

Beheading the Squatting N***

Decolonizing the Public Space

A Statue Is Beheaded

Prior to June 18, 2020, the destruction of a statue depicting a Black woman exhibited in public space had not yet occurred in Germany; to my knowledge, no such incidents have occurred anywhere else in Europe. This is due, on the one hand, to the simple fact that there are very few statues of Black women in spaces freely accessible to the public (apart from museums and art galleries),¹ and on the other to the fact that while a large number incorporating depictions of Black women do indeed exist in a European, and particularly German, art context, these are for the most part canonized works housed in protected spaces, be they museums, galleries, or private collections. Works of art depicting Black women are generally valued because they have already been recognized as art. In this context, one cannot, in the following investigation of an individual iconoclastic act, speak of a “reemerging iconoclasm.” As one in a series of iconoclasm that have occurred throughout the course of the post-colonial critique of colonialism in the western world, however, the case fits well in this collection of essays.

During the night of June 18, 2020, a life-sized statue of a kneeling woman, which I’ll refer to in this essay as *Squatting N**** (*Hockende N****), was beheaded by unknown vandals in Berlin’s Zehlendorf district (Fig. 1 a–b). The head was broken into two halves, the face and the back of the head (Fig. 1c),² and the statue covered in blue spray paint, particularly around the pedestal, which bears an inscription with the title and name of the sculptor, Arminius Hasemann (1888 Berlin–1979 Berlin). The sculpture was standing on a public strip of green in Leuchtenburgstrasse, opposite Hasemann’s former place of residence and near another of his works depicting a faun (Fig. 2). The head, which the vandals left lying on the ground next to the statue, was stolen after the crime and later recovered. The torso is currently in storage in the district’s Legal Office, separately from the head, which is held in the Parks Office. The whereabouts of the statue’s face are unknown. Both the *Faun* and *Squatting N**** were on display in the artist’s garden until Hasemann’s death in 1980, when, on a local initiative, they were moved to the site facing the sculptor’s parental home and residence, which was slated for demolition. A group of monkeys was donated to the Zoological Garden (see *Bildhauerei in Berlin*—Hasemann).³ In



1a Arminius Hasemann, *Squatting N**** (*Hockende N****), 1920s (after the destruction 06/18/2020)



1b Pedestal with blue painted inscription plate



1c Arminius Hasemann, *Squatting N****, detail: Back of the head (after the destruction 06/18/2020)

2000, thanks to the Zehlendorf local historical society and the funds they raised, the two figures were cleaned and signs created for the works.

Years had passed, and no one seemed bothered by the sight of *Squatting N**** and the *Faun*, which paid tribute to the sculptor and his former home and workplace. The *Squatting N**** became a political point of contention on August 7, 2019, however, when, at the prompting of the ISD (*Initiative schwarzer Menschen in Deutschland* or Initiative of Black People in Germany) and the *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* (Alliance 90/The Greens, a green political party in Germany), the district assembly (BVV) of Steglitz-Zehlendorf submitted a request for the removal of the statue from public space. The decision to comply with the request was made on January 22, 2020.⁴ In April of 2020, the director of the City History Museum Spandau, Dr. Urte Evert, received an inquiry asking if the statue could be included in the exhibition "Enthüllt" (Unveiled) at the Zitadelle, the District Museum in Spandau, which displays political monuments from Berlin that have been removed from public space because their history is considered offensive.⁵ Among the works shown here are the head of Nikolai Tomskey's statue of Lenin, the *Zehnkämpfer* (Decathlete) by Arno Breker, and the sculptures Wilhelm II commissioned for his "Siegesallee" (Victory Avenue) of Brandenburgian Prussian rulers. In June 2020, it was agreed that the *Squatting N**** statue would be relocated to the "Enthüllt" exhibition. Following the work's destruc-



2 Arminius Hasemann, *Faun*, circa 1920s, Berlin Zehlendorf

tion on November 10, 2020, the district assembly responsible, in Spandau, rejected the request that the *Squatting N**** be presented in “Enthüllt” and documented alongside the circumstances of the iconoclastic act. The destroyed sculpture had become a political issue, an *iconoclash* (Latour 2002) that ignited conflicting opinions about how to deal with images embodying racist statements. In absence of an agreement regarding how or whether the ruined figure should be displayed, it is currently being kept under lock and key (*Tagesspiegel*, July 9, 2020).

In the following, in order to understand this iconoclastic act and to assess how best to deal with the statue’s fragments, I will present various views on and interests in the case in an art historical and visual cultural investigation. The first aspect requiring clarification is the (art-) historical context of the sculpture at the time of its creation as well as its unusual iconography, which I would like to situate in the context of German colonialism. A subsequent step addresses the question of how the sculpture can be assessed in the current debate on national and global colonialism, which needs to be more thoroughly understood. A third point to consider is the local conflict, the fact that the statue became the focus of political contention between conflicting interests, an iconoclash (2002). The final point will deal with the statue’s future presentation.

The Sculpture’s (Art-) Historical Context

In stylistic terms, the sculptures *Squatting N**** and the *Faun* are closely related. Both are undated. The *Squatting N**** is depicted as a life-sized, scantily clad woman in a wrapped



3 Arminius Hasemann, *Squatting N****, circa 1920s, formerly Berlin Zehlendorf

garment whose nude upper body is gaunt, but whose arms and legs are markedly strong and muscular (Fig. 3). Her outsized arms are crossed, with the right hand resting on her opposite leg and the left hand holding a round fruit between her legs. Viewed from the side, what stands out are the hunched back and an exaggeratedly long and powerful neck, which merges into a countenance of coarse features and a receding forehead. She's wearing a turban-like headscarf and carrying a full pouch of water on her back; together with the fruit between her legs, it identifies her as a farm worker resting from her labor on the land. Stylistic features—a cross between Art Nouveau, with the graphic, linear curves in the folds of the fabric and the powerful limbs, and Expressionism, which emerges in the simplified shapes of the face and hands—suggest a date somewhere in the 1920s. Art historically, this was the Expressionist decade in Germany; politically, it was the time of the Weimar Republic, World War I, and, as a result of

the latter, the Versailles Treaty of 1919 and the end of German colonial rule. It's unknown who commissioned the statue, but a commission is likely, because the stone the statues are sculpted from, shell limestone, is costly (Lorenz 2000: 75). The sculpture's material and size indicate an intention to install the figure outdoors. Iconographically, the sculpture of the *Squatting N**** belongs in the context of paintings and sculptures representing Black people in Expressionist art, including those of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and Emil Nolde, to list only a few familiar names. It differs markedly from these artists, however, even beyond the subject matter. An iconography depicting the agricultural work of Black people, particularly women, is without precedent in Expressionist sculpture. At the most, there are drawings by artists like Max Pechstein, who sketched people harvesting taro on his 1914 expedition to the South Sea colony of Palau (Soika 2016: 80). There are no known sculptures by members of the *Brücke* in Dresden and Berlin depicting women farm workers, or of the *Blue Rider* in Munich, meaning that Hasemann's life-sized sculpture is an individual iconographic case requiring elucidation. The sculpture's visual and cultural historical context is multi-faceted. All over Europe, from the mid-nineteenth century, Black people from colonized regions and beyond were recruited for ethnological expositions, world fairs, and colonial exhibitions to simultaneously satisfy people's curiosity about "exotic" humans and to legitimize colonialism. African villages were built presenting recruited Africans engaged in everyday activities in order to demonstrate European progressiveness in comparison to people from Africa and other countries, who were denigrated as "primitive," as Hilke Thode-Arora describes the situation in the 1920s:

The people who were hauled off to Europe and presented to audiences as attractions served as examples of ethnic types and were intended to convey information about 'race.' (. . .) Visitors to human exhibitions wanted to 'discover' things, expected to encounter strange cultures and peoples, and reserved the right to make decisions about their bodies (. . .). Photographs missionaries had brought back with them, racist products and collectibles imported from the USA, as well as advertisements, comics, children's books, exotic novels, songs, toys, movies, plays, and 'blackface' performances by white people wearing make-up—the culture industry was teeming with garbled messages about African people. This distorted set of images, laden with historical and folkloric prejudice, was the mental baggage visitors brought with them to ethnological exhibitions; it was what prompted them to go in the first place, while at the same time creating the setting for the experiences the Black performers underwent in Germany. (Thode-Arora 2021: 140–141)

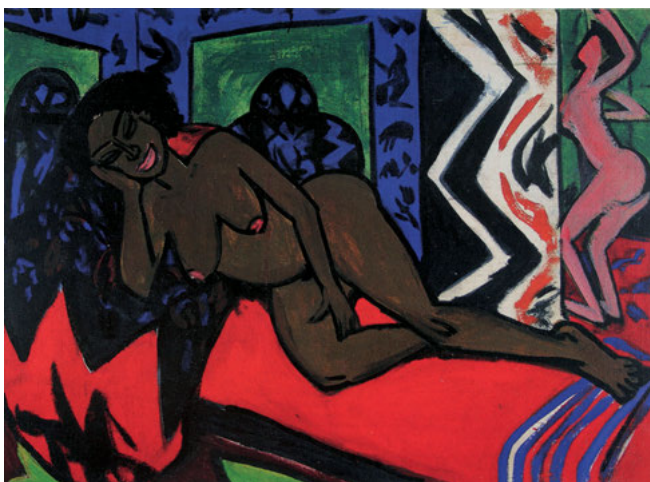
In Hamburg, when Carl Hagenbeck organized his first Völkerschau in 1874, it marked the beginning of the privately organized "crowd magnets" staged in most German cities. The first of two state-organized colonial exhibitions took place in Berlin in 1896 as part of the trade exhibition in Treptow (the show was titled "Zurückgeschaut," or a look back), followed by numerous private ethnological shows. "When selecting *individuals* for an ethnological exhibition, the most important criterion seemed to be appearance. Preference was given to those who most closely corresponded to a region's ideal anthropological type" (Thode-Arora 1989: 64). The idea was to display the spectacular physical strangeness of a largely "unacculturated 'original people'" in the

midst of a “picturesque-looking everyday life” (ibid.: 61). Thus, the racist and degrading view projected onto non-whites, which had prevailed throughout the entire Western world in the course of the nineteenth century in the interests of establishing a “white master race,” forms the frame of reference for ethnological exhibitions as well as for the *Squatting N****.

As mentioned above, the *Squatting N**** is depicted as a farm laborer. In his book *Arbeit in Afrika* (Work in Africa), the legal historian Harald Sippel examined a competition put on by the German East African Society in 1885 on the topic “What is the best way to educate Negroes to work on plantations?” (Sippel 1996; Schubert 2001: 65–119) Out of 64 essays, a prominent jury awarded prizes to two texts, one of them by the London merchant Hermann Bibo, which was published in 1887 as a monograph with the same title as the competition. In the course of its 46 pages, it explains the education of colonial peoples for the purposes of labor. In the colonies’ German-run plantations, cheap workers were to be trained for “civilization,” which was intended to serve as the “ethical and moral justification for the colonization of foreign peoples” (Sippel 1996: 315). Bibo’s text includes a passage describing how a plantation worker should be dressed:

In the case of the Negro as well as the Negress in tropical Africa, the upper part of the body must remain free during work. They also find stockings and footwear annoying; one gives to both sexes the Scottish ‘kilt’ made of cotton fabric, which is fastened around the body with no more than a belt (. . .). On the other hand, they require (. . .) a handsome and practical head-gear—that of the Roman Contadina, with a short folded veil of white calico lightly covering the neck, is fully sufficient for work in the fields. (Bibo 1887: 40)

The indigenous forced laborers were accused of being “averse to work,” “lazy,” and “indolent,” or, as Bibo writes, exhibiting a “natural tendency to idleness” (ibid.: 13). This derogatory image from colonial reality is also part of the sculpture’s context and the iconography of *Squatting N****. In 1910/1911, Brücke artists in Dresden invited Black people into their studios and photographed, drew, and painted them. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Erich Heckel depicted the artists recruited for the Schumann Circus with the American-sounding pseudonyms Sam, Milly, and Nelly as nude dancers, as a “Black Venus” or “Negro Couple” to provoke the prudish Wilhelmine Prussian society with the sexuality of Black people, which was imagined to be “unbridled” (Strzoda 2006: 78–95, Weikop 2018: 109–114, Kelly 2021: 156–161). The implementation of an iconography traditionally seen as belonging to high culture, such as Kirchner’s sleeping Venus (Fig. 4), shows the objectifying instrumentalization of the Black models for the rebellious artists’ own purposes: a Nietzsche-inspired rejection of the bourgeois aesthetics of “well-established older powers” and, as stated in the Brücke program of 1906, of “civilization” and “bourgeois ‘values’”. Not long before World War I broke out, this attention to nature, to exoticism, and to the so-called “primitive” forms of the artifacts coming from colonial territories and exhibited in ethnological museums was intended to initiate a “purification process” of culture many artists and intellectuals were demanding at the time. Although the pictures of Sam, Milly, and Nelly present body shapes and physiognomies with ‘racially’ identifying traits, it was certainly not the intention of the Brücke Expressionists to paint their figures with the contemptuous aesthetics



4 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Sleeping Milly* (*Schlafende Milly*), 1911, Bremen, Kunsthalle

that had been widespread in racial doctrines since the Enlightenment. In any case, there are no caricaturing racial features to be found in the physiognomy of Kirchner's *Sleeping Nelly*, as they were conveyed in a stereotypical manner in the racial discourses of the nineteenth century. The figures were supposed to provoke through their simplistic and exaggerated forms, but not be repulsive or ugly. Indeed, the intention of the art was to shock people by sexualizing 'foreign' naked bodies in such a way that viewers could witness racial prejudice being thwarted by their own sexual desire. Post-colonial Western art history argues that avant-garde artists are part of systemic racism in that they use colonialism for the purposes of their art precisely because, as in the case of *Schlafende Nelly* (*Sleeping Nelly*), it "reduces Black bodies to a locus of desire and enchantment" (Kelly 2021:159).

In contrast, Hasemann's *Squatting N**** does not show the Black body in the sexually charged way some of the Brücke artists use. The figure's secondary sexual characteristics, her breasts and buttocks—forms the Brücke artists overemphasized as big and round—are concealed in *Squatting N**** by the arms crossed in front of the upper body and by her seated position. The chest of *Squatting N**** is depicted as sunken or emaciated, as if to obviate a sexualized view. Instead, Hasemann gave the figure long, overly muscular limbs and a physiognomy endowed with features that have been delineated in racial discourses since the eighteenth century. Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1763) identified a European-centric ideal of beauty dating back to antiquity that defined a people—Winckelmann does not yet speak of 'race,' but of "peoples"—as a difference in form, and devalued the Black as "ape-like":

The flattened nose of the Kalmyk, the Chinese, and other distant peoples, is likewise a deviation: it interrupts the unity of the forms (. . .). The thick, pouting mouth that the Moors have in common

with the apes in their land is a superfluous growth and a swelling caused by the heat of their climate, just as our lips swell up from the heat or from sharp, salty moisture or, in some men, with violent anger. (Winckelmann 1763/2006: 194)

One integral part of the visual frame of reference for *Squatting N**** are the illustrated volumes with photographs taken in the colonies, which were particularly focused on the female body, as were the two tomes Albert Friedenthal published in 1911 containing 1,084 illustrations of undressed or partially undressed people:

With this work, it was my intention to write about the women of all peoples while paying special attention to their physical, mental, and spiritual characteristics. My knowledge is based on direct observation gained during 25 years of travel through most of the countries of the world and evaluated in anthropological and ethnological studies carried out over many years. (Friedenthal 1911: V)

The ethnologist Michael Wiener notes a “popularization of the ethnological subject (. . .), which subsequently appeared in an increasing number of illustrated volumes” (Wiener 1990: 75–76). At the beginning of the twentieth century, an interest in “early human history” emerged, and “ultimately, people believed that pictures from the lives of ‘savages’ and ‘primitives’ could be used to illustrate human history” (ibid.: 74–75). The interest in the everyday life of indigenous peoples at the beginning of the twentieth century apparent in the photographs is also evident in Hasemann’s sculpture. In viewing the images of agricultural and manual labor in the photo books, city-dwelling readers felt they were looking back at pre-industrial Europe, and interpreted this as a “sign of a disappearing world”: “While the ‘savage,’ otherwise denigrated as ‘primitive,’ experienced a new appreciation as the embodiment of a way of life that was disappearing in Europe but possessed lasting value and stood in contrast to the belief in progress that had dominated the early nineteenth century, it nonetheless remained only one element of an ideal expressed artistically in the picture,” one that did not, moreover, exert an ameliorative effect on aggressive colonial policy or on local ethnological research practices (ibid.: 161). Hasemann’s *Squatting N**** can therefore be interpreted as a work that symbolizes this retrospective view of humankind, in which notions about an original, primitive form of humanity living off its manual labor, embodied by a Black woman, blend with the realization that metropolitan industrial society had lost its former subsistence economy. The discovery of Neanderthal Man in 1856, whose “animal form” was sometimes explained as a “renunciation of God” in comparison with medieval concepts of the “Savage Man” (Auffermann/Weniger 2006: 184), goes hand-in-hand with the statue’s form, which carries racist connotations. The emergence of the “ancestors of modern humans,” particularly their physiognomy, interested anthropologists and artists alike, among them Amédée Forestier, who reconstructed the Neanderthals as “ancestors of anatomically modern humans” in 1911 according to Arthur Keith’s specifications (ibid.). “Consequently, we are presented with a Neanderthal who hardly differs from modern humans and has all the appearance of a thoroughly human creature—a strong, Stone Age culture bearer shown seated by the fire in his working and living environment” (ibid.: 185). On



5 *Crouching Venus*, 3th century B. C.,
Rom, Museo Nazionale Romano



6 *The Beauty* (1905) 3 (5), cover

the other hand, some ethnographers considered Neanderthals and people from non-European cultures to be “savages”.

Hasemann’s kneeling figure invokes the iconographic motif of the crouching Venus, a European ideal of female artistic beauty par excellence dating back to the visual art of antiquity (Fig. 5). Hasemann takes the ancient archetypal form of the goddess—who, surprised to discover people observing her bathing, suddenly realizes her nakedness and quickly tries to cover it in an elegant gesture—and vigorously reformulates it into a counter-image of a woman whose body is massive and coarse. The hunched back, the shoulders slumped despite their muscularity, the masculine-looking breasts, and other above-mentioned features of an “ugliness” summarily attributed to the “Moors” or “N****” in the racial discourses of the time, call for a comparison to the “crouching Venus”, which occupies a prominent place in the collective visual memory of the art-educated bourgeoisie and beyond. The cover image from 1905 of the magazine *Die Schönheit* (Beauty) (Fig. 6), which was published in connection with the German social reform movements, depicts the physical and artistic ideal the middle class worshiped and once again underscores the aesthetic difference in Hasemann’s sculpture, which devalues a cultural stage of humanity as ‘primitive,’ ‘savage,’ and ‘ugly,’ be it found in Africa or the Neanderthal. The effect that Hasemann’s *Squatting N***** had on viewers around 1920, the year it was presumably created, differs from the provocations of the Brücke and other Expressionist artists, whose works presented a frank and objectifying sexualization of Black people through an exaggeration



7 Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, *Blue-red Head (Panish Schrecken)* *Blauroter Kopf (Panischer Schrecken)*, 1917, Berlin, Brücke Museum

of female body forms, as discussed above. While the Expressionists, such as Kirchner, painted naked Black bodies in order to provide the bourgeoisie and the academic painting they subscribed to with a provocative counter-image, in the case of Hasemann, we can see a depiction charged with racism and contempt, which is reinforced by opposing it with the Western art motif of a woman named Venus canonized as “divinely beautiful.” In comparison with Venus and *Die Schönheit*, the *Squatting N**** becomes a caricature of Black people, in this case, the Black woman, as was part and parcel in the racial discourses of the Weimar Republic. The sculptor, by grossly exaggerating bodily and physiognomic features recognizable as “African,” thus reinforces racist defamation.

The statue’s counterpart, the *Faun*—whose half-human, half-animal figure stood during this period both for its licentiousness and its proximity to nature and hence distance to civilization—fits in with this racist, denigrating caricature of Venus and beauty (see Westermann 2017, Fig. 2). In Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), the satyr embodies the epitome “of a longing directed toward the primordial and natural,” as the Greeks viewed it, but by no means the likeness of a monkey that he accused his contemporaries of. On the contrary: “In comparison with him, the man of culture was reduced to a misleading caricature.” (Nietzsche 2008) Hasemann’s *Faun* purses his lips to whistle natural flute notes, while his goat’s face takes on the features of African masks, much in the way the expressionist Karl Schmidt-Rottluff interpreted them in 1917 in his *Blauroter Kopf (Panischer Schrecken)* (Remm 2018) (Fig. 7). Hasemann’s clumsy figure of the “bearded satyr” is certainly not a picture of the “true man (. . .)

who cried out with joy to his god” as Nietzsche portrays him (ibid.). On the contrary, Hasemann’s *Faun* becomes a caricature of the sublime figure that Nietzsche made into a paragon of the modern artist.

The Artist in Context

Hasemann was certainly not one of Nietzsche’s followers; nor did he count among the Expressionists or other avant-garde movements from the 1920s. His sculptural work addressed popular themes with the superior, parodic gaze that spoke to the bourgeoisie of the Weimar Republic and their racist nationalism. He was known for editions of his graphic art, specifically the woodcut series *Circus* (1920) and *Don Quixote de La Mancha* (1922), which were made possible by the success of his book *Himmel und Hölle auf der Landstrasse* (Heaven and Hell on the Road, 1915), an essentially trivial report on his wanderings as a young artist that failed to appear in any of the contemporary anthologies of vagabond literature. Right from the start, he introduces himself as a bohemian looking for a job without “pressure” and yearning for something greater: “I’ve always had respect for the large stone figures and ornaments on old buildings,” he writes, and suspects that the difficulties of creating such “enduring stone images” provided the impetus that drove him to sculpture. He recalls that his grandfather told him about Michelangelo, “whose name I had a lot of trouble pronouncing; I kept forgetting it” (Hasemann 1915/1922: 6), an echo of Marinetti’s *Manifesto of Futurism* (1910) resonates in his contempt for Italian art tradition which play no role in *Himmel und Hölle auf der Landstrasse*. Thus, the two figures’ oversized limbs address Michelangelo, whose “grandfatherly” art Hasemann doesn’t pay homage to but rather derides through caricatural exaggeration. In a foreword, the book’s anonymous editor, who induced Hasemann to “record his experiences,” expounds upon the artist’s journeys in unmistakable populist nationalist parlance. “Only Germans embark on journeys! And the power in those who wander can bring blessings to the German fatherland” (ibid.: VII). At the same time, the editor puts in a word for German colonialism, which was locked in competition with the French. Instead of fighting in the French Foreign Legion, he argues:

A German legion for the German colonies! That alone would be a lot of work. (. . .) Create a place for him [the German, C.K.] in the German colonies where no one asks where he comes from, but rather what he can do! And you will see how the German, the born soldier, gladly spills his blood for the fatherland instead of for a foreign people. (ibid.: VIII)

In keeping with this is the fact that Hasemann trained with the sculptor Hermann Volz (1847–1941) at the Großherzogliche Badische Kunstschule (Grand Ducal Baden Art School) in Karlsruhe in 1910–1912. “As an artist and teacher, Volz, one of the most successful sculptors of monuments in the monument-hungry nationalist period following 1871, embodied the nineteenth-century academic tradition.” (Schmidt 2012: 66)⁶

From that point on, Hasemann’s travel chronicle no longer recounts art historical concerns, but rather his encounters with various characters, for instance in Melilla on the African continent:

"People in brown robes and with brutish gestures, Negro boys, Spanish soldiers (. . .)" (ibid.: 152) He did not, however, utter a single word concerning German colonial rule in Africa. As a sculptor, Hasemann never became known outside Berlin. A native Berliner, he underwent academic training as a sculptor and graphic artist in Karlsruhe and Charlottenburg and adapted to Berlin's shifting political majorities or, as his sole biographer Detlef Lorenz notes:

Just a moment ago, he was still an active Nazi [1932 membership in the NSDAP, so-called 'cultural warden' (Kulturwart) in the local Zehlendorf chapter, C. K.]; now [following the end of the war, C. K.], Hasemann was drafted into the construction staff of the Red Army and was soon in a leading position, involved in building the Treptow Memorial (. . .), and a short time later in the reconstruction of the State Opera Unter den Linden. (Lorenz 2000: 79)

From Neighborhood Darling to Political Issue

It's no longer possible to explain why *Squatting N**** and the *Faun* remained in the artist's garden, given that the sculptures' size and material suggest they were commissions. One presumes a designated spot in Tiergarten, where ethnological exhibitions took place. But public interest in them had decreased and was no longer encouraged because the fear of "racial mixing," i. e., sexual contact between Germans and Africans, was too great on the part of the National Socialists, who criminalized it in 1940 (Aitken/Rosenhaft: 2013, 194–229; Dreesbach 2005: 25). What is certain is that the two statues in front of the artist's former home and studio had no more than a regional impact limited to the Steglitz-Zehlendorf area. When the *Squatting N**** was installed with funding from the cultural budget of the Steglitz-Zehlendorf district, it was probably not intended to honor a racist whose art was barely known in 1980 and whose National Socialist past people would have preferred to forget. In 1970, Hasemann was commissioned to create a bronze monument for Friedrich Ebert, another indication of the opportunistic attitude that had also led him to conceal his membership in the NSDAP (Archive CU 20). After the artist's death, the statues became the property of the Steglitz-Zehlendorf district (Archive CE 6). The neighbors' petition states that the two statues "can be saved from destruction" and "contribute to beautifying our street" (Archive CU 21 and 22) and was initiated as an art project. For years, nobody was bothered by the unapologetic racism of the *Squatting N****. People either passed by without noticing or acknowledged her with a glance of approval. The people of Zehlendorf, however, honored the pair of sculptures in 2000 with an inscription and cleaning paid for by public donations. In terms of image theory, *Squatting N**** was a "weak image" (Kruse 2017) that attracted no more than local attention.

The sculpture became a political issue on January 22, 2020, when the *Initiative Schwarzer Menschen in Berlin*, together with Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, secured its removal from the Steglitz-Zehlendorf district government. And it is precisely this fact that makes it a "strong image" in the terminology of image theory (Kruse 2017). The justification the cultural policy spokesman for the Greens offered, which led to the decision, was her portrayal as "naked, monkey-like, and simple-minded" and "strongly prone to conveying racist stereotypes. (. . .) In the framework of

exhibitions in the Ethnological Museum, an appropriate context could be created to explain and prevent racism.” (BVV Spandau 1471/V 1/22/2020). The desire to remove the sculpture coincides with two fatal attacks on Black people, William Tonou-Mbobda in Hamburg and Rooble Warsame in Schweinfurt. The men died under circumstances that have as yet to be clarified. The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, which eventually brought down dozens of monuments in the US and Europe to individuals accused of racism, particularly slave traders, coincided with the discussion over renaming Berlin’s Mohrenstrasse into Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Strasse, initiated by various Africa activists. On June 15, 2020, the monument to Bismarck, a dispute over whose colonial policy had recently broken out, was smeared with blood-red paint in Schleepark in Hamburg. In other words, mid-2020 saw an increased willingness to topple monuments, a reaction to systemic racism and the historical erasure of colonialism and the slave trade in Germany with violence against defamatory imagery. In the course of these events, *Squatting N**** was beheaded and covered in blue spray paint in Zehlendorf. I use the term “beheaded” here, because the unknown perpetrators had a particular intention in destroying the statue, which I will discuss in the following. In any case, the decapitation was aimed specifically at violently separating the head from the statue’s body.

Who did the act address, and who—apart from the members of the *Initiative Schwarzer Menschen in Deutschland*—had an interest in the sculpture being removed from public space? Did the iconoclastic act target a conception of art on the part of a Weimar Republic-era sculptor whose National Socialist past as an armed ‘cultural warden’ had since come to light (Lorenz 2000), but had not attracted attention until 2019? A white sculptor who presumed to depict a Black woman in such a way? Or was it aimed at German history and a reluctance to come to terms with the crimes committed against Black people during colonialism? The display, without commentary, of a nearly naked Black woman next to the figure of a faun, a creature considered to be licentious?

First of all, it should be noted that it wasn’t a monument that was toppled that day in Zehlendorf, on June 18, 2020—a work of art was vandalized in a criminal sense. Unlike in Bristol with the statue of Edward Colston (June 7, 2020), a slave trader; in London with the slaveowner Robert Milligan; or in Oxford with the statue of Cecil Rhodes, all of whom were men who had committed racist acts and were pushed off their pedestals in effigy by members of the Black Lives Matter movement (see Schieder in this volume).

So was the iconoclastic act, the statue’s decapitation, directed at the sculptor Hasemann and the work’s message, which was racist and insulting to Black people? In this case, it was the sculptor who was beheaded, with the statue as his surrogate. In this instance, the act should be considered in the context of renaming public streets and be ascribed to the Black Lives Matter movement, which addressed the German public in June of 2020 as a project collective with the website *tearthisdown.com*⁷. The collective, made up of the ISD, the artist group *Pengl*, and supported by the Berlin Zoff Collective for Visual Communication and the feminist performance collective *Swoosh Lieu*, called for “[reporting] remaining traces of colonialism” and located these on a map of Germany, in order to develop strategies to eliminate systemic racism in German society (*tearthisdown.com*). Under the keyword “mark,” the website asks its visitors: “Who is actually being honored, and for what? Criminals for crimes, that won’t do! Off with their heads,

down from their pedestals, cover them in paint, put a sign over them—there are many possibilities. But marking them is not enough, we’re looking for other ways. Many things can be a monument, and in case of doubt, floating in the water also works.” (ibid.)

The website of the project collective *tearthisdown.com* may have played a role in the statue’s decapitation—but its call for toppling monuments explicitly targets colonialism’s active criminals and not their victims! Was Hasemann a colonial criminal? On July 15, 2021, *Peng!* was found to be party to the vandalism perpetrated against the statue; due to their calls for property damage to objects embodying colonial content, the State Office of Criminal Investigations (LKA) in Berlin reported them to the Joint Center for Countering Extremism and Terrorism (GETZ) of the federal and state governments, as Niklas Schrader (Die Linke, MdA Berlin) established in a minor interpellation. Subsequently, investigations were opened against two members of *Peng!* due to “incitement to commit crimes according to § 111 of the Criminal Code (StGB)” (response to Interpellation No. 18/28239, August 10, 2021). The response confirms that the “investigating authorities are examining (. . .) whether a connection exists between the property damage perpetrated and the website’s published content.” (ibid.) Also listed here are “damage to property, Leuchtenburgstrasse” in a reference to the *Squatting N**** statue located on that very site. The decapitation action brought together very different energies of the iconoclashes of the year 2020 in a kind of flash point of which the beheading of *Squatting N**** in Zehlendorf was one part.

The question as to whether Hasemann should be described as a colonial criminal brings to mind the controversial debate over Emil Nolde held in Berlin in 2019 on the occasion of the exhibition “Emil Nolde—A German Legend. The Artist During National Socialism” at Hamburger Bahnhof. Nolde was a documented party member of the National Socialists (Soika/Ring/Fulda 2019). But while Nolde, Hasemann, and others were part of the criminal Nazi system, they should not be condemned as criminals according to the criminal code. Their works bear evidence to history; these are objects whose historical and political statements need to be researched and evaluated. Precisely this is the objective of this essay.

One fact that cannot be overlooked is that the ISD Berlin initiated the removal of the statue from public space in a democratic process and not in a call for iconoclasm. The request was introduced to the BVV Steglitz-Zehlendorf with the support of a political party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen). On January 22, 2020, it was decided there that the statue would be removed.

The AfD’s Interest in the Statue Fragment and the Exhibition “Unveiled”

On April 8, 2020—after the BVV decision at the local political level in Steglitz-Zehlendorf and prior to the beheading—*Squatting N**** was transformed from a neighborhood art project into a political monument in Berlin. On that day, Urte Evert, director of the Zitadelle district museum, in response to a request from the BVV Steglitz-Zehlendorf, expressed interest in including the sculpture in the exhibition “Unveiled,” where the story of *Squatting N****, as described above, could be appropriately documented and presented together with other statues removed for political reasons from Berlin’s public space. Immediately after the beheading, district councilor

Gerhard Hanke (CDU), as the chief decision-making authority over the district museum's program, decided not to include the statue fragment in the "Unveiled" exhibition. This decision ignited a political dispute over monuments that was largely fueled by the far-right political party Alternative for Germany (AfD), one that continues until 2023. On July 14, 2020, the political spokesman for culture, Dr. Dieter Neuenburg (AfD), wrote an open letter to Spandau's Mayor Kleebank in which he played down the statue's racist content as well as Hasemann's Nazi party membership and position as a "culture warden" as a "mindset alleged in retrospect [on the part of the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, C.K.]." Neuenburg saw the artist quite rightly "ostracized due to creations such as the *Squatting Negress* (. . .), with the National Socialists denouncing the style and subject as 'degenerate'" (Neuenburg (AfD), open letter from July 15, 2020). The fact that this was exactly the reason why the *Squatting N**** remained in Hasemann's garden is part of the statue's history: its expressionist caricaturing style is what made it suspicious in the eyes of the Nazis. A squatting N*** had no place in the "racially pure" stylistic ideal based on classical antiquity. It was probably Dieter Neuenburg's Facebook post of June 22, 2020, three days after the beheading and before his open letter, that made Gerhard Hanke decide not to exhibit *Squatting N**** in the citadel. Neuenburg had now vehemently posted his verdict on the artist and the statue in public. He also wrote about the act and the perpetrators as though there were facts available about them:

The work of art by Arminius Hasemann from the 1920s is considered an important example of Expressionism. An act of barbaric vandalism of this kind, modeled on similar actions in the USA and Great Britain, must not be tolerated. The spiritual instigators behind this act are the Greens, who already called for the sculpture to be sanded down in August 2019 because it allegedly perpetuated 'racist stereotypes.' The fact is, many important works of art from all periods could be branded in this way. This is cultural-historical iconoclasm without rhyme or reason. In this context, we must also examine a potential connection between the crime and the 'Black Lives Matter' movement. We demand that not only perpetrators such as those in Zehlendorf, but also politicians who have forgotten history and culture, be stopped at last in order to protect artistic freedom. (Neunburg (AfD), Facebook post from June 22, 2020)

Neuendorf quotes the *Berliner Morgenpost*: "Masked individuals bashed off the head of the bust of a 'negress,' presumably with a baseball bat. The state security police are investigating." (ibid.) Over the next few months, the AfD in the BVV Spandau campaigned for the statue to be included in the "Unveiled" exhibition on the grounds that the beheading should be documented as an act of vandalism on the part of the Black Lives Matter movement, a motion that has been repeatedly rejected (AfD applications, BVV Spandau).

The arguments of the AfD's cultural spokesman are a populist distortion and concealment of facts; the agenda is to repress Germany's colonial past and deny the sculpture's racist statement while declaring it to be great art. Before post-colonial criticism accused it of being a blind spot in German art history, this argument was applied to the reception of well-known Expressionist artists such as Nolde. The intention of the AfD, however, is not to contribute to clarifying colonial art history, but to blame their political opponent, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, for

the iconoclastic act and claim that the victims of racism are the perpetrators. The fact of the matter is that to date, authorities have been unable to identify either the perpetrators or the instrument used in the crime. The blue paint damaging the sculpture and its inscription—the hue of which is identical to the AfD’s signature party color—is conspicuous, however. The AfD’s fierce reaction to the iconoclastic act must be interpreted as a rejection of a democratic process in which it has no particular interest: the decolonization of the city of Berlin (*Junge Freiheit*, June 25, 2020). According to Martin Steltner, spokesman for the Berlin Public Prosecutor’s Office, “the perpetrators have not been caught and there is no prospect of them being identified.” (Phone call with Martin Steltner on August 19, 2021)

Where to Put the Fragments?

The fact that the statue fragments are currently stored in different locations in the Steglitz-Zehlendorf district testifies mainly to the contentious nature of the post-colonial debate, especially in Berlin, Germany’s capital. It’s a debate that has only just begun. As long as the statue remains invisible—and not, as was called for, publicly shown in the exhibition “Unveiled” as both a historical testimony to colonialism and racism in Germany and as a postcolonial object of decolonization—the question remains as to how colonialism and racism are to be adequately documented and presented. In the light of this essay—and this should be considered carefully by those who hold political responsibility—, keeping the statue fragments under lock and key will go down in the history of the *Squatting N**** as yet another example of post-colonial iconoclasm. To not show them amounts to concealing colonialism and racism and thus perpetuating it. In an article in the *Tagesspiegel*, Tahir Della (ISD) makes a case for a contextualized exhibition. He “welcomes the decision of the Spandau district office,” but thinks something has to be done with the statue. Just “showing it without a concept doesn’t make much sense,” he said. The question remains: what does one want to present to the viewer? He states that he’s available for discussion, but the district office has not yet contacted him. Della would also welcome a plaque on the Zehlendorf site; he wouldn’t destroy the object. “We have to find a way to address it.” (*Tagesspiegel*, July 9, 2020)

Translation: Andrea Scrima

Notes

- 1 Paz Sanz Fle, a white Spanish artist living in the Netherlands since 1989, creates life-sized clay statues depicting Black women, which are installed in public parks. While their presence has provoked discussions relevant to my own observations, I will not go into them here. As far as I know, none of these works have to date been destroyed. (www.pazsanz.nl)
- 2 According to the inscription, the statue was called “Squatting Negress,” a title I’d prefer to avoid here to resist perpetuating colonialism’s racist derogatory terms.

- 3 See a selection of Hasemann's visual works on the website <https://bildhauerei-in-berlin.de/creator/hasemann-arminius/> (accessed 04/13/2022).
- 4 Minutes of the Steglitz-Zehlendorf BVV of August 7, 2019 (request) and January 22, 2020 (decision).
- 5 According to e-mail correspondence with Dr. Evert on 05/27/2021. On the exhibition, see <https://www.zitadelle-berlin.de/museen/enthüllt/> (accessed 06/30/2022).
- 6 Volz was present at the "First German Art Exhibition" in 1937 with the small bronze *Orestes, den Furien entfliehend* (Orestes Fleeing the Furies). He was a teacher to other artists included in the exhibition (Schmidt 2012: 92, 127). Hitler purchased the Volz bronze *Jugend* (Youth), which was also on view in the exhibition (<http://www.gdk-research.de/de/obj19401958.html>).
- 7 At last access 08/30/2022 the website was no longer available, the link is considered broken.

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