

Marching Toward *The Clear World of the Blessed*: Untangling Political and Aesthetic Ideology
in the Artistic Canon of Elisàr von Kupffer

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Queer and Trans Histories of the Holocaust

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“The brush the painter employs should be dipped in reason, as someone once said of Aristotle’s writing implement. It should leave behind more to think about than just what it reveals to the eye, and this skill the painter can acquire if he has learned not to conceal but to clothe his thoughts in allegories.”¹

Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and the Art of Sculpture* (1755–56)

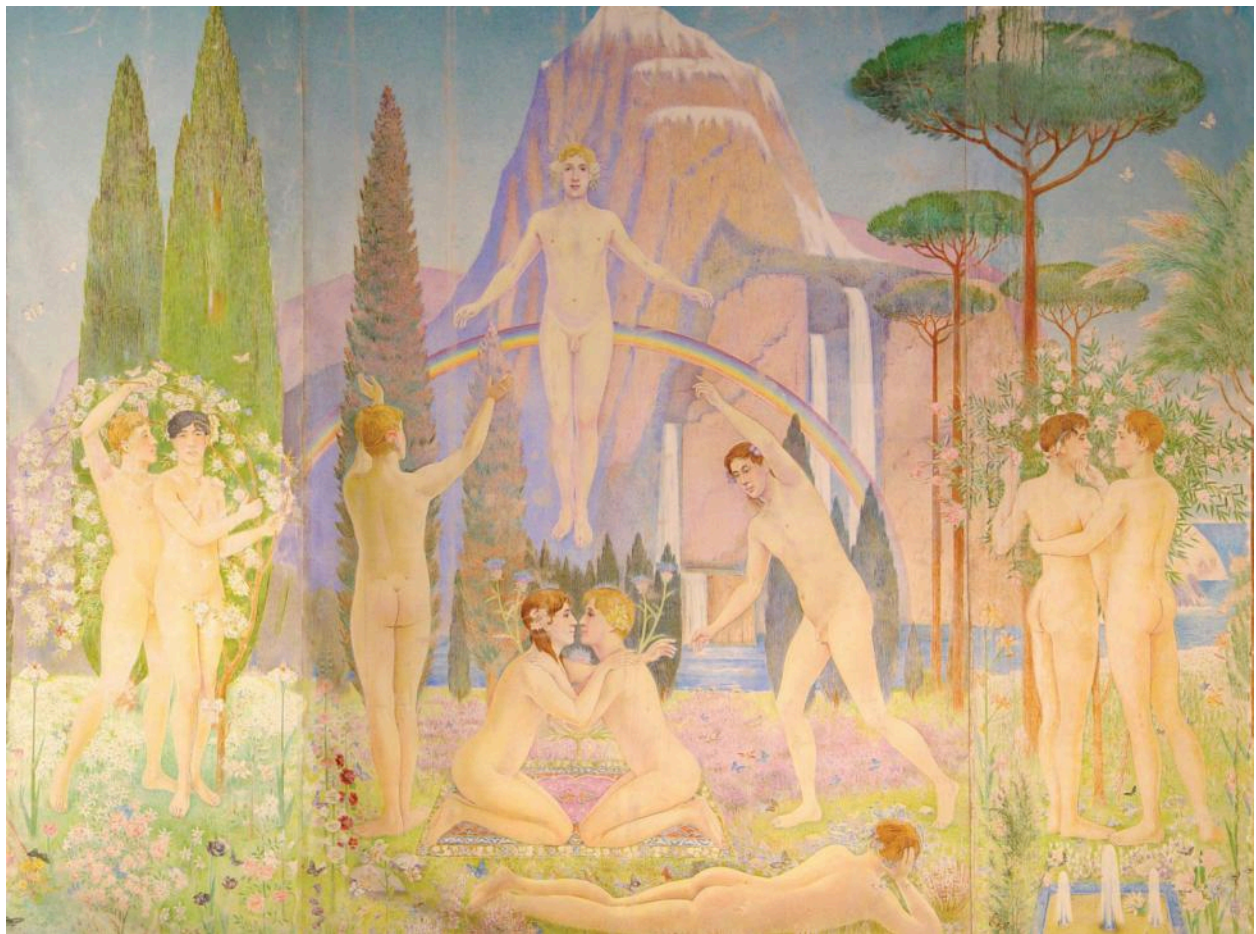


Figure 1. Detail: *Vor hohen Zypressen und dem Lichtfelsen [Rock of Light]*. Elisar von Kupffer, *Die Klarwelt der Seligen [The Clear World of the Blessed]*, 1923-1930, Elisarion Pavilion, Monte Verità Museums.

¹ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, trans. David Carter. “Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and the Art of Sculpture (1755–56).” Essay. In *Johann Joachim Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology*, 31–55. Boydell & Brewer, Camden House, 2013, 55.

Elisàr von Kupffer is an incredibly complicated and multifaceted subject within the overlapping canons of queer and art history. As an artist, von Kupffer and his work continually distinguished a unique, entirely idiosyncratic, style that used the material image of mystical homosexual androgyny to distill a distinctly fascist, antisemitic, and National Socialist message. Outside of his efforts as a painter, von Kupffer was also a spiritual leader of his own philosophic religion, *Klarismus*, and an avid public writer, frequently using his pen to engage (and *debate*) with multiple sources of authority; He frequently penned letters to Magnus Hirschfeld at the Institute of Sexual Science, Adolf Brand's Masculinist magazine *Der Eigene*, Nazi Officials in Third Reich, and Adolf Hitler to develop and articulate his vision for Aryan homosexuality's place in (an increasingly National Socialist controlled) Germany. He was also an avid student of art history, paying particular attention to Saint Petersburg's Persian manuscripts, Italian Renaissance painter Il Sodoma, the ruins of Pompeii, and German art historian and Hellenist Johann Joachim Winckelmann.² Through his artwork, von Kupffer attempts to pull from (and bricolage) all these disparate sources into one united, harmonious vision of utopia. But attempting to draw out the socio-political contours (or conditions) of this utopia reveals an unexpected edge to his scenes of queer frivolity. Von Kupffer exemplifies Winckelmann's idea of the painter's brush dipped in his *reason*, as equal as his pen. Examining Elisàr von Kupffer's overlapping engagement with three dominating artistic movements of 20th-century Europe (namely: Classicism, Primitivism, and Modernism) allows for a more nuanced understanding of more than just the *aesthetic* ideological choices behind his brushstrokes.

Classicism saw a revived interest in the artistic and philosophical products of antiquity, often manifesting as direct citations or even recreations of ancient works of art. This Classicist

² Ave Palm and Ben Miller. "The 'Fascist Femboys' of Baltic German Artist Elisàr von Kupffer. Interview with Historian Ben Miller." *Feministeerium*, September 9, 2024.

gaze dominates von Kupffer's oeuvre, inspiring and informing numerous figurative poses and musculature renderings. This allusion to classic form is most prevalent in works like *Die Klarwelt der Seligen* (Figures 1-3), his 30-meter cyclorama depicting his mystical vision of a queer utopia that was constructed as the ultimate articulation of his religious, philosophical, and artistic ideological project. As the cyclorama moves through the four seasons, it illustrates a lush and mountainous paradise populated by dozens of nude, nearly identical, figures. Figure 2 details a subsection of the cyclorama entitled *Am Wasserfall [The Waterfall]* and exemplifies how these figures form an almost visually overwhelming wall of homogenous faces. A central figure immediately invokes antiquity by playing a heart-shaped lyre, while another, identical but slightly darker-haired, figure sits and caresses their leg. This citation and *recreation* of the aesthetic culture of Ancient Greece can be understood within von Kupffer's larger engagement with Homosexualist Masculinist thought throughout the 1920s and 30s. According to Mel Gordon, mainstream strands of Masculinism, as articulated by magazines like *Der Eigene*, repeatedly invoked antiquity as a model for establishing a "new Nietzschean hierarchy, along an imagined, antiquitous Greek classification. Wise and muscular Aryan pederasts with their admiring boys."³ Von Kupffer is in direct dialogue with these ideas (and constructions of homosexuality), and each of his artistic citations from the *koine* of antiquity can not be extricated from this association.

In fact, von Kupffer himself explicates his connection between antiquity and a proposed model for homosexual society. In his article on the queer mysticism of von Kupffer's art, Damien Delille notes that numerous of von Kupffer's texts were published and circulated in *Der Eigene*, including the preface to his 1899 anthology on male love where he used quotes and extracts from

³ Mel Gordon. "Berlin Meant Boys." Essay. In *Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin*, 78–101. Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2008, 85.

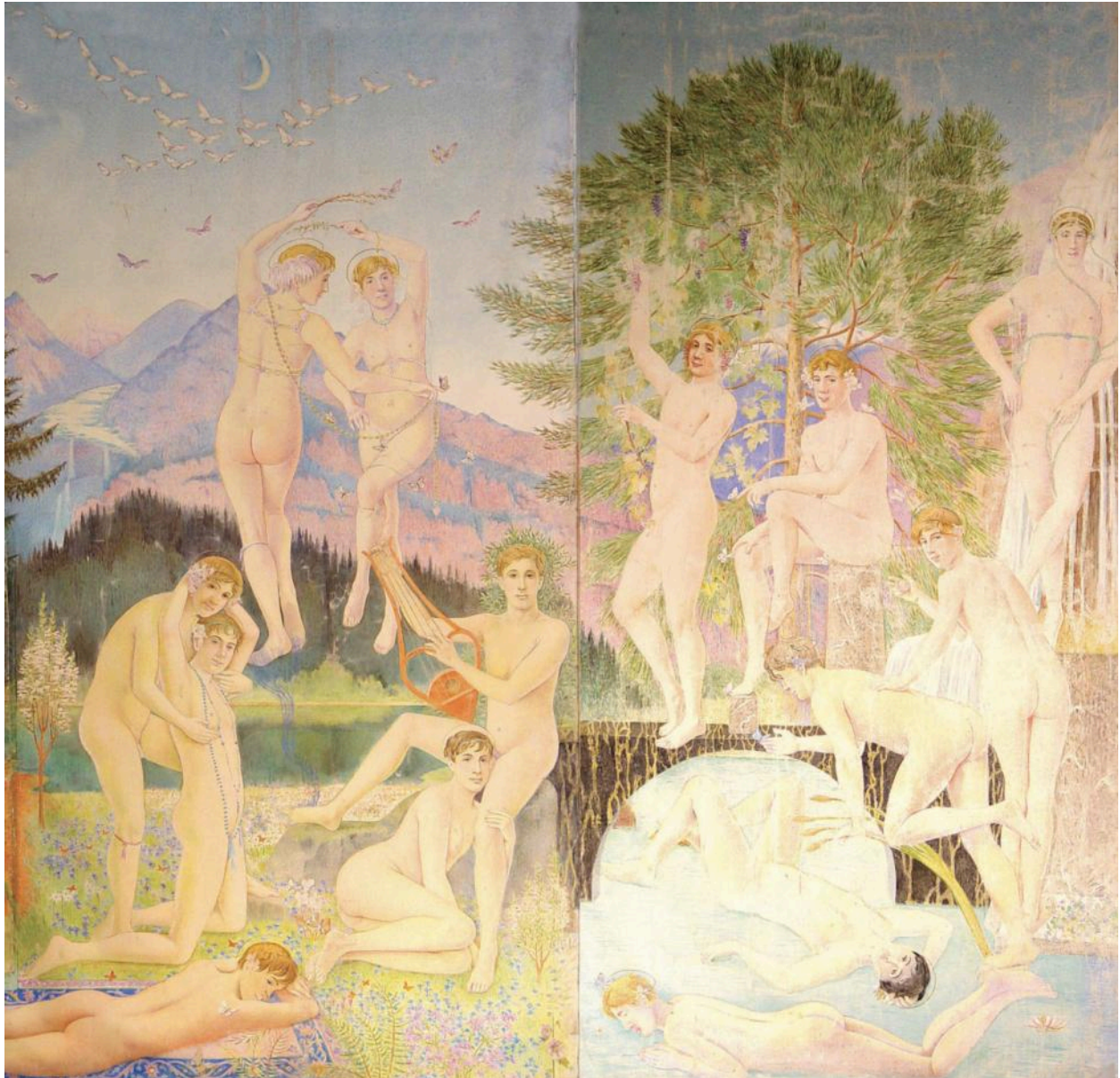


Figure 2. Detail: *Am Wasserfall*. Elisar von Kupffer, *Die Klarwelt der Seligen*,
1923-1930, Elisarion Pavilion, Monte Verità Museums.

ancient texts to prove male *bonding* was “not only the origin of homosexuality but also the primordial cell of society.”⁴ As in his writing, von Kupffer *visually* extracts quotations of classical form to attend to this same ideological construction. *Am Wasserfall* promotes this exact bonding through its utopic scene of ambiguous (but decidedly *masculinized* with their short haircuts) figures as they relax, dance, exercise, and *embrace*. Understanding these figures as masculine — and thus the entire work as a *surrounding* 30 meters of uninterrupted masculinity both at rest and in action — starts to complicate von Kupffer’s projected vision of queer utopia. In his extensive research on von Kupffer’s oeuvre, Ben Miller notes how this style of androgynous but still decidedly masculine figures articulate von Kupffer’s engagement in the misogynist strands of Masculinism: “based on tremendously visceral fear and disgust of the female body... as a source of unregulated desires and impulses and flows that were not properly contained within the rationally governed armour of the proper male body politic.”⁵ As the cyclorama’s sea of engaged figures “promis[e] a harmonic future through a cult of the male youth,” it begins to become clear who exactly is included in von Kupffer’s definition of *seligen [blessed]*.⁶

But his engagement with Masculinist ideology was not the only source from which von Kupffer drew his pederastic vision of antiquity. German architect and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann devoted much of his career to promoting the study and replication of great works of antiquity, and he proved to be an extremely influential figure in von Kupffer’s visual style. It was his visit to Villa Albani in Rome, Winckelmann’s former estate, that von

⁴ Damien Delille. “Queer Mysticism: Elisär von Kupffer and the Androgynous Reform of Art.” *Between Light and Darkness – New Perspectives in Symbolism Research, Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 1 (2014): 45–57, 49.

⁵ Ave Palm and Ben Miller. “The ‘Fascist Femboys’ of Baltic German Artist Elisär von Kupffer.”

⁶ Ben Miller. “Rejecting the Klarwelt: How Elisär von Kupffer Complicates Queer History.” Essay. In *TO BE SEEN. Queer Lives 1900–1950*, 263–75. Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2023. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, organized and presented by the NS-Dokumentationszentrum München, October 7, 2022–May 21, 2023, 269.

Kupffer credits as the inspiration for his “ephebos” vision of his *Arapprodites* that fill his landscape of *Die Klarwelt*.⁷ It is not hard to understand why von Kupffer found a particular affinity with Wincklemann’s written ideas. Much (nearly all) of his writing focused on the sculpted, nude masculine form:

The Greeks’ whole way of dressing was such that it did not impose the least restraint on the process of nature. The growth of a beautiful form did not suffer from the various styles and parts of our present clothes, which squeeze and pinch us, especially on the neck, hips, and thighs.⁸

His influence on von Kupffer is particularly evident when we examine the great *masterpieces* that Wincklemann exalts in his *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and the Art of Sculpture*: “Nature does not produce so easily for us such a perfect body... and the highest form of imagination cannot conceive anything greater than the superhuman proportions of a beautiful divinity embodied in the Vatican Apollo (Figure 3).”⁹ Within the sculptured form of the Vatican Apollo, we encounter the same softened/youthful/fleshy masculinity that defines von Kupffer’s *Arapprodites*. Von Kupffer shared a particularly strong affinity to this figure of Apollo, as his birthplace shared a meridian with the god’s island of Delos, and echoes of the Vatican Apollo’s classical form can be found throughout *Die Klarwelt der Seligen*.¹⁰

Figure 4 details another section of the cyclorama entitled *Feier im Bergtal [Celebration in the Mountain Valley]* where another *Arapprodite* with a golden crown leans against a tiled pedestal, raising a staff and a plucked flower. The adolescent body and exposed genitalia (one of the few instances throughout the entire cyclorama) immediately recall the form of the Vatican Apollo through their parallel form. Even the *Arapprodite*’s face-framing crown of golden grapes recalls the Vatican Apollo’s almost vine-like curls in his hair. Placing this mythic image of

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, “Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works,” 33.

⁹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰ Ben Miller. “Rejecting the Klarwelt,” 265.



Figure 3. *Apollo Belvedere*, 2nd century A.D [Roman copy of Greek original from 330 B.C.].

Musei Vaticani, Vatican City.

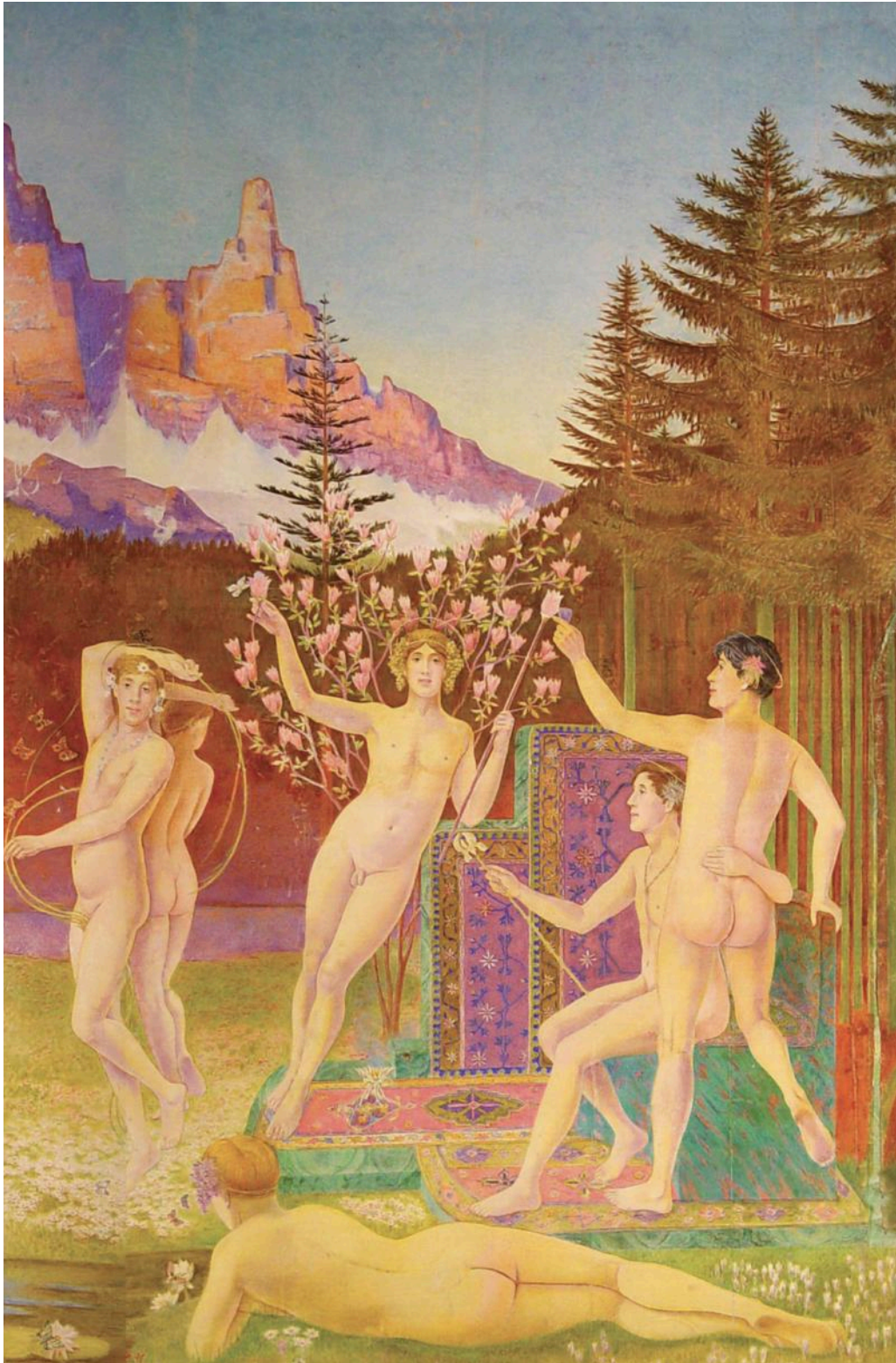


Figure 4. Detail: *Feier im Bergtal* [Celebration in the Mountain Valley]. Elisar von Kupffer, *Die Klarwelt der Seligen*, 1923-1930, Elisarion Pavilion, Monte Verità Museums.

Apollo amidst his homogenous paradise then helps further define the identity of these figures. They are von Kupffer himself. The entire cyclorama is populated with eighty-four duplicated faces of von Kupffer, his partner Eduard von Mayer, and his favorite model, Luigi Tarrico.¹¹ Through his art, von Kupffer explicitly (and repeatedly) presents himself in divinized form, solidifying this affiliation to the classical heroic form. Through his citation of (and self-presentation as) Classicist references like the Vatican Apollo, von Kupffer attempted to construct a visual canon of homosexuality and heroism, linked in indivisible mural form.

Von Kupffer searches the entire art historical canon to salvage more historical figures into his construction of homosexuality, and he pays notable attention to the revival of classical form in Italian Renaissance painters like Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, known as Il Sodoma. Again, turning to the artist's material existence within the texts of art history helps us understand how von Kupffer would have understood this figure:

Giorgio Vasari published a portrait of the artist as having been constantly surrounded by young boys, whose company he appreciated. This dimension of implied sexual attraction allowed von Kupffer to explain the reasons behind Sodoma's desire to paint himself and his adolescent models with a combination of the delicate female beauty and male strength.¹²

Von Kupffer particularly found an affinity with Il Sodoma's depiction of Saint Sebastian's martyrdom (Figure 5). He would create two self-portraits of himself staged as Sodoma's Sebastian, using the mediums of both photography and the painted canvas (Figure 6) to capture the image of his nude body, reclining against a lush forest, pierced with arrows. Figures like Il Sodoma (and Saint Sebastian by extension) were particularly "seductive" as images in this new construction of homosexuality because they "could be interpreted as part of the Hellenic educational model for young boys under 'feminine control.'"¹³ The invocation of these heroes

¹¹ Ben Miller. "In Search Of Lost Time: Primitivist Homomythopoetics and the Self-Invention of the White Gay Man." PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2024, 143.

¹² Damien Delille. "Queer Mysticism," 49.

¹³ Ibid., 48.



Figure 5. Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (Il Sodoma), *Martirio di San Sebastiano*, 1525. Gallerie Degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.



Figure 6. Left: Elisàr von Kupffer, Saint Sebastian, 1907, published in *Nackte Schönheit: Ein buch für Künstler und Aerzte*. Right: Elisàr von Kupffer, Untitled Self-Portrait, n.d., Elisarion Pavilion, Monte Verità Museums.

becomes a vehicle for the normalization (and promotion) of pederastic sexual relations in this imagined homosexual Aryan utopia. Von Kupffer's early queer identification with Saint Sebastian is further complicated in understanding each piercing arrow of martyrdom as a reflection of European-wide antihomosexual attitudes and laws of the time that specifically punished sexual encounters between adult men and teenage (or even younger) boys. While no figure directly invokes Saint Sebastian in the cyclorama, the self-portrait displays a direct visual congruency and looks like it could be any of the other figures. *Die Klarwelt der Seligen* becomes an Edenic vision of what Wincklemann calls the "admiring boys" of the pederasts as they socialize in utopic harmony.

This Classicist visual identification with divine heroism and pederasty are again products of von Kupffer's larger ideological, philosophical, and religious system. Miller emphasizes that this self-casting, aesthetic veneration of Western heroism is another direct manifestation of von Kupffer's national-masculinist ideology and its "myth of the historical continuity of that love between men" that constructed "an axis of identification" with heroes of antiquity that were no doubt "organized according to a racialized and anti-socialist worldview."¹⁴ Born to un-landed Baltic German nobility and a working doctor father in 1872, von Kupffer's life was greatly impacted by witnessing the Bolshevik revolution and its accompanying loss of familial status and wealth; this anti-Bolshevism is also where von Kupffer begins to ideologically slip into antisemitism.¹⁵ Von Kupffer's vision of paradise begins to become further racially defined. Not only are these figures masculine but they are particularly Aryan in their homosexuality. Von Kupffer's visual construction of the Aryan, masculinist homosexual subject (and self) derives entirely from his ideological engagements. The *subjecthood* in his art is entirely informed by the

¹⁴ Ben Miller. "Rejecting the Klarwelt," 267.

¹⁵ Ave Palm and Ben Miller. "The 'Fascist Femboys' of Baltic German Artist Elisar von Kupffer."

masculinist association between heroism and homosexuality to suggest “that women are a drag on human progress and the men who reject women can go further and do more because they’re not dragged down by the evil feminine... Jewishness and femaleness are often constructed together as negative influences on the German national project.”¹⁶

This indivisibility of feminine and non-Aryan exclusion within von Kupffer’s brushstrokes is further enunciated when we examine how von Kupffer’s work simultaneously engages with the Primitivist artistic movement of the 20th century. Works like *Der Tempeltanz* (1918) (Figure 7), appropriate a distinctly Orientalist eastern aesthetic. His two central figures dance atop a Persian rug in sheer and revealing bright outfits, all encased within an arabesque arch. The entire piece acts as a glimpse into the exoticized corners of von Kupffer’s utopia, with his particular emphasis on Eastern aesthetics derivative of his time in Saint Petersburg, where he studied “Orientalist literature” and the largest collection of Persian manuscripts at that time.¹⁷ What is notable though, is that von Kupffer’s “primitive” figures are still the Aryan, self-portrait *Araphrodites* of *Die Klarwelt der Seligen*. Elisär’s face stares back at the viewer from the right figure as the left figure turns to reveal a flash of the same hair and facial structure. These figures, stripped of all “primitive” regalia, also populate *Am Wasserfall* (Figure 2). Miller explicates the ideological repercussions of this replacement:

Here, then, is an interpellation of the alluring, dangerous figure of the dancing boy into the clear world of the blessed: a depiction of Kupffer’s fractured and modern self as this trope of the feminized and receptive sodomite, in a work whose ideological self-justification rejected the idea that homoeroticism constructed its participants as feminized sodomites. Kupffer here staked a claim to direct identification with this Other. He placed his white masculine self in this primitive, racialized, and feminized position: literally making the white gay man out of the racialized and temporally backwards Other. The figures move from orientalism to classical antiquity.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ben Miller. “In Search Of Lost Time,” 156.

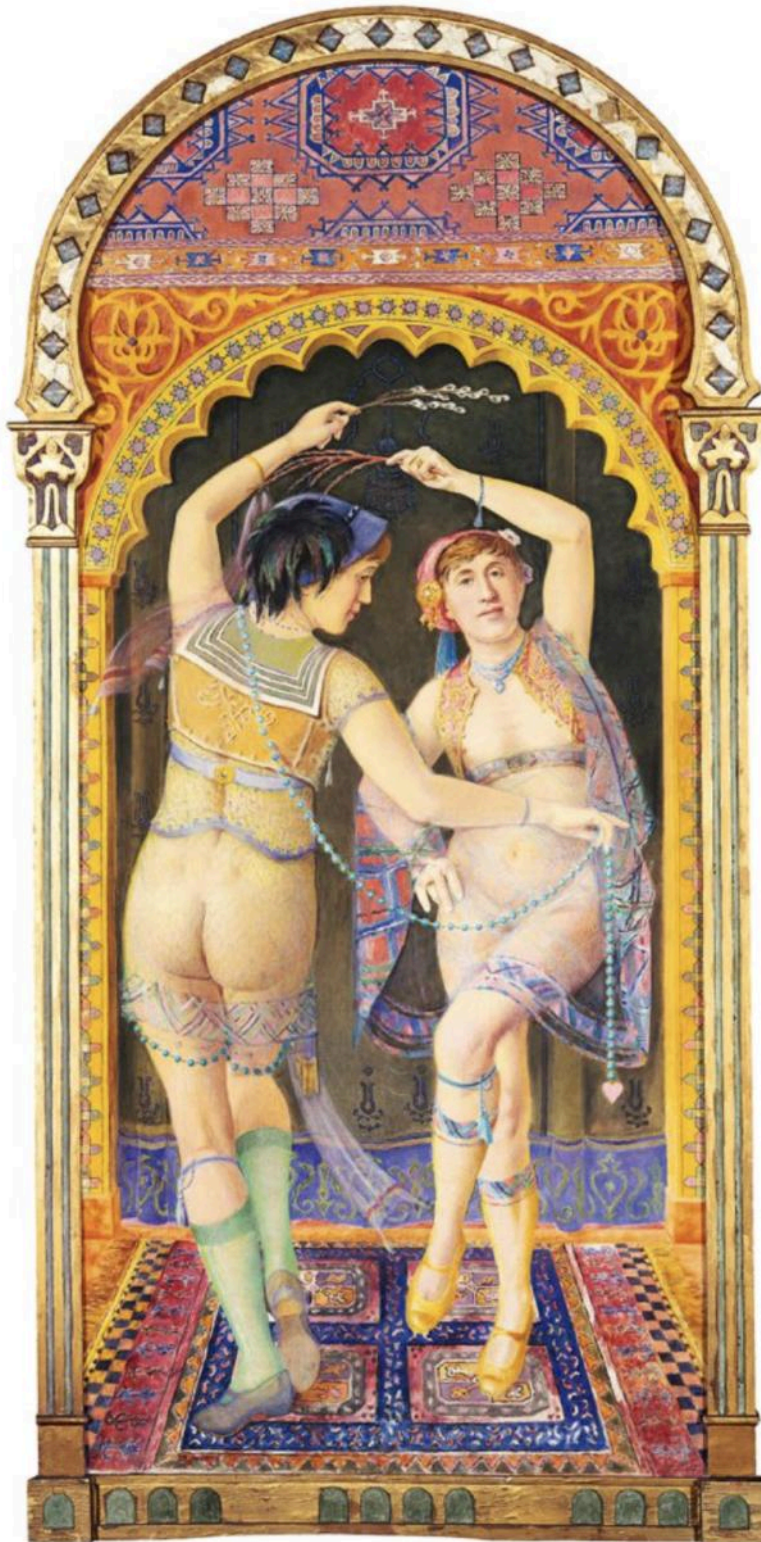


Figure 7. Elisar von Kupffer, *Der Tempeltanz*, 1918. Elisarion Pavilion, Monte Verità Museums.

Von Kupffer's primitivism in effect serves to appropriate a strictly material image of these foreign cultures, erasing all "primitive" subjecthood and supplanting it with his Aryan *Araphrodites* in dress-up. Miller writes that von Kupffer essentially scavenges (even *loots*) the colonized past for these references to "Otherhood" as articulated by the canon. In constructing the future for the white homosexual subject in these recognizable scenes of primitive exoticism, he entirely erases the original "primitive" and assigns it to a permanent past.

This style of Primitivism, with its total occlusion of colonial subjects, is entirely aberrant for its era. Other Primitivists of the time like Pablo Picasso or Paul Gauguin (Figure 8) mostly coupled these subjects, as well as their aesthetic culture, into each composition as a means of destabilizing European perspective.¹⁹ But even as von Kupffer's *Auf Wiedersehen, Locarno* eerily parallels the form of Gauguin's *Manao tupapau*, it completely erases the "primitive" (and notably *feminine*) subject. Both figures recall the same reclining form as they cross their ankles and slightly turn back to the viewer, exposing their back and butt. While Gauguin's figure has a neutral face that could even be read as voyeuristic discomfort, von Kupffer's figure meets the viewer's eye and returns a smile, seemingly enjoying this exhibitionist gaze. Miller argues that von Kupffer's *extractive* form of primitivism is in direct conversation with the softened androgyny of the *Araphrodite*'s flesh, "mining femaleness for certain important characteristics that might be useful" while "discard[ing] the actual women" for these "beings who are, while androgynous, still always recognizably men."²⁰ The *Araphrodite* is able to absorb and imitate softer feminine forms while still maintaining a masculinity emphasized through the repetition of von Kupffer's face and exposed genitalia. Primitivism serves as a visual vehicle for von Kupffer in stripping femininity and racialized "otherness"'s form from subjecthood, appropriating their

¹⁹ Ibid., 141.

²⁰ Ave Palm and Ben Miller. "The 'Fascist Femboys' of Baltic German Artist Elisar von Kupffer."

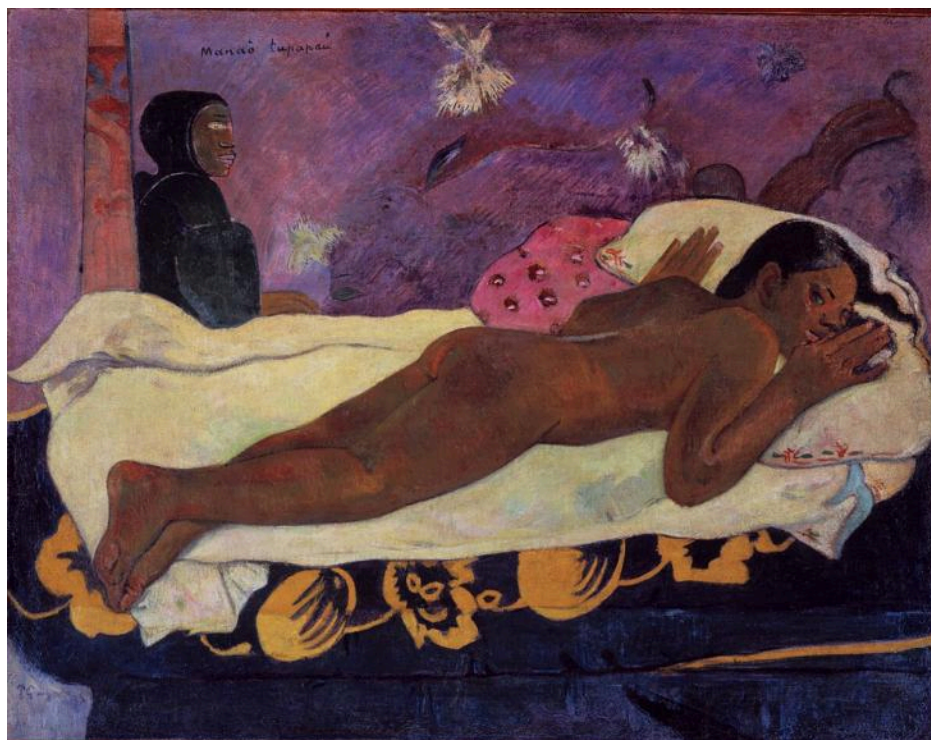


Figure 8. Paul Gauguin, *Manao tupapau* [*The Spirit of the Dead Keep Watch*], 1892, Buffalo

AKG Art Museum



Figure 9. Elisar von Kupffer, *Auf Wiedersehen*, Locarno, n.d. Elisarion Pavilion, Monte Verità

Museums.

imagery to articulate his vision for an all-male Aryan future.

This fervent future-forward gaze dominates von Kupffer's oeuvre and often emerges from his engagement with Modernism and its constructions of Modernity. His religion, *Klarismus*, proposed this utopic *Klarwelt* [*Clear World*] that von Kupffer believed could be attained at an individual (and ultimately *social*) level through a break with the modern, "tangled" world and a return to the past (both classical and primitive).²¹ The cyclorama served as a direct means of visualizing and indoctrinating this religious image of queer utopic bliss. Von Kupffer's Aryan *Ephebos* serve as a radical alterity to the "soup of diseased modernity's 'confused world,'" serving "as a way out of modernity's relativist and technologically confusing morass of madness."²² Each *Arphrodite* serves to alluringly *convert* homosexual subjecthood into congruence within this larger Aryan/misogynist/antisemitic project. Though Winckelmann writes of *clothing* one's ideological intentions through the paintbrush dipped in reason, von Kupffer builds the National Socialist logic of his artwork through a *disrobing* of his figures. It is interesting that Winckelmann also turns to the image of *disease* when he contrasts the societies of antiquity and his day:

The illnesses that destroy beauty in so many cases, and spoil the noblest forms, were still unknown to the Greeks... there can be found no trace of smallpox, and no displayed image of a Greek... includes such distinctive features as pockmarks. Venereal disease and its offspring, rachitis, were not yet wreaking havoc against the beautiful aspects of nature.²³

Thus these disrobed figures, in their classic form and un-pockmarked perfection, represent a distinctly Eugenic promise of health and vitality in this all-male utopia. This return to the past, in tandem with the removal of all feminine and/or racialized subjecthood, is then established as a visual/material condition for the disappearance of all these medical plagues in this promised

²¹ Ben Miller. "Rejecting the Klarwelt," 269.

²² Ben Miller. "In Search Of Lost Time," 148.

²³ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, "Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works," 34.

vision.

Von Kupffer stages his *Araphrodites* using a distinctly Modernist visual language of identical doubles amongst a flat, fairytale illustration landscape to emphasize both the hollowness of Modernity and the necessity of his proposed *interface* with the past. Delille notes how the “saturated tones and flattened surfaces” of von Kupffer’s rendering “compress the figures into decor, like the cardboard cutouts of photography studios.”²⁴ The over-saturation, lack of depth, and overly illustrative (almost *cartoonish*) style emphasize its status as an art object — another cultural artifact for the canon. In *Am Wasserfal* (Figure 2), the two dancing boys are rendered suspended in the air, not making any connection to the flat backdrop of the landscape behind them. This self-reflexive emphasis on artistic objecthood through regressive style is exactly what makes von Kupffer's work

legible as modern reproductions of antiquity: duplicable, mass-produced, almost ready-made figures that bring the past into the present to create political futures. His very self is fractured and broken, divided amongst the various figures.²⁵

The cloning and mass duplication of von Kupffer’s own image is then imagined as a fractioning (or *tangling*) of oneself in the modern (artistic) conditions of society. Each *Araphorodite* in *Die Klarwelt* becomes a loose thread of self in Modernity’s false paradise. This Modernist motif of duplication emphasizes both von Kupffer’s dream of “racial purity, mutual resemblance” and the hollowness of these selves that can only be liberated once this racially cleansed utopia is achieved.²⁶

A pair of two self-portraits hung in the Elisarion Pavilion (Figure 10), among the rest of von Kupffer’s oeuvre, emphasize this fracturing and cleaving of self into gendered halves. The two figures look nearly identical to any of those found in *Die Kalarwelt*, but they are disguised

²⁴ Damien Delille. “Queer Mysticism,” 55.

²⁵ Ben Miller. “In Search Of Lost Time,” 146.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

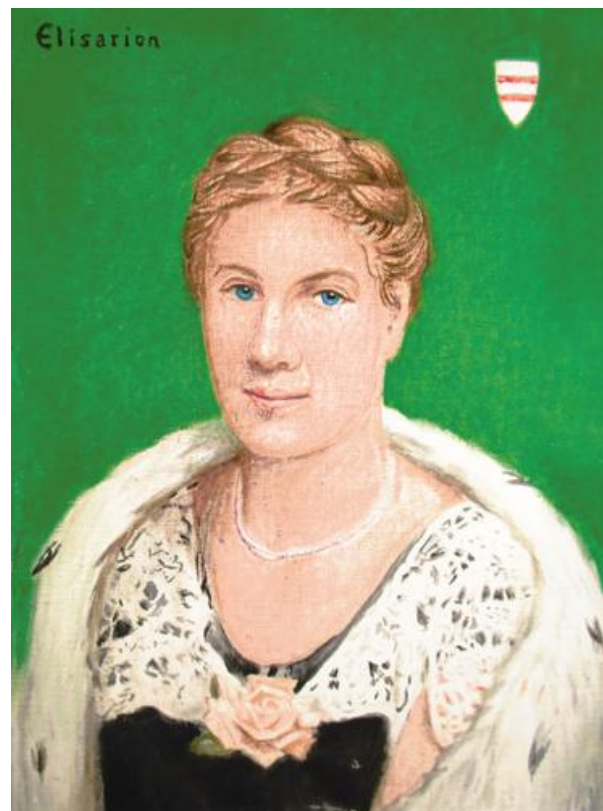


Figure 10. Elisàr von Kupffer, Untitled Portraits, n.d. Elisarion Pavilion, Monte Verità Museums.

behind the contemporary gendered dress of von Kupffer's time. The masculine figure on the left sports a beard and navy suit while the feminine figure on the right wears a braided hairdo and lace dress. Both paintings are labeled "Elisarion," von Kupffer's name for himself, meaning they are both self-portraits of the artist's same face behind two gendered masks. His modern self is emphasized as divided and incomplete, pointing to his androgynous vision of *Die Klarwelt* as the only reconciliation (and escape from) this fracturing. Even the proportions of his feminine face appear slightly off to emphasize this incongruity of self as if unnaturally grafted onto this body. Delille credits this artistic interest in hybridity to von Kupffer's extended interest in the ruins and frescoes of Pompeii, where "figures of indeterminacy" and hybrids of Centaurs and Nereids inspired his own artistic language of gendered duality.²⁷ Von Kupffer's self-portraits stage a denaturalization of this clean separation between the masculine/feminine halves of self enacted by the two separated canvases. The two portraits image a clean line of division akin to the line separating horse/man in the Centaurs of Pompeii. From this cleavage of unintegrable division, *The Araphrodite* promises a means out through its intermediacy, becoming a reconciliatory, amalgamating figure of divided selves.

The Modernist, flat background that reminds Delille of the *cardboard cutouts of photography studios* indexes another important movement attempting to define homosexuality that von Kupffer is ideologically (and visually) in dialogue with: Magnus Hirschfeld and the larger field of Sexology. Throughout his career at the Institute of Sexual Science, Hirschfeld used photography to capture images of queer subjects that he believed would help prove — and visually explicate — his theories on sexual intermediaries. Images like *Classification of homosexuals as a natural third sex situated between man and woman* (Figure 11), explicate this emergence of a "homosexual" body between the gaps of the gender binary. Based on the

²⁷ Damien Delille. "Queer Mysticism," 48-49.



Figure 11. Magnus Hirschfeld, *Classification of homosexuals as a natural third sex situated between man and woman*, 1903, in *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, vol. 5.

criminological photographs of Alphonse Bertillon, Hirschfeld created a photographic anthropological study that sought to define the homosexual through scientific means of visual classification. Many of his images implore a similar focus in tightly focusing on the exposed, nude queer figure against a flat background. Figure 11 interestingly implores this same focus but places the “homosexual” subject against a rock backdrop that reads as both Primitivist and Orientalist, especially in combination with the accessorization of a headscarf covering the figure’s face. Much of this visual construction was based on Hirschfeld’s data on the proportions of patients at the Institute, assuming a physiognomical manifestation of homosexuality: “Key identifiers were the level of the hips and the size of the pelvis, which differentiated the homosexual body from that of the heterosexual and tied it to both feminine characteristics and the body of the adolescent.”²⁸ Thus the morphology of von Kupffer’s *Araphrodite* is understood to have a twofold photographic reference,

demonstrative of a double level of artistic and medical homosexuality. If the adolescent was connected to the eromenos and became a sexual object whose large buttocks, was implicit of sodomy, he also corresponded to the medical observations of Hirschfeld on the larger size of the homosexual pelvis.²⁹

From an abstracted perspective, von Kupffer and Hirschfeld appear to construct identical images of homosexuality through feminized hips, softened muscles, and obscured genitalia.

Though the work of Hirschfeld and his Institute are often historically conceived as separate spheres of influence, von Kupffer’s artistic style explicates this overlapping dialogue between the two ideologies. Miller specifically refutes any view of the two spheres as “diametrically opposed projects,” noting how von Kupffer’s early writing praises Hirschfeld’s 1906 treatise on bisexuality. While von Kupffer would go on to publicly disagree and refute many of the sexologists’ ideas, this foundational influence remained behind his own

²⁸ Ibid., 47.

²⁹ Ibid., 51.

visual/ideological constructions: “Masculinists like Kupffer refused inversion, yet still found themselves constructed and constrained by it.”³⁰ Von Kupffer’s entire visual project of his lounging *Araphrodites*, with all of its colonial, antisemitic, and eugenic undertones, is in direct conversation (and direct *product* of) sexological thought and visual classification. This enmeshment of von Kupffer, “Hirschfeld, race science, eugenics, and the German colonial project” is visually articulated when Hirschfeld’s “homosexual” figure is set in front of a parallel backdrop of Primitivism and Orientalism.³¹ Ideas — and visual constructions — of inversion, intermediaries, and homosexual subjecthood were another condition of modernity that von Kupffer found his *Araphroditic* visions entangled within.

Throughout his literary and artistic oeuvre, Elisar von Kupffer articulates an entirely unique vision of queer subjectivity for World War II Europe. Numerous political and ideological forces equally shape and redefine his homosexual philosophy across his life, and it is within the canvas that von Kupffer visually negotiates and synthesizes these competing forces. Through his engagement with (and notable transformations of) the visual movements of Classicism, Primitivism, Orientalism, and Modernism, von Kupffer articulates a pederastic vision of homosexual paradise, liberated from the societal burdens of women, non-Aryans, Modernity, and even venereal disease. His lifelong ideological dedication to National Socialism is entirely interwoven into his artistic vision of an Aryan homosexual paradise. It is only through a rigorous dissection of queer artistic subjects like von Kupffer and works like *Die Klarwelt der Seligen* that we can begin to uncover and understand this complex — and often muddled — matrix of homosexual, Aryan, pederastic, and colonial subjecthood within fascist Germany.

³⁰ Ben Miller. “Rejecting the Klarwelt,” 267.

³¹ Ibid.

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