

KUNKEL FINE ART

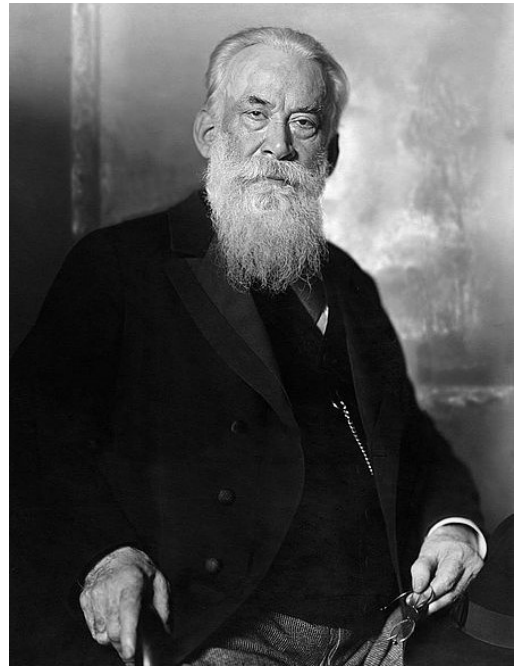
Zeichnungen, Gemälde und Skulpturen
des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts

Paul Meyerheim

1842 – Berlin – 1915

Paul Meyerheim was one of the most important animal painters of the second half of the nineteenth century. Aged only eighteen and a student of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, he made his debut at the Berlin Art Exhibition with a painting titled *Interieur mit Hund* [Interior with Dog]. The work, now in the Albertinum in Dresden, anticipated the direction his artistic career was to take.

Zirkusvorstellung [Circus Act], a painting which combines an exotic menagerie and a crowd of spellbound spectators, was executed a year later (Nationalgalerie Berlin). In 1866, Meyerheim achieved a major success outside Germany when he was awarded a Gold Medal at the Paris Salon for his painting *Menagerie*. In powerfully narrative paintings like these he was to open up new perspectives for the animal genre and forge a reputation as its leading representative.



Nicola Perscheid, *Paul Meyerheim*, c.1915

Meyerheim spent the years 1865-6 in France, where he studied Realism and the painting of Gustave Courbet and also explored the new landscape approach developed by the painters of the Barbizon school. He intensified his interest in landscape painting and travelled widely in search of motifs. Particularly attracted by Alpine subjects, he undertook several study trips to Switzerland and was often accompanied by his mentor and friend Adolph Menzel. In a painting of 1875 titled *Ochsespanne in einem Steinbruch* [Teams of Oxen in a Quarry] Meyerheim's broad, firm brushwork masterfully conveys the harsh surface of rock. A further example of his landscape skills is the painting *Kohlenmeiler im bayerischen Gebirge* [In the Bavarian Alps] executed in 1878. Later, he travelled further afield on study trips to Italy and Egypt.

The 1870s saw Meyerheim firmly established in Berlin social and artistic circles. He was called on to paint murals and ceiling paintings for important decorative projects. He received a commission from the industrialist and railway magnate August Borsig to paint seven large-format panels on copper illustrating the *Lebensgeschichte der Lokomotive* [Life History of a Locomotive]. Executed between 1873 and 1876, the panels are now held at the Märkisches Museum in Berlin. Meyerheim's cycle ranks

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alongside Menzel's painting *Eisenwalzwerk* [The Iron-Rolling Mill, or 'The Modern Cyclops'] of 1875 (Nationalgalerie Berlin) as a major contribution by a Berlin-based artist to the development of industrial themes in painting.

Throughout his life, Meyerheim's preferred subject was the animal world, which he would study on regular visits to the Berlin Zoo. This made him ideally suited for the job of illustrating the first volumes of *Brehms Tierleben*. He worked on the illustrations from 1864 to 1869. The monkey species particularly fascinated Meyerheim and he often endowed the monkeys in his paintings with human traits. He excelled in the portrayal of lions, occasionally showing them in captivity but usually depicting them in the wide steppe and savannah landscapes of their natural habitat. He returned frequently to the subject matter of his early career – menagerie scenes and depictions of fairground booths. The vibrancy of his paintings derives from his accurate representation of animal anatomy and his lively rendering of the psychological reactions of the spectators. His highly scenic compositions are marked by an underlying humour and, in common with Menzel, incisively realistic detail.

When Meyerheim took over the animal painting class at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Berlin in 1887 he made it mandatory for his students to study animals from life at the Zoo. Two of his best-known pupils are August Gaul and Wilhelm Kuhnert. Both artists were to build on his artistic heritage and carry it forward into the modern era.