic snippet of a monumental temple. The image, mailed in 1915, points back to an essay from 1906 in which Baader described such a huge

structure, inspired in part by Fidus's Tempelkunst. A poem placed under it announced: "Then the Earth exists in a new form in the middle of heaven, created by Germany." Those lines in turn reiterated the crux of what Baader called Christianity II in *Vierzehn Briefe Christi*: "Heaven and Earth have become one."

In 1919 Baader turned his attention to the medium of collage, soon announcing the impending appearance of a huge collection of such works in HADO (Handbook of the Oberdada). Somehow, however, this magnum opus went astray; Baader later claimed he had forgotten it in a streetcar.

Four years later he called for a "World Congress" at the Ludwigstein Castle. By then he had begun to try to drum up money for the castle by issuing a coupon worth "1 Ludwigstein Penny," which could be obtained by paying 1500 marks in cash. The coupon could be traded back into hard currency in Berlin after the antiquarian Josef Altmann sold the "373 Secret Files of the Dadaistic Movement," which Baader had written and given to him. The whole project — part and parcel of the hyperinflation of the early 1920s necessitating emergency money of all kinds — came to nothing.

## **FRIEDRICH MUCK-LAMBERTY, THEODOR PLIEVIER, JOHANNES BAADER, AND THE INFLATION SAINTS**

In 1921 the hyperinflation broke out in Germany, inciting panic and a loss of conviction in Church and State. Soon emergency money was issued, such as these bills embellished with images of Muck-Lamberty and his *Neue Schar*. Concurrently all kinds of Inflation Saints cropped up, vying with one another for his former followers.

Although best remembered for his novels about the Eastern Front in World War II, Theodor Plievier donned the robe of a prophet shortly after encountering Gräser in 1919. By then his friend Gog, whom he'd met in World War I, had become a Christ Revolutionary. The mixture of anarchicapocalyptic notions, individualism, and reformist Christian principles in Plievier's *Anarchie* also paralleled the mindset of Vogeler, who became a friend as well. In 1920 Plievier moved to Berlin, where he networked within the anarchistsyndicalist scene, writing *Weltwende*. There he also consorted with the Inflation Saints Haeusser and Leonhard Stark.

Three years later Carl Dopf published *Häusser im Urteile seiner Zeitgenossen*, a book about "Haeusser's personality and impact." Few of those he contacted had reacted positively. Even Baader was far from unequivocal about the prophet. In 1930 Baader took part in the "Religious Week" in Hildburghausen. Schulze-Sölde later published Baader's poem "Vision" in *Der Dom*, containing this line: "Germany lies at the center of the world and is the victor in Heaven." It suggests that Baader now felt the precepts of his "Christianity II" had anticipated not just Dada but the Christ Revolutionaries too.