



ELLIOTT FINE ART

Nineteenth Century to Early Modern



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Gussy Hippold-Ahnert
(Berlin 1910 – 2003 Dresden)

Studio Corner (Atelierecke)

Monogrammed lower right: GA

Titled, dated and signed on the reverse: *Atelierecke / genn. 1927 / Gussy Ahnert*

Oil on panel

92 x 67.5 cm. (36 ¼ x 26 ½ in.)

Provenance:

Bergmann Auktionhaus, Erlangen, 10 March 2007, lot 746;

Schmidt Kunstauktionen, Dresden, 8 March 2014, lot 53;

Galerie Döbele, Dresden.



‘It probably has its own particular reasons, and it is not only a superficial ‘fashion’ that cacti, of all things, are treasured and cared for more than any other plant today: it is their ‘atonal’ growth, their ungraspable form, that is near and dear to us. They make us see nature in a new way, in a way that is different from earlier eras—but it is more lively in us than ever.’¹

Walter Riezel, 1930

Painted in 1927, when Gussy Hippold-Ahnert was just seventeen years old, this striking plant still life is an accomplished early work that reveals both her technical precocity and her engagement with the artistic and intellectual culture of Weimar Germany. A student of Otto Dix in the early 1930s, Hippold came of age during a moment of aesthetic realignment, when the cool, lucid gaze of New Objectivity had begun to supplant the turbulence of Expressionism. This painting predates her contact with Dix and belongs to the formative period in which she was still developing her independent visual vocabulary, grounded in quiet observation, formal balance and a subtle psychological charge.

The composition is centred around a tall vase of gladioli, stately, energetic stems that erupt upward in a fan of pale pinks, whites, oranges and fuchsias. Their bright vitality seems to ripple outward, enlivening the surrounding forms: the taut sweep of green drapery cascading across the table, the angular window recess, the lean of the potted cactus. Despite the apparent realism, Hippold-Ahnert’s arrangement is carefully orchestrated. Everything points inward or upward, as if caught in a visual current flowing toward the light.

Most curious and significant is the inclusion of the cacti. At first glance, they are humble additions: a miniature on the windowsill and two larger specimens, perhaps of the genus *opuntia*, angled in visual conversation with the central vase. Yet these succulents were far more than incidental. As Rainer Stamm notes in his essay *Plant Cult*, cacti in 1920s Germany had become emblems of modern taste and visual culture, at once exotic, formalist and symbolically charged.² The cactus’s capacity to survive in isolation, its self-sufficiency and armoured body, made it a fitting metaphor in a period of emotional reserve and cultural disillusionment. Georg Scholz’s *Cacti and Semaphore* of 1923 (fig. 1) and Rudolf Wacker’s *Great Crested Grebe and Cactus* of 1928 (fig. 2) are notable examples of this cactus motif in New Objectivity painting. Quoted at the beginning of this essay, Walter Riezler’s evocation of their ‘atonal’ growth and ‘ungraspable form’ captures precisely what made them so alluring to artists of the period.

Hippold-Ahnert’s studio window, with its two potted plants, resonates with what has been described as the phenomenon of the *Kakteenfenster* - the ‘cactus window’ (fig. 3). Common in German middle-class homes during the Weimar Republic, these orderly displays of succulents became a cultural shorthand for a particular modern sensibility. As highlighted by Rainer Stamm, cactus windows were expressions of interior discipline, aesthetic awareness and a quietly radical domesticity.³ Hippold-Ahnert’s scene plays knowingly on this

¹ W. Riezler, ‘Das Kunstgewerbe heute und morgen’ in *Die Form: Zeitschrift für gestaltende Arbeit* 5, no. 10, May 1930, pp. 254-55.

² R. Stamm, *Plant Cult* in *Green Modernism*, 2023 (online catalogue only - <https://www.gruene-moderne.de/en/texts/plant-cult/>).

³ *Ibid.*

vocabulary. The cactus window here is more than a decorative flourish; it marks the studio as a cultivated space, where restraint and exoticism, nature and geometry, live side by side. It is both a literal source of light and a symbolic portal to modern taste.



Fig. 1, Georg Scholz, *Cacti and Semaphore*, 1923, oil on panel, 69 x 52.3 cm, WLW Landesmuseum, Münster



Fig. 2, Rudolf Wacker, *Cactus and Great Crested Glebe*, 1928, oil on panel, 69 x 50 cm, Leopold Museum

Hippold-Ahnert's cacti seem to echo this double register, both decorative and psychological. Their prickliness offers a counterpoint to the sensual, almost erotic exuberance of the gladioli. The room itself, the artist's studio, appears both personal and staged, a site of interior life and aesthetic construction. The folded portfolio in the bottom right hints at Hippold's status as a student, and the drapery, often used in academic still life setups, reinforces this self-reflective quality.

The still life captures the spirit of its time: the cultivation of form and discipline in the studio, the encroachment of the exotic and symbolic into domestic interiors, and the young artist's search for a voice within the cultural context of Weimar Germany. Even at seventeen, Hippold-Ahnert reveals a mature sensitivity to space, tension and the silent drama of objects.

Born in Dresden in 1910, Hippold-Ahnert began formal artistic training at a young age and showed exceptional promise from the outset. This still life reflects not just technical talent but a sensitivity to contemporary visual culture that sets her apart from many of her peers. In the early 1930s, she entered the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts, where she came under the influence of Otto Dix, who immediately recognised her exceptional talent and brought her into his circle. Dix's instruction was rigorous, stressing precision, anatomical study and an unflinching approach to both form and subject. While Hippold-Ahnert's would absorb aspects of his discipline, especially in terms of technique and compositional structure, she

retained a gentler, more meditative tone. Her works from the early 1930s show a deepening clarity and composure, with psychologically rich portraits that reflect the atmosphere of New Objectivity while resisting its more caustic tendencies (fig. 4).



Fig. 3, Cactus window in Rosa Schapire's home, 1922, Landesmuseum, Oldenburg



Fig. 4, Gussy Hippold-Ahnert, *The Painter Erhard Hippold*, 1933, oil on panel, 97.5 x 82.5 cm, Albertinum, Dresden

In 1936, she married fellow artist Erhard Hippold, who she had met five years previously when both were students. Soon after their marriage, they were forced to close their shared studio as the Nazi regime tightened its malign grip on cultural life. The couple relocated to Radebeul, where they took over the corset shop of Hippold-Ahnert's father, using this to support themselves through the war years. After 1945, she continued to manage the family's corset business in what was now East Germany, while also quietly resuming her artistic work, turning to pastel and watercolour depictions of the gentle landscapes of Saxony. It was not until the 1970s that Hippold-Ahnert's early works were rediscovered by the art historian Fritz Löffler, leading to renewed interest and exhibitions in Dresden and Radebeul.