

E. H. Gombrich, Obituary of Hans Tietze, Burlington Magazine, Vol. 96, 1954, pp.289-90 [Trapp no.1954G.1]

To the English-speaking public Hans Tietze (who was born in Prague in 1880 and died in New York in April of this year) was primarily known as an authority on Venetian painting, author of beautiful books on Titian and Tintoretto, and, jointly with his wife Erica Tietze-Conrat, of the standard work on Venetian drawings. Yet these late fruits of a long and crowded life represent only one phase and facet of Tietze's service to scholarship. The bibliography of his writings which was included in the essays in honour of his seventieth birthday in 1950, to be published in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, lists nearly 600 items. The first of these, an iconographic study of medieval picture cycles in Austria, came out exactly half a century ago. It had grown out of Tietze's activities in cataloguing medieval MSS. of Austrian monasteries. Trained in the austere historical discipline of Franz Wickhoff, whose assistant he became in Vienna, Tietze was soon attracted to otherwise neglected fields and periods of art history. Thus he proved a pioneer of Seicento studies in his fundamental paper on Annibale Carracci's *Galleria Farnese* which he published in 1906. In that year he joined the Austrian Commission for Historical Monuments and the next few years saw the publication, in rapid succession, of volume after heavy volume of the *Oesterreichische Kunsttopographie*. The experience he thereby gained in describing and assessing, almost singlehanded, the variegated art treasures of Austrian regions gave him that versatility and quick grasp of essentials that enabled him to lay the foundations of our knowledge of Austrian Gothic and Baroque in countless learned papers. For Tietze this era of a confident application of an orthodox technique culminated and ended with the publication in 1913 of his weighty handbook on *Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte*. With all its panoply of learning it betrays an inner crisis: the historian's means are given, but what are his ends? Does he simply aim at truth or should it not be a living truth, one which matters to his own generation?

This was the time when the Expressionist movement had burst on Vienna with the art of Kokoschka and his contemporaries. Tietze felt the fascination of the new vision which discovered unexpected values in the art of the past, but unlike other propagandists he refused to surrender the historian's integrity both in his art criticism and in his quest for a 'live' and truly topical form of art history. This fruitful, but sometimes torturing tension between Tietze the historian and Tietze the champion of contemporaneity was further increased by the war and its aftermath. In 1918, which saw the publication of one of his most beautiful books, the volume on Vienna in Seemann's *Berühmte Kunststätten*, the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy called him to action. The art treasures, once the heirlooms of the Dynasty, had to be safeguarded and made available to the new era. He accepted an appointment in the Ministry of Education and became involved in problems of reorganization of sales and purchases. The Barockmuseum in Vienna is perhaps the most lasting fruit of a period which ended with Tietze's resignation in 1925 and a bitter feeling that he had been defeated by the forces of bureaucratic stagnation. He had meanwhile been appointed to a (titular) professorship at Vienna University and so he returned to scholarship with new hopes and a changed outlook. What now mattered to him in history was to see living personalities of the past 'in the round' not as pawns of blind 'evolution', but as products of all the emotional and intellectual forces that impinge on a great artist. It was to test this quickening faith in *Geistesgeschichte* that he embarked, with his wife, on a new assessment of Dürer's work. From the first volume, *Der junge Dürer* (1928) they chose the form of a chronological catalogue of the entire oeuvre, paintings, prints, and drawings. This bold reconstruction of an artist's inner growth aroused some opposition on the part of entrenched specialists for its ruthless rejection of many traditional and recent attributions. But Tietze never regarded attributions as an end in themselves. To identify connoisseurship with art history, he once wrote, would be like confusing detection with jurisprudence. He gaily admitted the subjective element in the picture any scholar makes himself of one of the great figures of the past, but he considered it a

moral duty to free the image of a creative artist from the accretions and confusions brought about by the vanity of collectors and "the credulity of experts. It was from the study of Dürer that Tietze was led (after the completion of the monograph in three volumes) to the study of Venetian art which had been the favourite subject of his teacher Wickhoff. The great exhibitions of Titian and Tintoretto provided that topical impulse he needed for his historical imagination to catch fire. But together with these large projects he kept up a ceaseless activity as teacher, critic, local historian, and organizer of exhibitions. Exile, which overtook him at the age of 58, cut deeper into his roots than it did with most other scholars. Yet those who had the privilege of enjoying the Tietzes' hospitality in their New York home will remember with gratitude and affection that he had achieved that harmony between detachment and compassion for which he had struggled with such uncompromising integrity throughout a well-spent life.