

Podcast two: Aspects of the New Woman

Ever since I started researching the Rhineland arts scene of my great-aunt Angelika Hoerle who died in 1923, I have been struck by the different roles strong women played immediately before and after World War I. There are many aspects to what was dubbed the new woman.

Shorter skirts, no corsets and short hair were practical when 60% of German women worked in support of the war effort between 1914-1918. Shortly after the war, shorter hair became a fashion statement for the new woman first with the bob, and, when slicked down, with the shingle. Angelika bobbed her hair and her friend the artist Marta Hegemann slicked hers into a shingle. The August Sander photograph of their friend Helene Abelen, which is readily available on the internet, shows a 1920s woman with masculine attire and a shingle.

However, even before the war, the poet Else Lasker-Schuler and the sculptor Milly Steger, had cut their hair, worn men's clothing and worked in a man's world. Karl Ernst Osthaus brought Milly to the Rhineland to work on creating an ideal fusion of art, architecture and the arts in Hagen. The poet, Else who often dressed as her alter-ego, the Prince of Thebes, read at the Book Store Dommes in Cologne on several occasions. Angelika knew these strong women who set the bar very high in terms of living independently and according to their own inner voices. (By the way, Else and Milly met in Hagen and Else wrote a poem about Milly.)

The high profile and success of politicians Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin even before women gained the right to vote in Germany in 1918, was also an inspiration to women like Angelika. That is why Luxemburg's murder, four days before women voted for the first time Jan 19, 1919 hit Angelika particularly hard. She worked with Cologne artists to commemorate Luxemburg in the woodcut series titled *Living Ones*. Clara Zetkin remained in parliament as a feminist beacon representing the KPD, the party Luxemburg helped found. Zetkin fled to Russia in 1933 when Hitler's National Socialists started their witch hunt for communists.

These determined ground-breaking women in arts and politics, were not the only representations of the new woman. In 1910, a divorced, mother of twelve children (8 died young), Johanna Ey opened a bakery in the proximity of the Duesseldorf Academy of Arts. She attracted artists, displayed their work in her shop windows and became a collector herself. In 1916 she opened a gallery which became home to the Young Rhineland Group. By the 1920s the portly arts doyenne, known affectionately as Mother Ey, was the most painted woman in the Rhineland. Even Angelika's brother Willy Fick painted her portrait. Like the American arts patron Katherine Dreier who came to Cologne in 1919 and purchased three of Angelika's works in 1922, Mother Ey represents the importance of the supportive but strong roles women could play.

Mother Ey, loved for her maternal support, was the opposite of Gala Eluard, wife of the French poet Paul Eluard. The Russian-born Gala rejected their child Cecile. In Nov 1921, on a visit to Max Ernst and his wife Dr Luise Straus-Ernst in Cologne, Gala embroiled the two men in a ménage a trois. Max left his wife and child in 1922 to pursue the Eluards to Paris. In 1924 Ernst sold his art inventory to Mother Ey to finance a trip to Indochina with the Eluards. Gala went on to become Salvador Dali's wife. The Toronto

public library has a book titled *Ghost Ships: A Surrealist Love Triangle*, by Robert McNab which details the Indochina journey. Gala, the muse, exemplified the sexually unleashed new woman for which flappers and dancers such as Josephine Baker stood.

In March 1921 Mary Wigman introduced a different aspect of women and dance when she performed in Cologne. Mary's expressive, abstract dances, based on Rudolf Laban's methods, had been part of the cabaret Voltaire Dada events in Zurich. By the 1920s Wigman had her own dance school in Dresden and her abstract creations were to dance what Kandinsky was to art and Schoenberg to music. Between 1921 and 1923 Wigman's partner was Dr Hans Prinzhorn whose 1922 book on the art of the mentally ill Angelika and Hoerle studied in their apartment. Both Wigman and Prinzhorn held tremendous interest for the Cologne arts scene with Mary standing for the successful modern woman in the arts..

The roll call of influential women who represent aspects of the new woman could go on. However, as the media gained broader power in the 1920s, movie stereotypes of women prevailed. Angelika Hoerle did not live long enough to see the images of strong women in politics and the arts overshadowed by images of women as vamps, interchangeable Tiller girls and swooning romantics.