

Of all the artists I met in the first part of my adult life Milein Cosman is the one who gave me the greatest practical help and advanced my career. After university, I got a job as researcher in Robert Douwma's print shop in Covent Garden and moved to London. Through the gallery's accountant I had the extraordinary luck of meeting the Austrian painter Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, and by renting a room in her house I got to know her well. Being Marie-Louise's lodger often meant opening the door for people who came to visit and this is how I met Milein. One evening she and her husband Hans were invited to eat and, as often, I was the first to respond to the doorbell. This was 1984, in the final year of Hans's life and the great musician was looking very haggard. For me, however, it was the start of a very important relationship.

My upbringing in Cambridge had prepared me well to enjoy the company of German speakers. My childhood and that of my sisters was documented for my parents by an outstanding Austrian photographer called Bertl Gaye, who used a Rolleiflex and never needed a light meter. Bertl impressed on me the importance of overexposure in order to obtain a 'thick' negative. Bertl was only one of several influences on my visual education. Another important figure was the family dentist Mali Meyer, in whose waiting room I saw original prints by German artists for the first time: a self-portrait lithograph by Käthe Kollwitz and a beautiful landscape by Lovis Corinth. I had not the faintest idea what a drypoint was, but its black foliage and the vibrant shadow effect created when inking the copper plate struck me as exquisitely beautiful. It was an effect I would later witness at first hand as Milein printed her plates. I played the violin in the



Some memories of Milein Cosman Peter Black

Self-Portrait drawing, felt pen,
c. 1980–1985, 29.7 × 20.7 cm,
Akademie der Künste, Berlin,
Art Collection, HZ 5422

Cambridge youth orchestra which had an exchange programme with Heidelberg and the symphonies we played with our German friends were of course mainly those of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. My father spoke German, having done military service in Austria. He was an academic publisher, and impressed on me the value of the contribution to Britain's post-war cultural life made by those whom the Nazis had forced to flee from Europe.

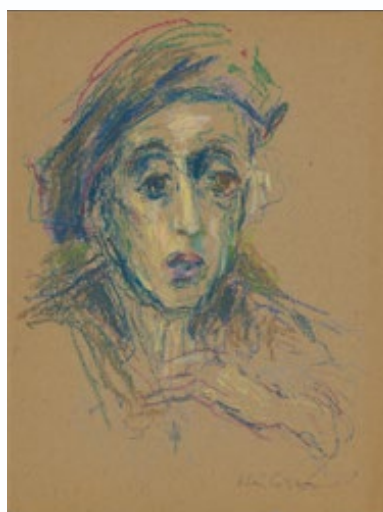
With these childhood memories I arrived in London and having met Milein I joined a growing circle of Germans and other émigrés. Marie-Louise von Motesiczky was, as Milein assured me, a truly great painter but she lacked confidence when speaking English and was happy to slip into German or, better still, Wienerisch. Milein, on the other hand, spoke with a confidence

which—if such a thing is possible—exceeded that of a native speaker. Her voice was deep and musical. Unlike Marie-Louise, Milein spoke in complete sentences and never hesitated. If a thought slipped her mind, she would tack on to what she was about to say some perfectly idiomatic, and often amusing English phrase, uttered with emphatic and rhythmical flourishes. There was never a hint of Germanic intonation in her voice, or of phraseology borrowed from her native tongue. I was at first simply amazed; only in recent years, as Ines Schlenker worked on Milein's biography, did I learn that Milein started learning English at a very early age because her older brother Cornelius had friends in Scotland and indeed went on to study Chemistry at Glasgow (1934–1938). It was Cornelius who wisely urged Milein to study at the Slade in London, allowing her to move seamlessly from school to art school as well as escape the horrors inflicted by the Nazis.

For about fifteen years, until I moved to work at the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow, I was in touch with Milein every week. If I now think back to life in my 20s, and the early stages of a career in art history and with a special interest in printmaking, I realise what extraordinary luck I had. Milein and Marie-Louise were senior figures in the art world and both were visited by art historians and curators whom I would sometimes meet because I was tagging along. In my idealistic way I felt that only I had seen the value and importance of these artists' work. Marie-Louise was guarded about introducing me to her contacts and even asked me not to get in touch with her old friend Ernst H. Gombrich. But Milein treated me from the start as a colleague and equal. My plan was to

publish on printmaking and I was working on a catalogue raisonné of prints by Stanley William Hayter. Marie-Louise had little interest in 'graphic' art, although she remembered having visited Hayter's workshop in Paris in 1938, with her friend and admirer Wolfgang Paalen. Milein on the other hand took me absolutely seriously and the help she gave was invaluable. She gave me a portrait of Hayter that she had made during a talk given at the Victoria & Albert Museum, a modest pen drawing, but with that immediacy which

Milein Cosman: Portrait of the artist Marie-Louise von Motesiczky (verso: sketches), oil pastels, c. 1990–1995, 32 × 24.3 cm, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Art Collection, HZ 5429



can only be obtained from life. She also opened her address book to me so that very soon I was visiting people who might help with my research. I took time off work at the gallery in order to look at the small collections of Hayter's prints and correspondence belonging to Ursula Goldfinger and Margaret Gardiner, who at that time went swimming together each morning in the Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath.¹ Margaret shortly afterwards asked Milein to print a small ex-libris plate of a horse with plaited tail, which Hayter had engraved for her in 1931. Milein had no hesitation in telling Margaret that she had passed the plate to me and thus I had the experience of printing an actual plate engraved by Hayter.

Most important of all, Milein found me a flat to rent in Golders Green, from Pippa who was the widow of the Czech painter Jacob Bornfriend, in whose studio Milein and Marie-Louise had met. Milein took me to Peter Freeth's etching classes in Kentish Town and thus I learned to put into practice some of what I knew about prints, and I met more of Milein's friends. One of these was Mary Kleinman who had a gallery in her house on Highbury Terrace and she offered it to me for my first exhibition as an independent art dealer in June 1989. I showed paintings, drawings and prints by several artists, including Milein, as well as sculptures by her old friend Daphne Hardy Henrion, whom I knew from Cambridge. For a really fine oil painting by Milein, of Spanish fishermen hauling their boat up the beach at Nerja, I found a perfect match with an old gilded frame

made by Bourlet. The painting sold to a collector friend. The exhibition was an important moment for me, coming as it did in the inflationary period that led to the 1991 recession. I was unsure whether I really wanted to be an art dealer or try for a job in a museum. Several of Milein's friends visited my exhibition. One person with whom I had fascinating conversations was the art dealer Gustav Delbanco (1903–1997), who is known as the promoter of contemporary artists through his Cork Street gallery Roland Browse and Delbanco, but was also an expert on old master painting. He had reached a stage at which he was disposing of his collection as well as dispensing wisdom about art, and I enjoyed his topical remarks about the 'inflation in the number of art galleries and the inflation of artists' reputations'. He was painfully clear about the insularity of the art world he found in Britain when he had arrived from Hamburg, and told me rather proudly of a remarkable fact: that he had published the first criticism of Henry Moore, in *Weltkunst*, in 1931. Most memorable of all was visiting Delbanco at home with my wife Jantien and spending an evening chatting in front of the wonderful early Rubens painting of the Fall of Phaeton which he was on the point of selling to the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

¹ Margaret Gardiner (1904–2005) was a peace activist and a supportive friend to writers and artists. Her art collection was given in 1979 to form the Pier Arts Centre in Stromness, Orkney. Ursula Blackwell was married to the architect Erno Goldfinger. Margaret and Ursula were survivors of a group of modernist intellectuals whose patronage was vital for émigré artists settling in north London from the 1930s onwards.

Milein Cosman: Two artists, John Heartfield and Jakob Bornfriend (Bauernfreund), walking in the Finchley Road (verso: portrait of John Heartfield from the 1940s), pen drawing, c. 1945–1949, 25.4 × 17.8 cm, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Art Collection, HZ 5423



This encounter with a great Rubens painting and the story of its acquisition as the work of a follower, in a mixed sale at Christie's, only weeks before the Second World War, will always remain with me. In conversations around Milein's dinner table in Frognaal Gardens Rubens would come up periodically and if anyone tried to belittle the great Flemish master Milein came vigorously to his defence. She knew Rubens extremely well, and not just his drawings. There is not space here to catalogue the extraordinarily eclectic range of exhibitions which Milein visited. But one example is perhaps instructive. I remember receiving from her a short lecture about Bonnard after I made a dismissive remark about his drawings which were then on show. I decided

to go and find out what it was that she saw in them. I concluded that she and Bonnard both made drawings, not for the sake of exhibiting them, but from a passionate desire to record what they saw around them. In an interview that Milein gave to the Association of Jewish Refugees there is a telling moment in which the significance of drawing comes to the surface. Describing her first meeting with Hans Keller, and her intense focus on his impressive head, she exclaims: "The main thing that struck me when I saw him was his face. I thought: Ha! If only I could draw that man!"

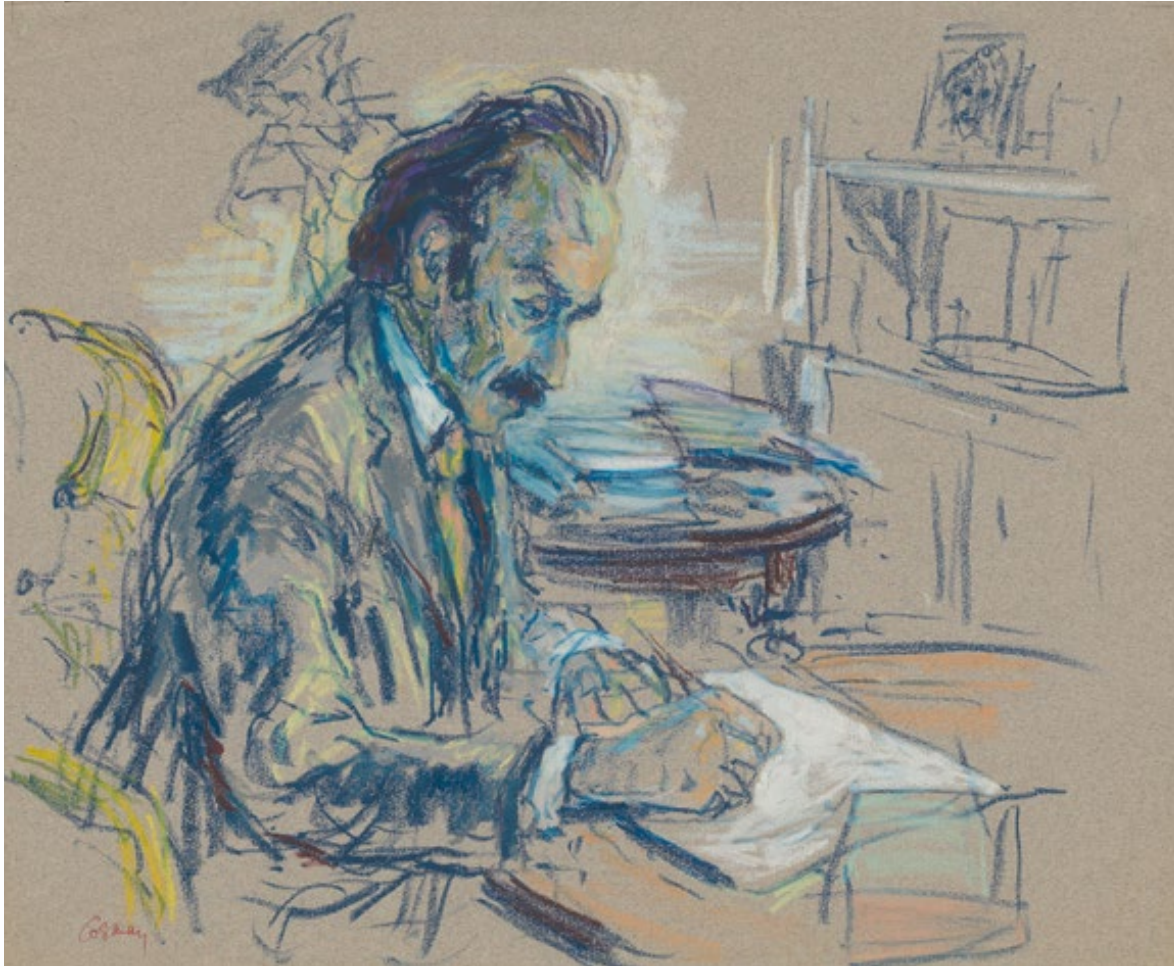
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Lorelei Rock, drypoint, c. 1995,
29,6 × 40,1 cm (sheet),
Akademie der Künste, Berlin,
Art Collection, DR 8403
(above)



Peter Paul Rubens: The Fall of
Phaeton, oil on canvas,
c. 1604–1605, 98,4 × 131,2 cm,
National Gallery of Art, Washington
(left)



Hans Keller at his desk, oil pastels
on grey wove paper, c. 1980s,
39×47 cm, Akademie der Künste,
Berlin, Art Collection, HZ 5387