



Marées, Hans von (1837-1887)

by Linda Rapp

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German-born painter Hans von Marées spent much of his career in Italy. He is best known for a set of large frescoes that he painted in the Stazione Zoologica in Naples. In these and other works he depicted male nudes, often in tranquil bucolic settings or in scenes from classical mythology. His work includes homoerotic drawings and paintings such as *Cheiron und Achilles* (1883) and *Entführung des Ganymed* (*The Rape of Ganymede*, 1887).

Von Marées was born to a prosperous family in Dessau, Germany, on December 24, 1837. As a young man he went to Berlin to study art at the Akademie and later in the studio of Carl Steffek, who specialized in equestrian and hunting scenes. Von Marées's early work consisted mainly of equestrian and military subjects. Even after leaving Steffek's studio and moving to Munich, he continued to choose similar themes for his paintings.

Von Marées also developed an interest in portraiture. His early self-portraits--the first of fifteen that he would eventually paint--show the influence of Rembrandt.

The influence of Venetian painting, with its use of rich colors, can be seen in a number of works that von Marées produced in 1863. He designed decorative panels with mythological themes for the St. Petersburg home of Baron Alexander Lyudwigovich Stieglitz and also painted a woodland scene, *Rast der Diana* (*Diana Resting*). Von Marées would return to mythological subjects throughout his career.

In 1864 von Marées left Germany for Italy, where he would remain for most of his life. Commissioned by Adolph Friedrich Graf von Schack to paint copies of works of the Old Masters, von Marées copied several paintings, but these were, as Christian Lenz states, "not so much painstaking reproductions of the originals as evidence of an independent exploration of the subjects." Not satisfied with the copies, Schack ended von Marées's commission in 1868.

While working in Italy, von Marées met and became enamored of Adolf Hildebrand, a young German sculptor and architect. When Hildebrand went back to Berlin, von Marées followed. He rented a studio that he shared with Hildebrand, who had become his pupil and protégé.

In 1873 both men returned to Italy when von Marées received a commission to paint the decorations for the Stazione Zoologica in Naples. The two artists collaborated on the project, Hildebrand contributing *trompe l'oeil* architectural elements for the five large frescoes by von Marées.

Two of the frescoes, *Aufbruch der Fisher* (*Fishermen Setting Off*) and *Das Boot* (*The Fishing Boat*), depict Neapolitan boatmen. In the first, six burly men--three of them nude, the others wearing only shorts--are launching a boat. The second shows five men energetically rowing a boat that transports a bored-looking woman who is paying them no attention.



Two images created by Hans von Marées:
Top: A portrait of his protégé and romantic interest Adolf von Hildebrand (1868).
Above: *Fishermen Setting Off* (fresco, 1873).

Another pair of frescoes, *Orangenhain; Die Frauen* and *Orangenhain; Die Männer*, depict figures in an orange grove. In the former, two women in contemporary dress are sitting on a bench conversing. The most prominent figure in the second is a nude young man plucking an orange from a tree.

The other figures in the male scene are an elderly man (clothed) digging with a shovel, and two boys, one clothed and seated, the other nude and lying on the ground. Von Marées would repeat the theme of nude young men in idyllic groves in several subsequent paintings including *Drei Jünglinge unter Orangenbäumen* (*Three Youths under Orange Trees*, 1875-1880).

The final fresco, *Pergola*, shows friends sitting at an outdoor table and drinking wine. Von Marées placed himself and Hildebrand in the scene. The two sit side by side, their heads close together.

When the fresco project was completed, von Marées and Hildebrand moved to Florence, where they remained for two years. Their romantic relationship ended when Hildebrand fell in love with and married Irene Schöffelen, a member of the German expatriate community in Rome who had sat for a portrait by von Marées.

Von Marées depicted the end of his romance with Hildebrand in a drawing, *Die Frau zwischen die beiden Männer* (*The woman between the two men*, 1875). In it, von Marées, clad in a loin-cloth, stands to the left, his gaze direct and his arm extended to the nude Hildebrand. The younger man returns only an oblique regard and makes a tentative gesture toward grasping von Marées's open and outstretched hand. A serene Koppel, dressed in a classical robe, looks fixedly at Hildebrand as she places a laurel wreath on his head.

Hildebrand and Koppel returned to their native Germany, but von Marées remained in Italy and went back to teaching. Beginning in the mid-1870s he worked with sculptors Artur Volkmann, Peter Bruckmann, and Louis Tuillon. Von Marées often made sketches for the sculptures that they produced, the subjects of which were generally from classical mythology. Von Marées himself intended to sculpt a marble nude of Nestor and made a series of preparatory sketches but did not complete the project.

Von Marées died in Rome on July 5, 1887. At the time of his death, his work--apart from the frescoes--was not widely known to the public. Some years later, Hildebrand designed a museum built in Munich in von Marées's memory. Recently, there has been a renewed interest in the artist and his work, as witnessed by exhibitions in Munich and other cities and by an increase in scholarship and criticism.

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