

10. Egon Schiele, *Self-Seers II*, 1911, oil on canvas. Leopold Museum, Vienna

from ancient Greece. It was for Schiele that Roessler coined the term “neo-Gothic” to indicate an approach in which all that is corporeal is viewed as no more than mere “husks of the soul.”<sup>35</sup> Schiele further supported this contention through his own claim, in a letter of January 1911, that the pictures he painted came “not from me, but out of me.”<sup>36</sup>

#### **DOUBLING ONESELF— SCHIELE AND HIS “SELF-SEERS”**

In employing the maxim “pictures not from me, but out of me,” Schiele effectively inverted the conventional scientific definition of the “mirror image.” In physics, an image reflected in a mirror is understood to “occupy” a position as distant from that mirror as is the original, while a strict symmetry obtains between original and reflection. But this is far from true of Schiele’s images of himself. In these, the face, the body, the hands, the torso, indeed the entire self



have all long been somewhat different, have been far more than what would normally be observed. This is above all the case with his double self-portraits.

These have, rightly, been viewed as a high point of Schiele’s work that, to this day, remains puzzling.<sup>37</sup> How alien these works really are within the context of art history is revealed by the rarely successful search for precedents. Among the work of the Old Masters, there are only a few examples to be found that show one and the same individual from diverse points of view. The best-known of these is the triple portrait of the English King Charles I by Anthony van Dyck.<sup>38</sup> Painted in England in 1635-36, it was sent to Rome in order to serve the celebrated architect and sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini as a model to create a marble bust of its subject.<sup>39</sup> The all-around visibility of the sculpted portrait made possible the multiple views offered by the painting. But what we encounter in Schiele’s work goes far beyond such juxtapositions between painting and sculpture, which are characteristic of the so-called *paragone* (the age-old rivalry between these two disciplines).

In 1910 and 1911 Schiele painted an entire series of portraits in which he showed himself twice.<sup>40</sup> To these he gave titles such as *World Melancholy*, *Self-Seers*, *The Poet*, *The Prophet*, and *Deliria (Delirium)*. Two paintings bore the title *Self-Seers*. Here I will concentrate on the work known as *Self-Seers II*,<sup>41</sup> as the earlier version<sup>42</sup> has been untraced since World War II, and is known only in the form of a black-and-white photograph.

In the painting *Self-Seers II* [Fig. 10], we find a young man, his eyes closed in apparently rapt self-contemplation. He is clasped from behind by a second, spectral figure. The body of the first figure is tightly held by several other

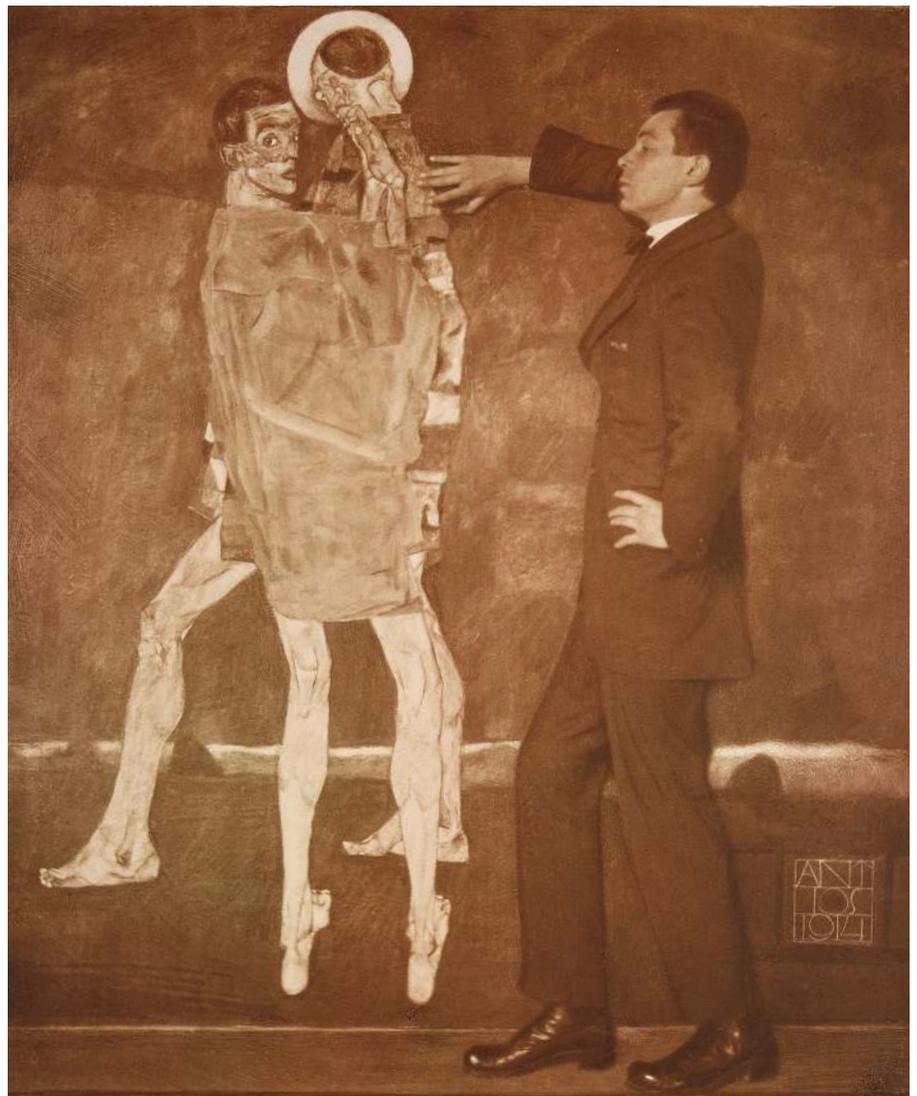
arms, but to whom these belong is not easy to ascertain. This is also, and especially, true of the hand with widely spread fingers that reaches up from the lower edge of the picture. As has been observed, “this hand, which is shown from the back, cannot originate from either of the figures.”<sup>43</sup>

Directly behind the head of the foremost figure appears that of the second: identical except for its deathly pallor, sunken cheeks, and open mouth. Its face is that of someone who has just returned from the realm of the dead. Even the thinly painted garment of this *doppelgänger* looks bleached as it billows above and around him.

The fact that Schiele intended to depict himself here is evident through this painting's derivation from *Self-Seers I*. Both of the figures shown in that earlier composition are manifestly identical, be it in their overall build, in their heads, and even as regards their shock of hair. Schiele has not only painted the same person twice, but has given that person his own facial features. The outcome is a doubling of the image of the artist.

Here we see the artist as his “own shadow,”<sup>44</sup> as his own “*doppelgänger*”:<sup>45</sup> in other words, the artist as creator who, in one and the same picture, creates a portrait both of himself and of his antithesis. This is, however, possible, or at least credible, only through a fragmentation of the body, and in as far as Schiele now no longer shies away from admitting a discontinuity in space and time.

Double self-portraits of this sort are typical of Schiele's work in the years 1911 and 1912. But the concept and structure that underlie such images are by no means limited to the work of that period. They persist, notably, in the 1913 painting *Encounter*. This important work,



striking not least on account of its size (around six and a half feet square), is also known as *Self-Portrait with Saint*.<sup>46</sup> It has, alas, remained untraced since World War II. Its appearance is, however, preserved in a contemporary photograph. This shows the artist standing in front of the life-size self-portrait in his own painted composition [Fig. 11]. As a result, the photograph itself may be interpreted as a form of double self-portrait, on account of the doubled image of Schiele that it contains.

11. Anton Josef Trčka, Egon Schiele standing in front of the lost 1913 canvas, *Encounter (Self-Portrait with Saint)*, 1913. Wien Museum, Vienna

but also self-doubt. The two self-portraits (1902 and 1903, respectively) with the nude Charlotte Berend, Corinth's model and later wife, convey an ambiguous impression. In one Corinth presents himself as a coarse reveler, firmly grasping the woman's breast, and in the other as a protector, on whom the woman leans in a tender gesture.

8. Lovis Corinth, *Self-Portrait in Fur Coat and Fur Cap*, 1916, oil on canvas. Private Collection. Photo: IKARE Bildarchiv

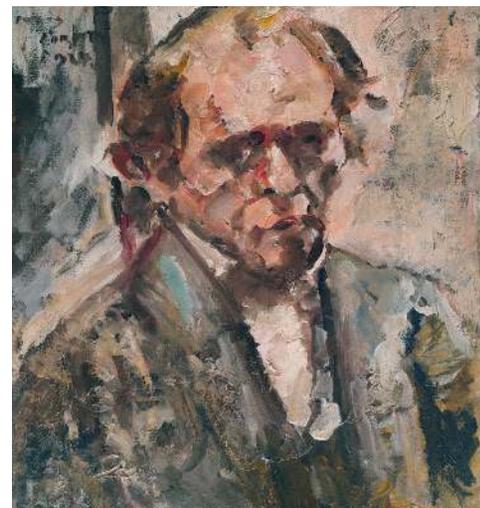


9. Lovis Corinth, *Self-Portrait*, 1924, oil on canvas. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift in memory of Ernst A. Teves, Harvard College, Class of 1936, for his courage demonstrated during the years of Nazi dictatorship in Germany. Photo: © President and Fellows of Harvard College

Numerous other paintings could also be mentioned, such as *Self-Portrait with Black Hat and Walking Stick*, painted in 1911, which presents Corinth as a superior artist conscious of tradition, who had just taken over from Max Liebermann as head of the Berliner Secession. When Corinth painted himself wearing fur and a fur beret in 1916, he was positioning himself as a successor to Rembrandt and revealing himself—in accordance with his above-cited admiration for Rembrandt—as the “greatest” living painter, in his own view [Fig. 8]. Given the radical advances of the contemporaneous avant-garde, this could be regarded as

a stunning misjudgment of his own person and a pitiable anachronism. But that was not the case, as was demonstrated, first, by the state ceremony when he died in 1925 and, second, by the two memorial exhibitions for him in Berlin in 1926 organized by the Nationalgalerie and the Akademie der Künste (Academy of Art), respectively. Moreover, the late Corinth achieved—not least in the portrait and self-portrait—an art whose quality indeed betrays a towering mastery, with which he was capable of opening up an existential dimension. It has been written in that context that his “brushwork imbues his subjects with both a threatened and a threatening presence.”<sup>16</sup>

The small, late self-portrait of 1924 now in the Busch-Reisinger Museum shows the artist, who has become thin, closely framed and cut off by the edges of the painting [Fig. 9]. The printed, dabbed, and pounded paint makes it impossible for the viewer of the painting to find calm in it visually. Human existence seems to evaporate before our eyes in that it is not possible to grasp the core of the person portrayed; it escapes. Georg Simmel's statement about Rembrandt cited above, in which he relates the fixed moment in the





10. Lovis Corinth, *Portrait of Imperial President Friedrich Ebert*, 1924, oil on canvas. Kunstmuseum Basel, acquired in 1937 with contributions from the unions and the educational department of the City of Basel.

11. Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo*, 1927, oil on canvas. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum. Photographer: Katya Kallsen. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

painting to the continuity of the individual's life, takes on here a precarious intensification and a modern pictorial confirmation. On the one hand, it continues to be true and, on the other, faced with this self-portrait one senses that the individual life current could dry up at any moment: On July 17 of the following year Corinth died in Amsterdam, the city that is home to Rembrandt's major works.

Max Beckmann, who was forced to immigrate to Rembrandt's city, Amsterdam, in 1937, in one of the most famous self-portraits of its time—*Self-Portrait in Tuxedo* of 1927—explicitly took up a late, masterly portrait by Corinth. It was not, however, a self-portrait but rather Corinth's *Portrait of Imperial President Friedrich Ebert* of 1924. Beckmann put himself in the place of Ebert, who had since died, and became the "Künstler im Staat" (Artist of the State)—the title of a text from 1927 connected to Beckmann's self-portrait.<sup>17</sup> It proclaims

not the famous topos of "the statesman as artist" but rather the artist as pilot of the ship of state [Figs. 10 and 11]. An endangered existence is replaced by the presumption of the artist as an exceptional personality who at the time could himself be accused of the megalomania of an emperor. In the *Berliner Tageblatt* on May 3, 1928, Fritz Stahl wrote of Beckmann's *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo*:

*An emperor's mask, knitted brown, a ruler's gaze, every inch a great man. These faces will have to disappear from the world again if humanity is to be restored.*<sup>18</sup>

In his book on the self-portrait of 1931, the art writer Fritz Ried indirectly justified Beckmann's ambition by saying that "volcanic spirituality" was hidden "beneath a bourgeois, traditional appearance." He succinctly worked out Beckmann's "transcendental objectivity" using the example of this self-portrait:

17. Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait with Crystal Ball*, 1931, tempera and oil glaze on panel. Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Photo: © Rheinisches Bildarchiv Cologne. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



Dix manifested his ambition to be a critical artist—which his Austrian colleague Wacker certainly perceived but did not pursue to that end—in his complex *Self-Portrait with a Crystal Ball* of 1931 [Fig. 17]. That painting is so important here because in it Dix returned to Dürer, mentioned at the beginning of this essay. In the middle of his arduous work on the monumental triptych *War* of 1929–32, Dix took up Dürer's famous *Melencolia I* [Fig. 3] engraving, which Panofsky had interpreted as the Nuremberg artist's spiritual self-portrait. Dix used the state of melancholy darkening not only to make a statement about his physical state when beginning creative work on a still white canvas but also with an eye to the circumstances of the time. The growth of nationalism and revanchism and the dramatic rise of National Socialism from 1930 onward left traces behind on the artist and his work. In his self-portrait Dix reveals himself as a visionary who predicts future disaster and tries to capture it in art. Dix is an *artifex vates* here.<sup>32</sup> But he also puts himself in the role of Saint Christopher, only instead of the Christ Child

he is carrying his son through the menacing landscape. Finally, in 1942, painting in secret, he tries to suggest with a half-covered burning landscape that his landscape paintings should at times be understood metaphorically and can contain a hidden, critical message in the face of World War II. The painting clearly sums up what is meant by the problematic concept of “inner emigration.”

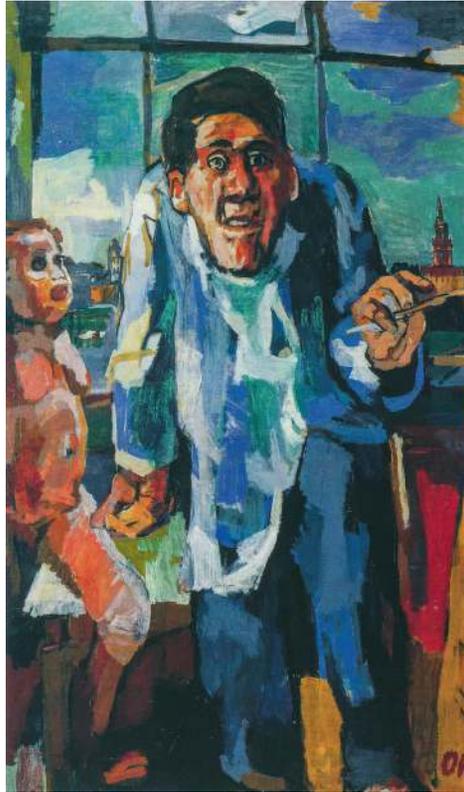
### QUESTIONED EXISTENCE AS AN ARTIST

Full of pride, Oskar Kokoschka painted himself with Alma Mahler in *Double Portrait* in 1913. This double portrait is regarded as an engagement painting, since at the time Alma Mahler had agreed to marry the eccentric and notorious painter. Their difficult relationship—which led to an abortion and separation—was reflected on in his major work *Bride of the Wind* of 1914 and *Knight Errant* of 1915. In the latter the artist is lying outstretched in a landscape in a wide horizontal format. The armor and the devastated landscape may refer to Kokoschka volunteering for military service in January 1915, which was clearly the artist's attempt to repress his unhappiness. On the right side of the painting, Alma Mahler is crawling away, melancholy and mourning, like a penitent, while Kokoschka, as the central figure, is lying on his back like a helpless bug or marionette.

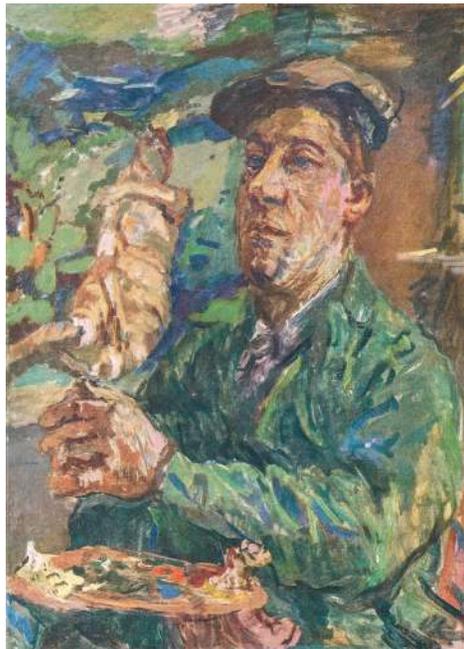
After they separated, Kokoschka did something remarkable, which seems perplexing today. He was perhaps himself astonished, as suggested by *Self-Portrait with Hand to Mouth* of 1918–19. It shows, first, astonishment, for that is the meaning of the gesture of his hand held to its mouth; it is not a gesture of melancholy or silence. It is, however, also a look back, whereby Kokoschka dovetails his biography with the iconographic topos of the brilliant turn of the head, which had been codified by Cesare Ripa as early as the sixteenth

century. And, finally, the painter signals a crisis because the hand seems strangely separated from the artist, almost as if amputated. But what had Kokoschka done? During his life crisis the painter decided to have the Munich-based seamstress and dollmaker Hermine Moos have a life-size and as realistic as possible doll made as a substitute for his lost lover. This bizarre story has been told frequently,<sup>33</sup> here it is interesting primarily for its reworking in his art, because Kokoschka painted and drew this doll and himself a number of times.

Perhaps the most impressive example is *Self-Portrait at the Easel* of 1922 [Fig. 18]. It shows Kokoschka in his Dresden studio, wearing a painter's smock and standing at the easel, with a smaller, naked doll serving as a model. It is no longer the life-size doll, which in the meanwhile had been destroyed, but a smaller replacement—in the painting an ordinary studio prop was perhaps adapted to the Alma Mahler doll to clarify the autobiographical connection—that serves here as the model or *aide-mémoire*. Kokoschka's painting has a closeness to Dix's self-portrait with a muse, which was produced two years later. Perhaps Dix, who was, after all, from Dresden, knew Kokoschka's painting. Dix was presenting himself as a painter whose inspiration is at the same time brought to life by his art. Kokoschka was presenting himself as a painter who also touches his doll—in this case with his right hand, which feels its thigh—whereas Dix is painting the transparent veil of his muse with his brush and bringing it to life. What Dix manages to do with his art in the painting had once been a goal for Kokoschka with his doll as a substitute, and he had appeared in public with the life-size doll. Now, however, Kokoschka is putting an end to this bitter episode and presents himself as a kind of painting Quasimodo,<sup>34</sup> who has to pinch his fetish to awaken from his own nightmare. Kokoschka ultimately succeeded,



18. Oskar Kokoschka, *Self-Portrait at the Easel*, 1922, oil on canvas. Private Collection. © 2019 Fondation Oskar Kokoschka / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ProLitteris, Zürich



19. Oskar Kokoschka, *Self-Portrait with Cap*, 1932, oil on canvas. Private Collection. © 2019 Fondation Oskar Kokoschka / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ProLitteris, Zürich



5. Anton Josef Trčka (Antios), *Portrait of the Painter Egon Schiele*, 1914, bromide silver print. Private Collection



6. Gertrud Arndt, *Self-Portrait with Mask* (Nr. 16). 1930, bromide gelatin silver print. Museum Folkwang. Photo: © Museum Folkwang Essen - ARTOTHEK. © VG Bild Kunst, Bonn

Whereas the double exposure served Höch as a way of illustrating different characteristics of her successful professional life—craft dynamics versus creative vision—the overlapping of two images in No. 16 of Gertraud Arndt’s *Masked Self-Portraits* of 1930 has an entirely different motivation and is also the result of a different technique: a montage of negatives [Fig. 6]. Though she arrived at the Bauhaus intending to become an architect, Arndt—like most of her fellow female students—ended up in the weaving class after completing the preliminary course. She was also interested in photography, which as the wife of an architect and Bauhaus master, she used to document his buildings. As her “sole pleasure,” she used a self-timer to take a series of self-portraits, creating thirty-four works in which she “combined lace, tulle, and silk fabrics, often fastened with pins. If one considers the aesthetic ideas of the Bauhaus or the productions from the weaving class, the fascination of such attributes seems astonishing,”<sup>16</sup> but perhaps it was the otherness of these unfashionable items, haphazardly thrown together, that inspired Arndt’s imagination to dream herself into fictive roles. Arndt not only combined different materials into multilayered veils but also superimposed several negatives in the darkroom to increase the layers further. As a result, the diaphanousness of the veils (some delicate, some coarse) varies and downcast eyes synchronize with challenging, curious stares; her heavily made-up mouth even seems to change in the middle. The sheer density of the associative opportunities offered suggests that rather than imitating specific role models, that is, certain roles for women, it would be better to give free rein to playing with dressing up. The self-selected and -defined mastery of mask, self-timer, and darkroom work perhaps offered Arndt a substitute for her actual existence, in which she was often forced into a prescribed social role.

Raoul Hausmann’s self-portraits, or rather their far-ranging use in the Dadaist’s artistic *oeuvre*, pursue strategies completely different from those discussed thus far, playing with an Arndt-like use of the medium with a potential almost antithetical to it. Imaginative engagement with his own identity and openness to imaginary role changes is combined here with deliberately turning the face into an unmistakable trademark identifiable even (and especially) in excerpts. From the lost manifesto “Synthetisches Cino der Malerei” (Synthetic Cinema of Painting) of 1918 by way of the cover of the third issue of the journal *DADA* (1920) and the collage *ABCD* (1923–24) and into the 1960s, Hausmann placed the same photograph of his face (cropped sometimes more, sometimes less, or even completely fragmented) in very different contexts. With his characteristic monocle and open mouth, he is not difficult to identify in each case: that is, the artist is present in his work visually, but his face serves to illustrate and propagate Dadaist theses, rather than representing private states of mind. His mouth opened to scream does not announce personal pain but is rather shouting a sound poem, calling for an uprising [Fig. 7]. It is no coincidence that the overpainting of the monocle in *ABCD* recalls the famous scene in Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (though the film had not yet appeared in the cinema), an icon of resistance to state power and oppression.

Not only in his Dadaist phase, Hausmann rejected psychologizing; “series of thoughts about the possibilities of facial expression” and “false theatrical ideas” were still anathema to him around 1930 at the height of his photographic activities.<sup>17</sup> So the image of his own face, traditionally the focus of brooding self-analysis, must have seemed the ideal material for playful experiments. Smashing language into individual letters and arbitrarily

arranging them in photomontages and sound poetry corresponded to the fragmentation



of the face into individual sense organs that can be regrouped freely. Anyone who wants to revolutionize all ideas about art must also make a clean sweep of the self-perception of its protagonists.

## POSTSCRIPT

It is not known whether Hausmann in fact took the aforementioned photograph himself, as it is documented he did on later occasions. But what difference does it make if the self-timer is replaced by a person who presses the camera's shutter release just as the self-depicter would have done? What if those depicted are seen as the true creators of their likenesses? Erika Billeter was neither the first nor the last to regard, for example, the photographic images resulting from the collaboration between Anton Josef Trčka (Antios) and Egon Schiele in 1914 [Fig. 5] as self-portraits by the painter, despite the clearly evident double signature.<sup>18</sup>

7. Raoul Hausmann, *ABCD*, 1923, photomontage and black ink. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Photo: © CNAC/MNAM/ Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

<sup>1</sup> Susan Butler, "So How Do I Look? Women before and behind the Camera," in *Staging the Self: Self-Portrait Photography, 1840–1980s*, exh. cat. National Portrait Gallery, London (Plymouth: Plymouth Arts Centre, 1986), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Erika Billeter, "Pour une exposition," in idem, ed., *L'autoportrait à l'âge de la photographie*, Musée Cantonal des Beaux Arts, Lausanne (Bern: Benteli, 1985), 15–25, esp. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Kühn, *Technik der Lichtbildnerie* (Halle an der Saale: W. Knapp, 1921).

<sup>4</sup> Georg Simmel, "Ästhetik des Portraits" (1905), in David Frisby, ed., *Georg Simmel in Wien: Texte und Kontexte aus dem Wien der Jahrhundertwende* (Vienna: WUV, 2000), 158–66, esp. 158.

<sup>5</sup> Monika Faber, *Inspiration:*

*Fotografie von Makart bis Klimt; Eine Materialiensammlung*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Belvedere, 2016), 76–79.

<sup>6</sup> Dietrich Schubert, *Otto Dix in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Tilman Osterwold, "Selbstbildnisse: Das Egozentrische der Kunst," in *L'autoportrait à l'âge de la photographie* (see note 2), 27–33, esp. 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Selbstfoto* is the title of a self-portrait by Marianne Brandt, 1928; on this and what follows, see Monika Faber, "Selbstfoto," in Ute Eskildsen, ed., *Fotografieren hiess teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf: Richter, 1994), 280–87.

<sup>9</sup> Sabina Lessmann, "Das Bewusstsein hat immer einen Leib": Fotografische Selbstbildnisse Lee Miller und Meret Oppenheims und

die Rolle beider als Aktmodelle Man Rays," *Frauen, Kunst, Wissenschaft*, no. 14 (October 1992): 53.

<sup>10</sup> See the information on Amerling's paintings in Ludwig August Frankl, *Friedrich von Amerling: Ein Lebensbild* (Vienna: Hartleben, 1889).

<sup>11</sup> Faber, *Inspiration* (see note 5), 204–7.

<sup>12</sup> See Bodo von Dewitz, ed., *La Bohème: Die Inszenierung des Künstlers in Fotografien des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Höch: *Eine Lebenscollage, 1946–1978* (Berlin: Argon, 2001), 163.

<sup>14</sup> Gunda Luyken, ed., *Hannah Höch: Album*, trans. John W. Gabriel (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2001), n.p.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

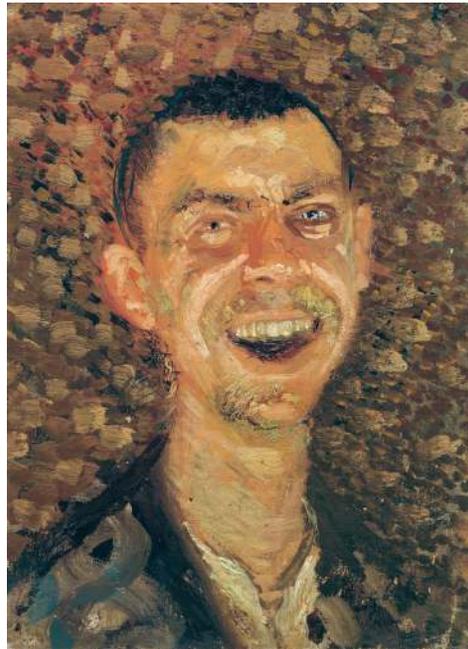
<sup>16</sup> Sabina Lessmann, "Die Maske

der Weiblichkeit nimmt kuriose Formen an ...': Rollenspiel und Verkleidungen in den Fotografien Gertrud Arndts und Marta Astfalck-Vietz," in Eskildsen, ed., *Fotografieren hiess teilnehmen* (see note 8), 272–79, esp. 274, also with the artist's own statements.

<sup>17</sup> Raoul Hausmann, "Wie kann ein gutes Bildnisphoto entstehen?" (1931), quoted in Hildegund Amanshauser and Monika Faber, *Gegen den kalten Blick der Welt: Raoul Hausmann, Fotografien, 1927–1933*, exh. cat. Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Vienna (Vienna: Österreichisches Fotoarchiv, 1986), 36–38.

<sup>18</sup> Billeter, *L'autoportrait à l'âge de la photographie* (see note 2), 509.

2. Richard Gerstl, *Self-Portrait, Laughing*, summer-autumn 1907, oil on canvas. Belvedere, Vienna. Photo: © Belvedere, Vienna



3. Lovis Corinth, *Self-Portrait as a Howling Bacchant*, 1905, oil on canvas. Museum Insel Hombroich



4. Max Slevogt, *Self-Portrait with Palette*, 1906, oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Leipzig. Photo: akg-images

not just fellow artists who provided stimuli; the significance of the portrait photograph and of reproductions in fashion journals and magazines is also relevant to the portrait of the early twentieth century. Lotte Jacobi in Berlin, who published in journals of the German capital but also in Munich, and Dora Kallmus, who in 1907 became one of the first women to found a photography studio in Vienna, are just two examples of women artists who influenced the portrait painting of the time. The photographs of August Sander played a role for *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity).<sup>8</sup> The same could be said of the photojournalism published in journals such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* in the 1920s.

And then there were also the difficult-to-grasp, private photographs by artists themselves. The twentieth century no longer needed a mirror to produce self-portraits. Paula Modersohn-Becker made drawings in the Louvre based on works by Fra Angelico, Lucas Cranach, Domenichino, Francisco de Goya,

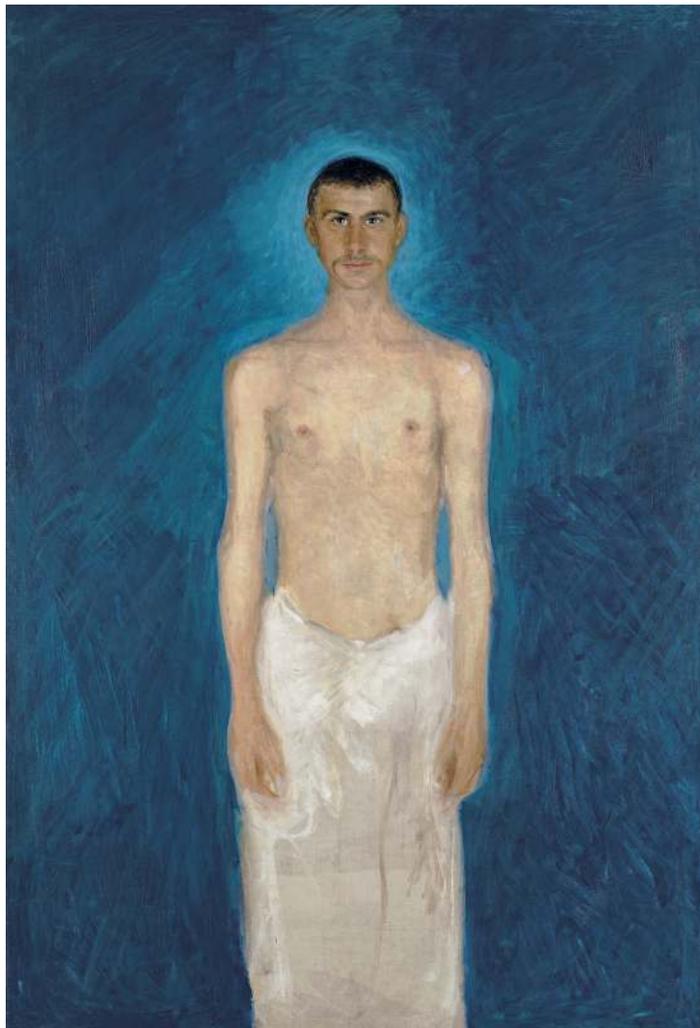
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Pisanello, Rembrandt van Rijn, Diego Velázquez, and Francisco de Zurbarán.<sup>9</sup> Her *Self-Portrait on the Sixth Wedding Day* in Bremen [Cat. no. 48] is thought to have been inspired by Cranach's *Venus Standing in a Landscape* in the Louvre (1529); by Hans von Marées's and Titian's nudes, which the painter had seen in Berlin and described; and by Edgar Degas's treatment of the female body.<sup>10</sup> Yet Modersohn-Becker also had photographs of herself showing her as a full-length figure and as a semi-nude, which could have been the immediate inspiration of the self-portrait in Bremen.<sup>11</sup>

Images result from images, whereby the painters of the early twentieth century did not have to look to the old masters as role models: their images are first and foremost an echo of their time.

#### **DÜRER AND THE PROPHETS OF MODERNITY**

Now the longer timeline of tradition: It is about myths, some of which are demanded by the public and in which the artists' depictions of themselves are based. One such role is that of the messiah, martyr, or prophet—in short, one that presumes a sense of mission.<sup>12</sup> Chagall, James Ensor, Gauguin, Munch, Slevogt, and Van Gogh are just some of the figures who took up the topos of elevation to the sacred in their self-portraits,<sup>13</sup> and this would be central to the foundation of the modern cult of the artist.

Modersohn-Becker's small *Self-Portrait with Two Flowers in Her Raised Left Hand* [Cat. no. 49] already suggests pictures of saints. Scholars have even ventured to compare it to trecento gold-ground paintings.<sup>14</sup> With a melancholy gaze, the figure establishes visual contact with the viewer, holding roses up



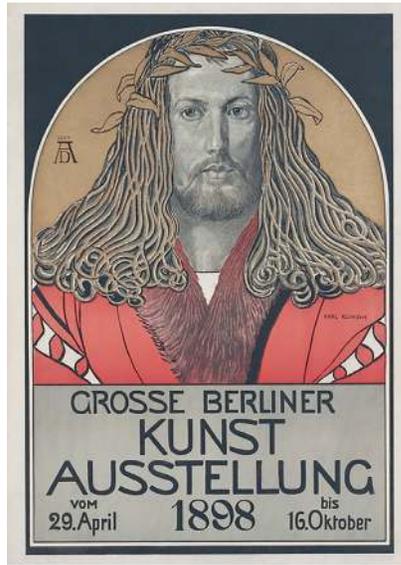
toward us, flowers that we encounter again and again in her work from 1905 onward, presenting the plants as if they were a magical attribute.

5. Richard Gerstl, *Semi-Nude Self-Portrait*, 1902–04, oil on canvas. Leopold Museum, Vienna

A clearer and more monumental example of the religiously exalted self is Richard Gerstl's early Viennese *Semi-Nude Self-Portrait* of 1902–04 [Fig. 5]. The young painter presents himself in frontal view, standing and dressed only in a loincloth. An auratic light plays around his upper body and condenses into a real nimbus in the area of his head; later Oskar Kokoschka,



6. Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait in Fur Cloak*, 1500, oil on panel. Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich. Photo: bpk Bildagentur / Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen / Art Resource, NY



7. Karl Ferdinand Klimsch, poster for the "Große Berliner Kunstausstellung," 1898, colored lithograph

Koloman Moser, Max Oppenheimer, and Egon Schiele would incorporate even clearer aureoles into their self-portraits. In Gerstl's work, medieval formulas such as the Man of Sorrows and the Ecce Homo are iconographical references.<sup>15</sup> It is, however, unlikely that he ever needed to use Albrecht Altdorfer's *Resurrection of Christ* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum (1518) as a source.<sup>16</sup>

In any case, Gerstl's work points to the most famous role model of Christomorphic self-depiction: Albrecht Dürer. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz emphasize the latter's cult status in *Die Legende vom Künstler* (translated as *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*) of 1934. They regarded Dürer as the founder of a "modern-day worship of genius," in that he associated the idea of the artist being graced by God with the idea of inspiration.<sup>17</sup> The master self-confidently included himself in religious works, in which he developed

a prominent dovetailing of pictorial subject and author in the early sixteenth century. For example, in the stage-like landscape in which the action of the *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand Christians* takes place [Cat. no. 2]. But, strangely, Dürer seems to be uninvolved in these events; he is deeply engrossed in a conversation with his companion, as if there were no connection of time or place between the horrible events and his presence. Dürer's Christ-morphic self-portraits, especially the famous one from 1500 in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich [Fig. 6],<sup>18</sup> became a reference for artists and their self-image around 1900. Max Seliger used Dürer for the cover of the December 1898 issue of *Kunstgewerbeblatt*,<sup>19</sup> and the painting in Munich was likewise the programmatic subject of a poster for the "Große Berliner Kunstausstellung" that same year [Fig. 7].

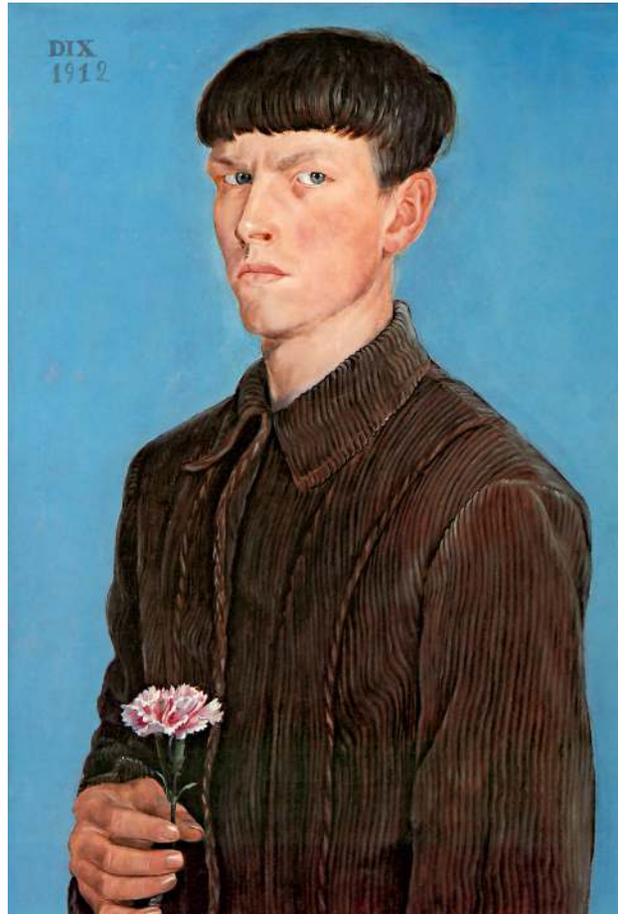
Otto Dix, too, took note of Dürer.<sup>20</sup> Because of its formal character and style, *Self-Portrait with Carnation* of 1912 [Fig. 8] looks as though it could have been borrowed from the southern German Renaissance. The half-length figure of the young painter steps out toward us from the simple background. Like Dürer, Dix signed his painting prominently. Like Dürer in his *Portrait of the Artist Holding a Thistle* in Paris, Dix is holding a plant heavy with symbolism: the carnation, whose dried buds look like nails, which is why it belongs to the symbolism of the Passion as a reference to Christ's death on the cross.<sup>21</sup> In Dix's work, this reference to the modes of older self-portraits from the age of Dürer is always connected to a search for something original: for him, looking back was a form of purging; famously, his other protagonists were Hans Baldung, Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and Matthias Grünewald.<sup>22</sup> And yet another component of the Old Master reference reverberates here as well: the confrontation between artist and

public,<sup>23</sup> which also conveys a latently aggressive defensive stance. By adopting religious connotated roles and the portrait styles of the Old Masters, artists were arming themselves against critics who mocked them for their art. Perhaps that accounts for the piercing gaze Dix hurls out of his portrait?

The same can be said of the dismissive-looking expression in Max Beckmann's self-portraits; his *Self-Portrait with a Cigarette* of 1923 shows him posed against a yellow background [Cat. no. 11]. Not least because of the gold color of the back wall, one inevitably thinks of depictions of saints on a gold ground; his oversized hands are also associated with late medieval influence.<sup>24</sup>

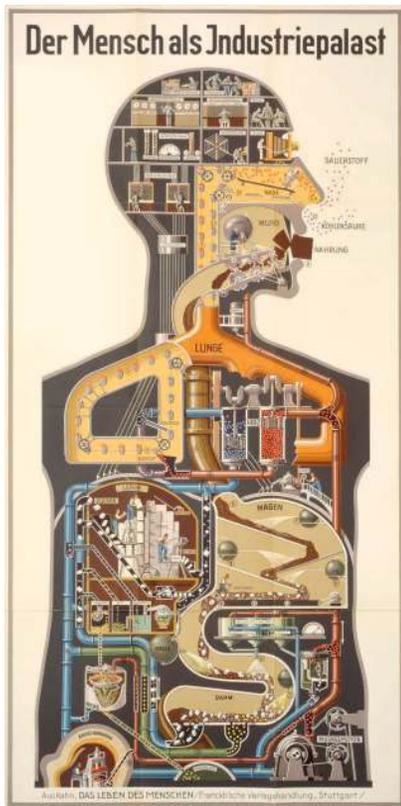
Beckmann's later self-portrait, painted in Amsterdam, can also be interpreted in that context: The brush and palette have been replaced by a horn [Cat. no. 12]. It almost seems as if in exile he wanted to listen to sounds from his homeland, since the horn is considered a German instrument. It calls to mind German Romanticism, especially Romantic opera.<sup>25</sup> In Beckmann's eyes, the horn blower is an ambiguous, sometimes tragic figure. The blast of a horn is triumphant; at the same time, it signals the end; and on a hunt it indicates the shooting of game, calling the hunting party to assemble. The painter as listener to and announcer of signals—that is Beckmann's view of the artist's life. When he was working on the painting, news from National Socialist Germany was reaching him in exile.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the rectangular frame (of a painting or of a mirror) is also noteworthy: it is surely no coincidence that it resembles a nimbus behind his head.<sup>27</sup>

In such works Beckmann stylized his own face so much and lent it such religious connotations that he pushes his self-portrait in



the direction of the icon.<sup>28</sup> And an icon-like portrait of the painter is standing on the easel of Kokoschka's *The Painter and His Model II* of 1923 as well [Cat. no. 37], one that led to caricatures and nasty comments.<sup>29</sup> We see the artist at work on a painting from 1910: the poster design for Herwarth Walden's journal *Der Sturm* [see p. 154]. In that work, Kokoschka presents himself as a bald Man of Sorrows, pointing with his finger to a wound in his side; he stylizes himself as a savior-artist, receiving the point of a lance perhaps (from the public).<sup>30</sup> It is not in the style of the Old Masters, but the long tradition of this motif of the *artifex alter Christus* legitimizes such attitudes, especially in Expressionism.<sup>31</sup>

8. Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait with Carnation*, 1912, oil on paper, mounted on panel. Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of Robert H. Tannahill. Photo: Bridgeman Images. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



12. Fritz Kahn, *Der Mensch als Industriepalast* (Man as Industrial Palace), 1926, colored lithograph

### THE BIRTH OF THE NEW MAN

Born in the trenches of the Western Front, the New Man was a dream shared by millions, a superhuman hero capable of riding and mastering the centrifugal forces of history, and of restoring the world to a stage of harmony and authenticity. Fascist New Man grew out of vitalist, organic imagery, ill-digested Nietzsche, and social Darwinism. It described a being of rare nobility and ancient, pure “race,” strong and cruel and pure in his quest for life and his fight against degeneracy and weakness.

Soviet New Man was different, a child of the industrial age. Just as society was conceived as a vast machine in which every cog must function perfectly or be replaced and discarded, the ideal *homo sovieticus* was more machine than man—or woman—and his main glory was his heroic work for the common good. Unlike the New Man of fascism, who was dependent on the genetic bounty inherited from his forefathers, *homo sovieticus* was not bound by inherited traits and could, just like the paradise of workers and peasants, be created through education, training, and hard work. Many artists and thinkers on the left preferred mechanical to organic metaphors when it came to describing the dreams of humanity, as well as the workings of the human body, famously in Fritz Kahn’s 1928 educational poster *Der Mensch als Industriepalast*, in which the doctor and public educator imagined a human body as a factory using food and drink as raw materials for the production of thought and action [Fig. 12]. Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov echoed this conception in his 1929 documentary film *A Man with a Movie Camera*, in which human bodies and machines are repeatedly fused into one vast, purring mechanism of progress [Fig. 13]. In Germany, the architects, artists, and designers of the Bauhaus experimented with a similarly mechanical and rational aesthetic.

The race for the New Man culminated in Germany’s 1936 Olympic games in Berlin, which were designed as a celebration of German, “Aryan” beauty and strength, notwithstanding that the central 100m sprint was won by an African-American athlete, Jesse Owens. The message of the Olympics was entrusted to filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, who used the introductory sequence to make a classical marble statue of a discus thrower come to life and start the torch run towards the stadium, a clear allusion to a German rebirth out of the spirit of ancient purity—interestingly not out of Germanic mythology, but classical antiquity.

If the New Man was a metaphor as well as a dream fascinating artists and thinkers across the political spectrum, the idea of total mastery and perfect knowledge also spoke to an increasing sense of uncertainty among the population at large. In Germany, the disastrous 1923 inflation was followed by the 1929 crisis, leaving millions without work and countless people without their savings, their possessions, their hope. This series of economic blows was compounded by the ferocious contestation of the country’s recent democracy. During the first five years of the Weimar Republic alone, some 5,000 people died in Germany through political violence such as street battles and assassinations.



13. Film still from *Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929, by Dziga Vertov

By then, the center of gravity for the visual arts had moved away from Vienna and towards Berlin. The uncompromisingly stark visual language of artists such as Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Käthe Kollwitz spoke to an era of stark and almost obscene social contrasts and continuing violence. Decadence and caricature were used as strategies to address a reality experienced as unjust and obsessed with escaping into hedonistic abandon.



### GLASS EYES AND EYEGLASSES

As artists sought to chronicle their present and perhaps also to use their art as a tool for understanding, as suggested by Grosz and his insistence that artists are “the eyes of society,” science did little to assist them in their endeavor. In 1928, the painter Herbert Ploberger depicted himself surrounded by medical models recalling the mechanistic image of Kahn’s devising, but this creator, dressed in a white lab coat, can only impotently point to his eye, which is obviously deficient and necessitates glasses [Fig. 14]. Science provided him with a means of aiding his weak eyes (glasses are

just as much a prop or a prosthesis as artificial limbs), but at the same time it obfuscates any attempt at finding a deeper human truth by reducing everything to its mechanical parts.

In reality, science was even less helpful to seekers of the truth, whether artistic or philosophical. Unsettling developments took place in physics. The now-established theory of relativity and the new field of quantum theory were both capable of making strong predictions and providing convincing explanations, but they not only described different dimensions—the very large and the very small—they also contradicted each other in fundamental ways.

Science revealed that the nature of matter, of the universe, and of time itself was nothing like what any Western tradition or human perception suggested, it also showed itself to be not a consolidated ascent towards objective truth, but a battleground of rivaling models and theories. From now on, any search for answers in a scientific and rational context had to be predicated on the understanding that reality was not at all what it seemed, that human reality is a construction, a projection, and in no way a faithful depiction of any external and knowable reality that can be satisfactorily defined, of any reality at all that could be agreed upon.

Not everyone accepted the fundamental assumptions of modern science. Spiritualists such as Madame Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner sought alternative explanations of vast spiritual realms and personal enlightenment via universal mysteries, while devotees of *Lebensphilosophie* eschewed modernity in favor of a life in tune with nature.

Other philosophical influences shaped perspectives on personhood and integrity. Vitalists such as the Frenchman Henri Bergson identified a conflict between the human *élan vital*

14. Herbert Ploberger, *Self-Portrait with Ophthalmological Teaching Models*, 1928-30, oil on panel. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, München. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) is generally considered one of the most important artists of the Dutch Golden Age. In his *oeuvre* the output of self-portraits reached “a new level [ . . . ] in terms of quantity, quality, variety and duration.”<sup>1</sup> From the age of twenty-two until his death, at sixty-three, Rembrandt produced over eighty self-portraits, in the form of paintings, etchings, and drawings. Self-portraits thus constitute around a tenth of his overall output.

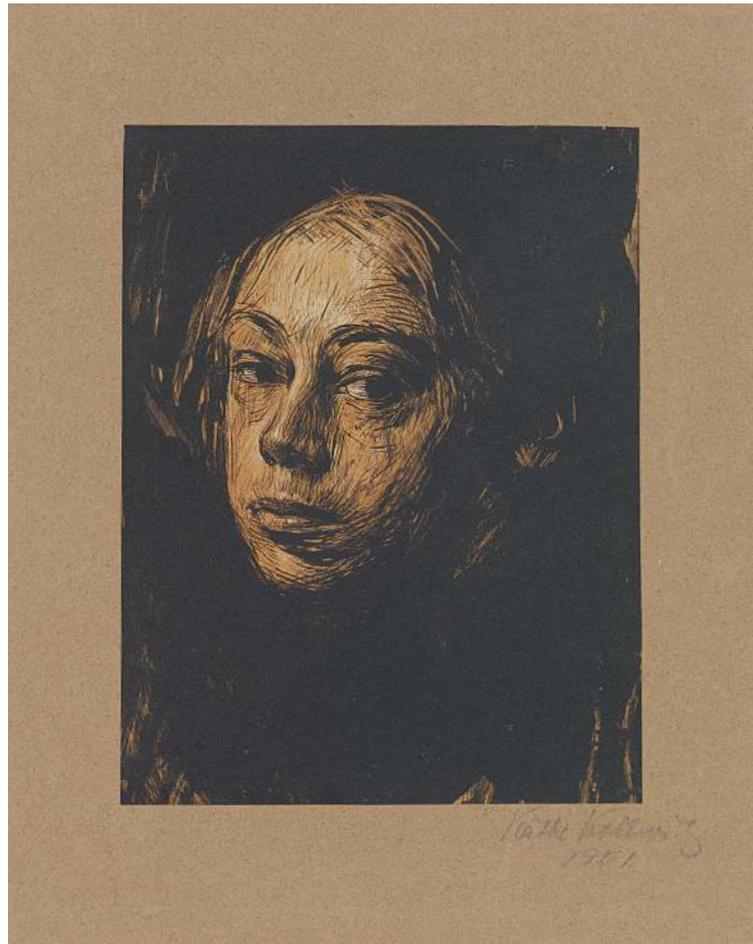
Tobias G. Natter

*Translated from the German by Elizabeth Clegg*

<sup>1</sup> James Hall, *The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 150.



**1b. REMBRANDT VAN RIJN** Self-Portrait in Cap:  
Laughing, 1630



**41. KÄTHE KOLLWITZ** Self-Portrait Facing Left, 1901

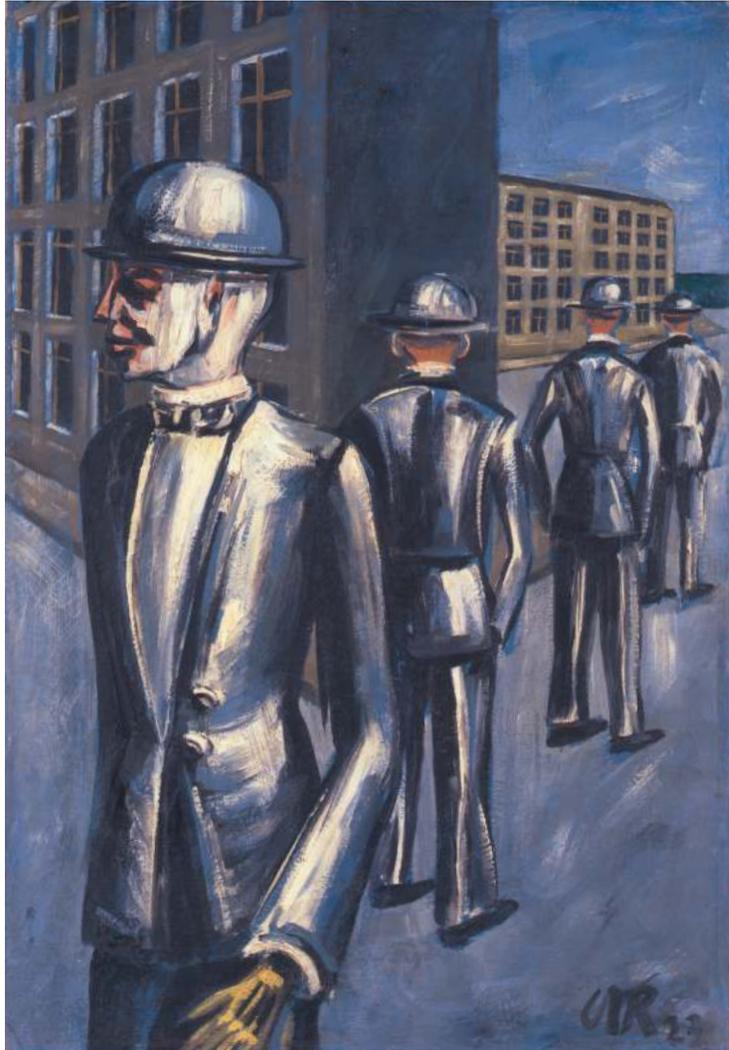


**42. KÄTHE KOLLWITZ** Frontal Self-Portrait, 1904

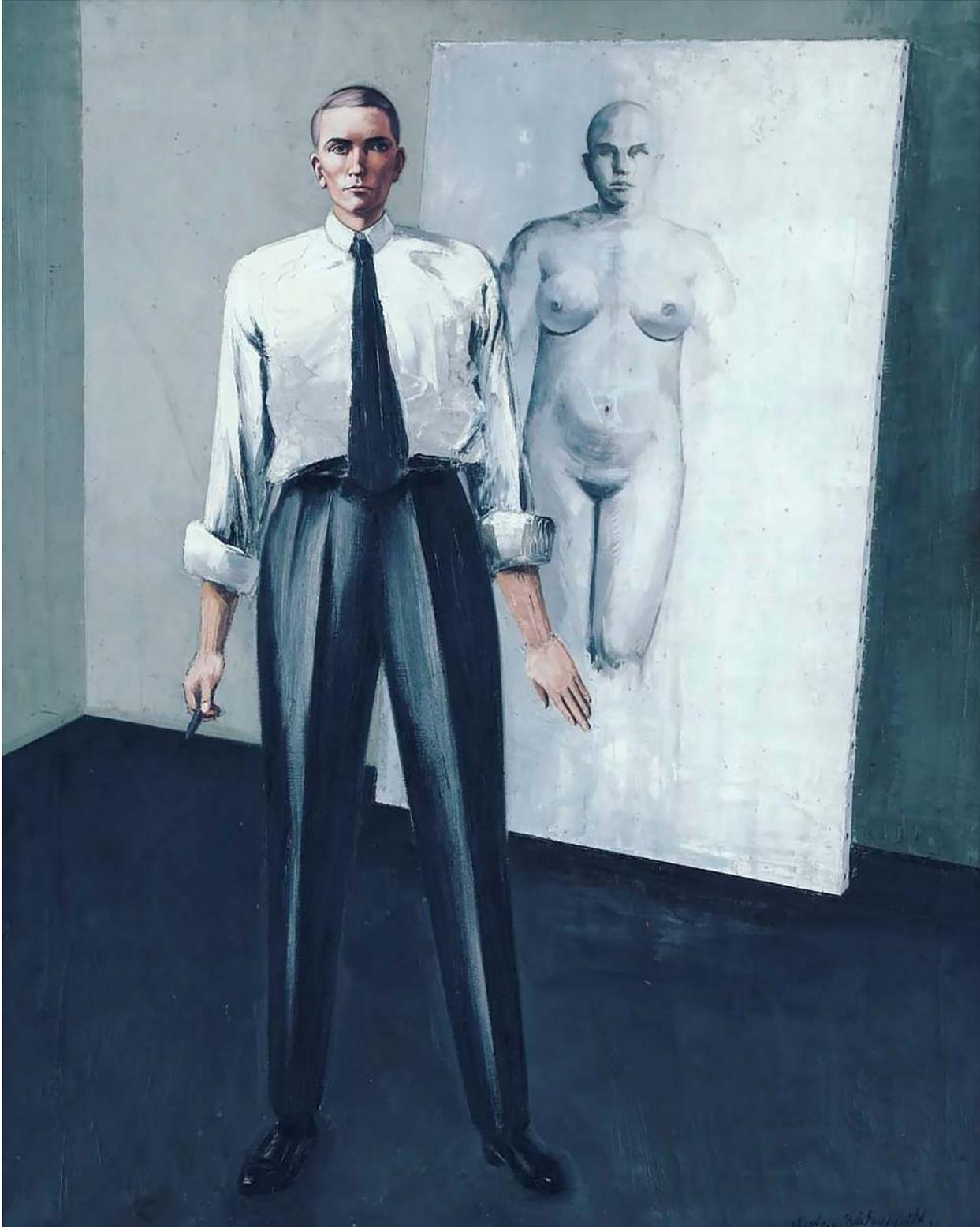




**48. PAULA MODERSOHN-BECKER** Self-Portrait on the Sixth Wedding Day, May 25, 1906



**54. ANTON RÄDERSCHIEDT** Self-Portrait in Industrial Landscape, 1923



55. ANTON RÄDERSCHIEDT Self-Portrait, 1928