

PREFACE TO THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ

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Max Peiffer Watenphul's life and work are distinguished by high intelligence, the profusion of new and sublime differentiations, the diversity of his personal contacts, and the artist's intellectual consistency. All these things gather together, in a great unified body of work, the nuances of the artist's development. The artist's sensitivity in no way diminished his passion and daring. The reason he was so passionate and daring was to realize pure beauty in his art, through his eye and spirit, and he was rational in order and measure, though dedicated to the joy of absorbing and creating. He asserted his right as an artist to act in his own way, not mainly confronting the observer with problems, but instead, delighting and affirming the observer through a representation of subjects and themes made *beautiful* by inner self-authorization.

This formal and aesthetic consistency can already be seen in the artist's delicate and ordering construction of flower still lifes. But what is most deeply moving in Peiffer Watenphul's work is the thematic realm in which he speaks to those who love the same thing that he does, to those for whom, as for him, the southern landscape, this phenomenon is precious and vitally important, not only externally as appearance, but in spiritual content, in its essence. Peiffer Watenphul's work is the greatest revelation of the Italian landscape, of the spirit of this Italian landscape, to come from the analysis of a Nordic artist in our time. Here, before us is the work of a lyric artist, perfect and self-sufficient; its perfection based on inner constancy and loyalty to the artist's own sensibility.

He does not paint reproductions of landscapes or cities, but instead; realizes their essence, their humanity. The results are sensitive interpretations of southern nature, arousing admiration and—it should be emphasized—joy, and leaving a deep impression as an expression of an oeuvre of lyrical originality. They appeal to those who carry the image and essence of this nature in their own hearts. They are grateful to have these things given back to them, and lay claim to them like portraits of loved ones that not only capture those persons' traits, but radiate their souls. That is the goal and the achievement of Peiffer Watenphul's compositions of southern landscapes and cities.

Max Peiffer Watenphul was born on September 1, 1896 in Weferlingen, near Braunschweig. His father was from Westphalia, his mother from the Rhineland. Though he always remained faithful to his great goals, his art is distinguished by the capacity to make sensitive differentiations of detail, and that capacity went with him throughout his life. He encountered numerous important personalities and embarked on a succession of travels and studies and areas of interest, but most importantly, and as a mainspring of inspiration, there was his high intellectuality and feel for values and quality.

Peiffer Watenphul pursued a variety of studies before he ultimately resolved to pursue painting. He studied medicine, then law, and earned a doctorate in the latter. Likewise in the realm of art, he at first shifted between weaving, pottery, and painting.

While still a law student, he was mystified and captivated by Paul Klee, whose works he saw in Munich (at Goltz). He wished to become Klee's pupil, and via Klee, he came to the Bauhaus, to Johannes Itten. He was there from 1919 until 1921, with Klee, Lyonel Feininger, Oskar Schlemmer, Itten, and Walter Gropius, who allotted the young man his own studio.

His early works—still lifes and landscapes—can be interpreted in the context of primitive painting. His schooling at the Bauhaus first had its impact after he had already found the style that he cultivated throughout his life, in particular, in the southern landscapes. These are hardly mere depictions of nature, and were never made in front of a subject. Instead, they combine different, carefully considered elements that convey expressions of *concepts*, such as Tuscany, Umbria, Ischia, Venice; for the man from the north, Salzburg was also part of the world of the beloved south. His landscapes and cities are statements of inner ideas in clear compositions. Here, Klee went farther, but in a direction that only Peiffer Watenphul espoused with equal intensity, namely, the emphasis placed on the southern temperament. No one in our time has interpreted it more penetratingly except perhaps certain Italians themselves, Carlo Carrà, and Rosai, for example. To the Italians, however, the *italianità* of their landscapes is self-evident, as impression and expression. Peiffer Watenphul gazes from the outside, despite living in Italy for decades. To a certain extent, he looks with Klee's eyes, but at things that Klee did not choose as areas for expression. Peiffer Watenphul worked according to the Bauhaus rule: first depict, then transform, then compose. In the terminology of Wassily Kandinsky that Itten adopted, the sequence is: impression—improvisation—composition.

Peiffer Watenphul's drawings should be understood in this way. Even in the sketch from nature made "outdoors," he records, whether drawing or painting a watercolor, only that which is constructively essential, and then composes it, whether in watercolors or merely linearly, into a pictorial thought. Lastly, he composes it into a painting in his gentle, rational painting technique. From the first stage of their creation, his drawings are not fleeting, but precise, fine, order-

ing, clever, an organic compositional structure made up from natural elements. Peiffer Watenphul's aforementioned broad-ranging intellectual interests led him to make diverse contacts from the beginning: Klee, Itten, Gropius have already been named, and Alfred Flechtheim and Heinrich Thannhauser were his first important gallerists. Among artists, he met and befriended Alexej von Jawlensky, Feininger, Kurt Schwitters, Otto Dix, Schlemmer, Kandinsky, Werner Gilles, Oskar Kokoschka, Karli Sohn-Rethel, Hans Purrmann, and Karl Rössing. He also knew Stefan Zweig, Jean Cocteau, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Peggy Guggenheim. He encountered many Italian contemporaries as well, such as Filippo De Pisis—to name the most sensitive, not coincidentally, last. Intellectual exchange was a necessity for him. His gifts and popularity as a teacher came from this. He taught at multiple art schools: at the Folkwangschule Essen from 1927–31, at the Krefeld Vocational School for Textiles from 1941–43, at the School of Arts and Crafts in Salzburg from 1943–44, and at the International Summer Academy in Salzburg from 1964–67.

He was awarded the Prize of Rome in 1931, and went to the German Academy at the Villa Massimo in Rome as a guest. He is among those painters who, through this encounter with Rome, had their souls and eyes opened to the Mediterranean world. Purrmann, Gilles, Eduard Bargheer, and Peiffer Watenphul became the essential interpreters of the southern landscape in contemporary German painting. Peiffer Watenphul stands out among them. His origins at the Bauhaus set him apart and comprise what is peculiar to his interpretation of Italy.

He is not a loner, however, if one looks farther back. He can be seen to carry forward, in a certain sense, and using the expressive means of our time, the long tradition of the German Romantics, and the German idealization of Italy, both which have varied widely over time and in style. Without going into detailed formal comparisons, we may say that Peiffer Watenphul is a link in that chain of German painters for whom the Italian landscape is more of an ideal concept and statement than an object to be studied for precise reproduction. This chain extends from Adam Elsheimer to August Reinhardt, Friedrich Overbeck, Johann Anton Koch, Franz Horny, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Hans von Marées, and Alexander Kanoldt down to Peiffer Watenphul. He is similar in his approach to those other elective Italians of our time, Gilles and Bargheer.

Naturally, the kinds of idealization of Italy differ between these painters along with the styles of the ages in which they worked, even setting personal idiosyncrasies aside. What distinguishes Peiffer Watenphul in principle and gives him his individual identity among the representatives of an ideal depiction of Italy, again, is his formal training at the Bauhaus, something he never turned his back on. His landscapes are formal combinations prepared in drawings, combinations that even recur in his choice of motifs. Sketches from nature, to the extent made at all, were executed long in advance, with the painting's disposition of surfaces taking place in non-spatial formulas of color. Some draft compositions corre-

spondingly specify colors. The return of long-stretched wide formats and narrow upright formats, in particular in Peiffer Watenphul's graphic art, arises from the same tendencies to set out the immanent essentials rather than to make a reproducing statement. Only a fanatical loner could apply this principle so consistently to the southern landscape, and do it for a lifetime, always with sensitivity, with lyrical gentleness despite the emphasis placed on penetrating intellect, and rejecting, with inner greatness, everything provocatively programmatic, all to be true to himself.

It should not be said that Peiffer Watenphul repeated himself. He remained entirely himself when he "only" differentiated—differentiated so as to stay that way. Though his productivity varied, he aimed to spread his pictorial ideas far and wide. In so doing, he created—and this is essential—not only to please the eye, but the measuring spirit as well, and to speak to the subtleties of the soul. Much of his impact comes from the limitations he imposed on himself throughout his life: in measure, in themes, in their clever and sumptuous modification.

It should likewise not be said that there is a dearth of problems addressed. The questions must be posed differently for Peiffer Watenphul. To approach him in that way would be to seek to assess him in a category to which he never belonged, in other words, by the wrong scale. He is impressive exactly because, acting outside of certain problems of our time, he bestows on us something that many of us love, and do not want to know so much as to have before them: the landscape of the south as an expression of its immanent essence. Peiffer Watenphul provided this not as a simple depiction of the beautiful, but as something passionately profound in spirit, demonstrating his ability, mastered at the Bauhaus, to intelligently think through form.

Max Peiffer Watenphul's intellectual versatility enabled him to formulate his artistic goals vividly and beautifully. His letters reveal the artist to have been as sensitive and precise in his words as he was in his pictures. His prose style corresponds in form and feeling, at once gentle, clear, and definite, to his creations in color and line, and all but explains the latter. It is no accident that every impetus for literary description comes from visual art, with form and essence explaining each another in turn.

Because man and nature seemed clearest to the artist when in the south, he always emphasized his preference for the southern world, for its landscape and architecture.

His descriptions of numerous landscapes and cities, vivid despite their brevity, always evidence both form and essence. To read them is to be introduced to Peiffer Watenphul's artistic intentions. Encounters with people are related with equal vividness, and his comments on his own work reveal his goals as a visual artist. At one point, for example, he writes that he seeks out inner greatness in the watercolor. Throughout his life, he emphasized the creative meaning that the south held for him. And when he speaks of "perfection of the exterior form" and of

“everything quiet, clear, classic in color and form,” and when he even calls “Italy, indeed, the most beautiful country in the world” (1960), he has no sentimental reasons, only ones of artistic form.

The letters provide an autobiographical commentary on the artist’s oeuvre. This is the context in which to understand Max Peiffer Watenphul’s remark about himself (in 1966) with which we conclude: “My works have arisen through my love for the Mediterranean and its world. Those who love antiquity, the landscape, with its olive trees and the silver foliage that is almost always changing, its cypresses, the clear outline of its mountaintops, and its ‘purple gulfs,’ will find this love in my paintings and be unable to evade its magic.”

In *Werkverzeichnis*, vol. I, Grace Watenphul Pasqualucci and Alessandra Pasqualucci, eds. (Cologne, 1989).

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