

## Sepp Hilz, the painter of peasants

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English translation by Prof. Bruna Crolla



Sepp Hilz was born in Northern Bavaria on October 22, 1906. His first teachings came from his father George Hilz, a painter and notable restorer of churches (amongst which were the churches of St. Sebastian, Berbling, Willing, Weihenlinden, Tuntenhausen and Bacherting). After finishing studying at the Volksschule, his father sent him to a school for apprentice painters in Rosenheim where he learnt to copy the works of great German painters, especially those of Dürer, Cranach and Altdorfer. Hilz soon left the school and continued working in his father's workshop as an apprentice. This experience gave Sepp great manual dexterity which was of fundamental importance for his artistic career. He studied in Munich from 1921 to 1927 and attended the Kunstgewerbeschule for three semesters, then he attended Prof. Moritz Heymann's private school of graphic arts and later on went to work as an apprentice for the well known painter of churches: Xaver Dietrich. Sepp began his work as a painter in his studio in Munich working mainly for regional exhibitions and displays and continued to copy the works of the great Flemish painters like Rembrandt, Vermeer, van Delft and Brouwer. Until the end of the 1920's Sepp dedicated himself to his studies and paintings of churches in the Upper Bavarian country. In 1928, he went back to his native town to work for his father again. He married Erika von Satzenhoven who, after a year, presented him with a son they called Benno. Together with other artists, he became the inspirer of the cultural life of Bad Aibling. They all would regularly meet at the Cafe Rupp to discuss and organize local cultural events and art exhibitions. Starting in 1930 Hilz painted many rural scenes in the style of Wilhelm Leibl (a German painter 1844-1900) which not only earned him the name "Bauernmaler" (the painter of peasants) but also gave him great notoriety in the region. The rural world of his homeland in Bavaria was a favourite theme throughout his paintings: scenes of their rustic lives, the simple expressions of country peoples faces, resting after a hard days work and then of course the lovely village girls - his artist's eyes enchanted by the simplicity and spontaneity of their rural life. A world without time which steadily repeated the cycle, season after season - of ritual actions like the hard work in the fields, moments of relaxation after work and the official days of rest. A world besieged by urbanism, by the progressive depopulation of the country towns and villages, by unceasing industrialization which criticised the existence of the same peasant class. By now Sepp Hilz was an affirmed portrait-painter, a painter of churches, rural life and

landscapes From 1938 to 1944 he presented twenty-two works at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst and at the Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung, amongst which was exhibited the famous triptych "Bäuerliche Trilogie" in 1941. The young painter had become a versatile artist able to master diverse working techniques fully demonstrating his exceptional talent: from small portraits to large scale paintings,

Hilz is capable of representing the character, the atmosphere, the poetry and the reality of his themes: He once mentioned that "jedes Ding hat seine Seele, musst bloss malen wie es ist." (everything has a soul of its own, we must only paint it for what it is). His painting called "Nach Feierabend", which was shown at the Haus der Kunst was bought by Adolf Hitler in 1938 for 10.000 RM; Hitler also bought "Wetterhexe" in 1942. A year later, Hilz presents the famous "Bäuerliche Venus" (a country Venus), a beautiful painting of a nude young Bavarian Country Venus that did put the final seal on his status as one of the most distinguished painters of his time, even if his paintings do not bear any explicit political reference. This artwork got great positive response and also criticism from the public and was later on bought by the famed politician Joseph Goebbels. Young people and soldiers were crazy about the painting as well, which very soon became a popular icon: the artist received thousands of letters from admirers both for the painting and of course his model Annerl. In his many letters he answered he stated that he was not a matrimonial agency! Hilz used the same model, Annerl Meierhanser, for his painting the following year "Die Eitelkeit". His fascinating representation of rural scenes in large scale paintings such as Bauernbraut 1940, Bäuerliche Trilogie 1941 and Wetterhexe 1942, confirm the technique Hilz so skillfully mastered already as a young apprentice.

Unfortunately, his choice of representing the rural world as he saw it, was not without political implications: these were the years when the peasant class, who had violently fought hard for their rights at the end of the 1920's, had finally earned the regime's favour and were able to have a law passed which made small and medium size farmland unsaleable, indivisible and not mortgageable. The peasant class is seen by National Socialist ideologists as a bulwark of the common people who, on behalf of tradition, are against the forces of cosmopolitan disruption of the city. As spokesman of the peasant class and being only 32 years old, the "Bauernmaler" Sepp Hilz is awarded the prestigious City of Munich Lenbach prize in 1938 for the portrait of his 1st wife Erika von Satzenhoven (today property of the Städtischen Galerie im Lenbachhaus). In 1939, on recommendation of the photographer Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler gave Hilz the sum of 1,000.000 Reichsmark (RM) for the construction of a new studio, projected by the architect Degano in Gmund am Tegernsee. From 1940 on his works were on display at the exhibition "Künstler in Kriegseinsatz". During World War II, Hilz buys a small property in Willing, a village next to his home town Bad Aibling. In 1943, at only 36 years old, he receives the title of Professor by Reichsminister Joseph Goebbels. In 1944, the city of Rosenheim awards him the Leibl-Sperl prize.

At this time, Bad Aibling is tragically defeated. It was now occupied by the Americans and full of refugees escaping from Munich and also from the eastern territories which were invaded by the Russians -it became also the seat of a huge prison camp called "Fliegerhorst", located by Mitraching nr Bad Aibling and housed many German soldier war escapee and American war prisoners but NEVER was a concentration camp as some people erroneously stated.

After the war, Hilz, notwithstanding the many difficulties, goes back to work and restores the paintings in the churches of Schäflarn, Schlehdorf am Kochelsee, Obholting, Baumburg (the cloister of the church Altenmarkt an der Alz) and the Franciscan church of Bad Tölz. He begins painting sacred themes, portraits and landscapes of his beloved Bavarian Heimat. His father George dies in 1949 and in the autumn of the same year, his much adored son Benno dies tragically in a car accident an der Alten Strasse zu Rosenheim and Oberaudorf bei Brannenburg. This event causes

the break up of his marriage to Erika. In his painting Heilige Drei Könige 1949 (the Three Holy Kings), Hilz dramatically represents his son Benno as the last of the Three Kings. In 1950, Hilz marries Christa, Frein von Rehlingen-Haltenberg (1926-1968). Two much loved children came out of this marriage: Sibylle and Florian. On October 26, 1950 at a town hall meeting, which re-establishes the Kunstverein of Bad Aibling, it was noted: "after World War II, 1948 and 1949, an extremely difficult period began for painters and sculptors. Sepp Hilz asked himself how he could help these artists. He was the strength of the Kunstverein creation and of its support of the search for many new members. Thanks to Hilz, this association was able to get work for "poor artists". On October 20, 1951 in Munich many art lovers gathered together and tried to organise exhibitions of these artists who had also been highly praised during the National Socialist period, including Joseph Thorak, the sculptor and Hilz himself. Public protests were immediately started against these artists who had exhibited their works at the "Haus der Deutschen Kunst" and this left Hilz deeply embittered. The Bavarian Minister of Education, Mr. Schwalber, had to appeal to the government for democratic tolerance and to the freedom of art which was already established through the Constitution: This last principle "could not be denied, as it already had been accepted by the heads of the National Socialism group". Only because of his influential contacts and undisputed ability as an artist, Hilz was able to increase his activity as a church restorer and painter until 1956, when he decided to devote himself completely to painting. Sepp Hilz died in Bad Aibling on September 30, 1967 - five months before his second wife's death. Hilz too, as all the artists who worked during the national-socialist period, were banned after the World War II. Many of his great works were stolen, some destroyed, some taken to the USA. Today it is quite impossible to study the quality of his works because not much does exist, at least not knowingly.. His work is wrapped in silence on the pretext of political reasons. The very few times his work was recalled to memory, even his compatriots made meaningless protests for his supposed involvement in the regime but kept in general quiet, definitely not working in his favour. The fact that Hilz had been so successful during the years of the national-socialism regime was sufficient enough to them to deserve perpetual banishment. Jealousy is a destroying emotion ...

Private admirers guard his works very carefully because today they are of great value. Apart from Mortimer G. Davidson's praiseworthy work ("Kunst in Deutschland 1933-1945" Volume I and II Grabert Verlag, 1989-1994, Grabert Verlag, Postfach 1629, D-72006 Tübingen [www.grabert-verlag.de](http://www.grabert-verlag.de) e-mail: [grabert-verlag@t-online.de](mailto:grabert-verlag@t-online.de) there have not been any monographs, studies or exhibitions about the artist since the end of World War II. Antique dealers sell old issues of the art magazines of those years, which often contain photographic reproductions of Sepp Hilz's paintings; however, any art scholar or enthusiast, eager to deepen their knowledge and technique of Sepp Hilz's work can only see a small part at the Galerie Markt Bruckmühl. (Sonnenwiechser Strasse 12, D 83052 Bruckmühl, Tel: 08062-5307, [www.galerie-bruckmuehl.de](http://www.galerie-bruckmuehl.de), e-mail: [webmaster@galerie-bruckmehl.de](mailto:webmaster@galerie-bruckmehl.de) , which exhibits some of Hilz's works in the collection "Georg Dorrer" <http://www.galerie-bruckmuehl.de/sammlung/sammlung.html>

The beautiful site <http://artroots.com/index.html> devoted by Brigitte Gastel Lloyd to the world of art (past as well as contemporary Bavarian artists) contain many works by this artist, who can be admired at page: <http://artroots.com/art2/sepphilz1906works.htm> .

Scandalously, none of Hilz's works can be found in Munich's art galleries. At the Heimatmuseum in Bad Aibling (Wilhelm Leibl Platz 2, 83043 Bad Aibling, Tel. 08061-8724) only **one** painting by Sepp Hilz, "Müder Alter", dated 1943, is kept without any comment.

The publisher and book-seller of Bad Aibling, J.N. Cortolezis ( Kirchzeile 4, D 83043 Bad Aibling, Tel. 0861 2572, Fax 0861-30641 <http://www.cortolibri.de> ) printed in 2004 the lovely new book by Christine and Klaus Joerg Schoenmetzler "Kunst und Kuenstler in Bad Aibling. Ein Bayerischer

Bilderbogen”, containing about 20 pages about this particular artist and the reproduction of some of his works.



Sepp Hiltz in 1939, while painting the famous “Bäuerliche Venus” with the model Annerl Meierhanser; who also posed for his painting “Eitelkeit” in 1940.

Index of Sepp Hiltz’s works (in brackets the file number) present on the site:

<http://artroots.com/art2/sepphiltz1906works.htm>

*In colour from top left* : Landschaft bei Bad Aibling 1956 (13) - Am Uferweg auf der Fraueninsel 1943 (15) - Schneetreiben in Willing 1946 (14) – portrait of Georg Dorrer, 1945 (34) – portrait of Katharina Dorrer 1942 (11) – portrait of Wolfgang Kollner, 1932 (23) - Bauernmädchen in Tracht, sd (3) - Bauernmädchen, sd (4) - Eitelkeit 1940 (7) - Bäuerliche Venus, 1939 (1) - Bauernmädchen, 1940 (16) - Mädchen mit Korallenkette 1942 (12) – portrait of first wife Erika, 1938 (24) - Heilige Drei Könige, 1949 (21) - Die rote Halskette, (portrait of the young Liselotte Prams), 1942 (6) - Bäuerliche Trilogie ( Die Mägde, Das Füllhorn, Die Knechte, 1941 (8-9-10) - Michael Gegenfurtner als Lehrbub, 1930 (36) -Hans Gegenfurtner, 1926 (37) - Inntaler Berge, 1937 (38) – Zauberer im Herbst, 1943 (39) - Das Kellner Marerl, 1947 (33) - Zwei Frauen, 1946 (30) – portrait of Annerl.

*Works presented at the exhibitions Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung 1937-1943 in the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich*: Meierhanser, 1940 (32) - Der Feldpostbrief, 1940 (35) – portrait of Josef Koch, 1944 (31) - Mangfalldamm, 1942 (29) - Spätherbst, 1967 (26) - Heilige Maria, Chiesa di Thann, sd (28) - Der Hühnerdieb, 1941 (27) - Studie zur Magd III, 1941 (22) - Walpurgisnacht, 1942 (25) - Die Wetterhexe, 1942 (5) - Bauernbraut, 1940 (17).

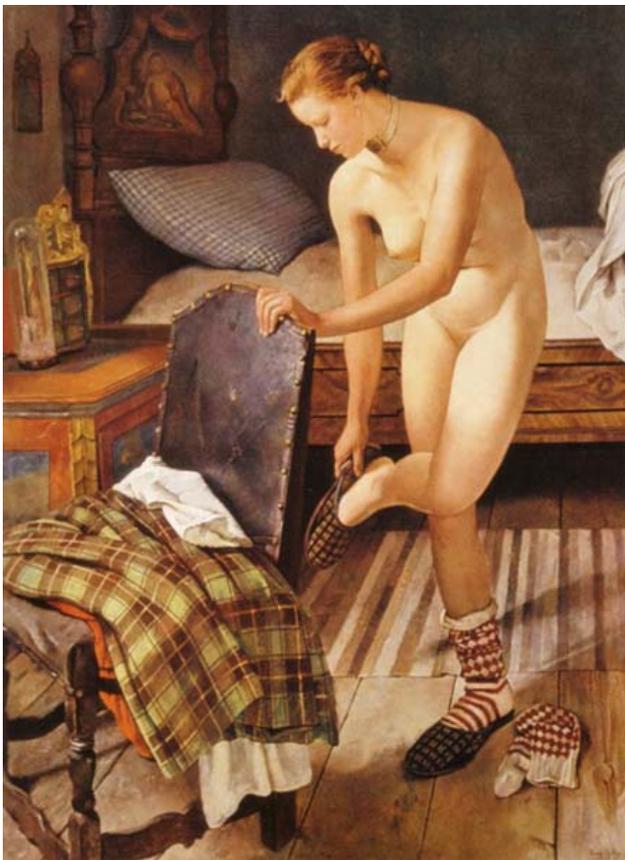
*In black and white*: Joseph und Maria, sd, - Nach Feierabend, 1937 (18) - Fischermädchen, sd (19) - Spätherbst 1917, 1939 (20) - Landschaft bei Willing, sd - Wachsjesukind und Krippenfigur, sd - Betende Hände, sd - Waschbankl, sd - Nach dem Ball – poster of meeting on the painter Sepp Hiltz 1995.

*Works presented at the exhibition Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung 1937- 1943 in the Haus der*

Deutsche Kunst at Munich: Alte mit Kopftuch, 1938 - Bäuerliche Venus, 1939 - Spätherbst, 1939 - Eitelkeit, 1940 - Die Bauernbraut, 1940 - Bäuerliche Trilogie (Die Mägde, Das Füllhorn, Die Knechte), 1941 - Die Wetterhexe, 1942 - Alter Mann mit Haube, 1942 - Die rote Halskette, 1942 - Zauberei im Herbst, 1943 - Die Kübelträgerin, 1943 - Müder Alter 1943.

All the catalogues of Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung 1937-1943 can be bought at the price of 20 euros each ( catalogue #. 18 of May 2004 Kulturgeschichte from n. 832 to n. 839) at Antiquariat Schmidt, Postfach 8, D 72402 Bisingen, Germany, tel.0049 7476 1609, fax.0049 7476 3458.

Issue 24, February 2004 of “ El barco Vikingo. Revista de arte, tradición y cultura” contains an article devoted to Sepp Hilz. It costs 2 euros, subscription for 5 issues: 15 euros for Europe, 20 euros for the other countries. Call Javier Nicolàs, Ap. 14.215 E 08080 Barcelona  
[jnc1960sp@hotmail.com](mailto:jnc1960sp@hotmail.com)



Bäuerliche Venus, 1939



Eitelkeit, 1940



Die rote Halskette, 1942