

Matter, in our view, is an aggregate of “images.” And by “image” we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*, – an existence placed half-way between the “thing” and the “representation.”

Henry Bergson, *Matter and Memory*

Architecture as Memory:

Gothic Ruins in the Work of Lyonel Feininger, 1928-1953

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At first glance the cold, windy beaches north of the Baltic Coast would not top the list of coveted vacation destinations. But it is here that Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956) returned every summer from 1924 until 1935—a little village of Deep in Pomerania, now part of Germany. By then Feininger was already a renowned artist on both sides of the Atlantic, his native New York and his adopted home Berlin, as well as a key figure in German expressionism and one of the founders of the Bauhaus. Lux, one of Feininger’s sons, describes the choice of location for the family’s annual trips with an unassailable measure of surprise: “Eine unerwartete Wendung, eins von den Vorkommnissen, die man mangels eines besseren Begriffs einen Zufall nennt, richtete die Aufmerksamkeit meiner Eltern auf Deep, dessen Lage auf der Landkarte nicht allzu einladend aussah.” (“An unexpected twist, one of those events, which for lack of a better word is

called a coincidence, drew my parents' attention to Deep, whose location on the map did not look too inviting.”¹

In other letters, Lux Feininger paints an uninviting picture of the rugged landscape from his childhood memories:

An Stelle des reichen Segelschiffverkehrs von den Vorkriegsjahren fand er einen verlassenenen, ich möchte sagen einen wilden Strand, viel Sturmwetter, Einsamkeit. [...] Dies waren zunächst Enttäuschungen. Selbst das friedliche Lagern am Strand, an welches mein Vater von früher her gewohnt war, war nur selten zu haben. (Instead of the busy traffic of sailing ships of the pre-war years he found a deserted, I would even say a wild beach, lots of stormy weather, loneliness. Instead of the smooth sea in Lee von Usedom, the open coast, exposed to the prevailing west wind, where the thundering surf could be heard nearly every day. [...] These were initially disappointments. Even the peaceful lounging on the beach, to which my father was accustomed, was seldom available.)²

And yet unexpectedly Deep becomes one of the most persistent leitmotifs of Feininger's oeuvre, rivaled in the number of works produced only by his depictions of the church at Gelmeroda.³ An obvious question arises: what drew Feininger to return to this location year after year? It is only in looking directly at the works that the answer starts to emerge.

July 11, 1928, the first encounter, drawing.

It is now the Feiningers' fifth summer in Deep. The artist reserved three months of every summer for drawings and watercolors as a break from easel paintings, his focus for the rest of the year.⁴ By now he becomes familiar with his surroundings, his sketchbooks filled with drawings of stormy seascapes and sailboats passing by in the distance.

¹ Lux Feininger, "Lyonel Feininger in West-Deep," *Baltische Studien*. MS Ger 146-MS Ger 146.3, MS Ger 146 [Translations throughout the paper are my own.]

² Feininger, "Lyonel Feininger in West-Deep."

³ William S. Lieberman, *The Ruin by the Sea* (New York: Museum of Modern Arts, 1968), 5.

⁴ Laura Muir and Lyonel Feininger, *Lyonel Feininger* (Ostfildern, Germany: Harvard Art Museums, 2011), 27.

On July 11, 1928, Lyonel and his eldest son Laurence take a walk into the nearby village of Hoff and discover the ruins of a Gothic church perched off a cliff. Later they will learn that this church stood there as early as 1331. “When its vault, originally built on Gothic arches, collapsed in later years, the building was bricked over and a wooden roof added. [...] It retained only the Gothic windows of the choir. [...] When Feininger saw it, only the south wall and a portion of the choir remained standing.”⁵

Lyonel Feininger described this initial encounter in a letter to his wife Julia:

Far away, at the highest and steepest point stood something puzzling. There on top of the edge of the precipice, and without a doubt doomed to perdition, stood the ruins of a church. I was completely mystified. I made sketches, and visions of pictures arose in my mind. Successively as we approached, apertures revealed buttresses, and at last a row of beautifully shaped arched window-openings in the Gothic style came into view. It all seemed so magnificent, and full of magic.⁶

During this first encounter, Feininger makes a number of quick drawings in his sketchbook.⁷ Most striking are the drawings made from the right side. The artist starts at a medium distance from the ruins (Fig. 1). The cliffs take up roughly half of the sketchpad, with the church perched on top—a cursory suggestion of the verticality and flatness of the wall and pointed arches of the openings that used to be windows. Then in the next drawing (Fig. 2), the scale expands wider, the camera slowly moves into a panoramic shot of the surroundings—now the sandy beach under the base of the cliff opens up, on it Laurence sits by the seaside gazing into the Baltic coast. Then finally, in the most zoomed-out snapshot (Fig. 3) the vastness of sand and the sky take up most of the space, the church melts into the cliff, barely distinguishable from

⁵ Lieberman, *The Ruin by the Sea*, 4

⁶ July 11, 1928 letter from Lyonel Feininger to Julia Feininger. MS Ger 146-MS Ger 146.3, MS Ger 146.1, (1234-2428).

⁷ At least eleven drawings were dated as 7.11.1928 in Moma’s collection, it is possible more drawings exist in other collections.

the background. Laurence's figure is now also but a speck on the beach, just like one of the rocks lying nearby. Feininger erases the border between objects man-made and natural.

It is impossible to know which drawings Feininger made first—whether he starts close and moves into the distance, or vice versa, or maybe even mixes and matches coming closer and further for each drawing, and yet when looking at the sketches it is irresistible to see them as pages in a flipbook.⁸ The viewer is pulled to move from the closeup where the church and the cliff appear as separate entities, towards the point at which both the church and Laurence become indistinguishable from the surroundings, the landscape swallowing up the detail. The images lend themselves so well to a cinematic sequence, a slow pan of the camera from a zoom-in of the ruins into the distance, which introduces another dimension of the works—temporal. As the eye moves along the sketches time and space mold into one.

The idea of a continuous flow of time and space is at the core of the work of the philosopher Henri Bergson. His conception of reality rejects a static single viewpoint and instead sees objects as constantly changing in the temporal and spatial flux. Bergson is credited with laying the philosophical framework for the Cubist movement and prompting artists to experiment with depicting objects from different vantage points.⁹ His foundational text, *Matter and Memory*, was first translated into English in 1911, and some scholars conjecture that Feininger may have read it.¹⁰ Feininger underwent his own Cubist phase, especially between 1918-1921 when he analyzed the Gothic form in Cubist terms in a series of sixteen woodcuts (including the famous

⁸ Feininger made at least 6 drawings from this angle, all of varying distances from the ruins, which furthers the panoramic zoom-out effect. I did not include all of them for the sake of brevity.

⁹ Martha Langford, Martha, *Narratives Unfolding: National Art Histories in an Unfinished World* (McGill-Queen's Press, 2017), 88.

¹⁰ Barbara Haskell, Lyonel Feininger, and John Carlin, *Lyonel Feininger: At the Edge of the World* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2011).

Bauhaus logo, Fig. 4).¹¹ Thus, by the time Feininger discovers the ruins of Hoff in 1928 he already spent years grappling with the Gothic form as a way to represent the relationship between the past and present in non-linear terms.

Already on this very first day, the new site—ruins of a Gothic church—becomes infused with motifs that will persist in Feininger’s depictions of this location for decades to come. Right away he saw everything in these abandoned ruins—repetition, time, history, and his own place in it.

August 6, 1928, Ruine am Meere I, ink.

The summer of 1928 when Feininger first discovered the ruins in Hoff will turn out to be the most fruitful for his depictions of the church—in pencil and a month later in ink.¹²

Feininger’s next encounter with the church happens on August 6, and this time he changes its materiality entirely.¹³ For the first time, he translates the ruins into another medium, something that later becomes key in his reconstructions of the ruins. The drawings from August 6-8, 1928 are made in ink and pen on paper (Fig. 5). The perfectly straight lines of the sky, cliffs, and the walls of the church suggest just as much—in their measured meticulous strokes they recall architectural blueprints, a far cry from plein air rough sketches from July. In its focus on the parallel lines inscribing the church into its larger ambient, this drawing recalls the Bauhaus-era woodcuts depicting architecture (Fig. 4). Here, again, the image fuses Bergsonian

¹¹ Lyonel Feininger, letter from 1913. MS Ger 146-MS Ger 146.3, MS Ger 146.1, (1234-2428); Langford, *Narratives Unfolding*, 87.

¹² If we are to judge from public collections, it is unidentifiable how many of these drawings were sold to private collectors.

¹³ On one of the drawings from the first encounter on July 11 (Fig. 1) he makes a handwritten note stating that he came back to the location on July 28th with his other son Andreas, but there are no separate drawings from that day (again, based on the public collections).

past and present into one—architects make renderings for buildings of the future, those that have not happened yet, rather than ruins of the past.

For the first time, Feininger names the scene: *Ruine am Meere i* (*Ruin by the Sea 1*) which suggests remarkable foresight on the part of the artist. He already knows that this ink drawing is part of a larger series, that he will continue returning to the same motif. The next day, August 7, *Ruine am Meere ii* emerges, and on yet the next, August 8th, he already draws *Ruine am mere V*, all in ink.¹⁴ The name will also become a testament to Feininger’s organization and consistency—he will use the same name for all the numerous depictions of this motif for the rest of his life.¹⁵

The paper for this drawing is more than twice as large as the pocket sketchbooks used for the first pencil drawings, so these drawings were likely completed not on the walk but from his desk. In fact, Feininger does not come back to plein air drawings of the ruins ever again after that first encounter in July 1928. He completes the rest of his depictions of the church from memory at his desk (Fig. 6). This separation between being physically present on-site and recreating a location from memory in his drawings is key in understanding Feininger’s work. He explained that distinction to his wife Julia in another letter from Deep: “The transcendental formation of space in the picture makes it possible to have an impression of that which was experienced that is equivalent. I currently don't get round to composing, I'm in a period of reception and I'm focused wholly on that. Once I am removed and in a different location, the re-experiencing then comes to me in the only possible form of recreation: that of the picture.”¹⁶

¹⁴ The remaining (III, IV) must be missing from Moma’s collection.

¹⁵ Except that later he will translate it into English.

¹⁶ July 7, 1924 letter from Lyonel Feininger to Julia Feininger. MS Ger 146-MS Ger 146.3, MS Ger 146.1 (1234-2428).

August 20, 1929, Composition for painting, charcoal.

Next year the Feingers return to Deep. And again, the ruins reappear—this time in charcoal.¹⁷ The change in the mood from 1928 is striking. The tones here become darker, more ominous, the church blends into the background. The first drawing from this year, labeled *Composition for Painting: Ruin on the Cliff*, looks like a foreboding of an impending disaster. Lux's description of the ruins appears particularly fitting for this charcoal sketch: "Ein eindrucksvolleres Monument der Verlassenheit läßt sich nicht vorstellen." ("A more impressive monument of abandonment cannot be imagined.")¹⁸ When looking at this drawing with contemporary eyes, it feels inevitable to recall the events unfolding on the global arena at the time. Historians call 1929 "a turning point" in the history of the Weimar Republic, a period when anti-democratic sentiments started to heat up, prompted by hyperinflation and unemployment of the Great Depression.

Perhaps this sense of economic instability is what drove Feininger to shelve his desire to use the summer as a break from oil painting—the main source of income for his family, which was frequently sporadic and insufficient even in the best of times.¹⁹ Thus at this time of financial calamity Feininger can no longer afford to spend the entire summer making leisurely sketches for his own pleasure. The artist is back at work, in search of an angle for an oil painting, which will be completed the following year. The sketch he chooses is also called *Ruine am Meere II*, just like the pencil drawing from the previous year.²⁰ Feininger writes the title in English for the first

¹⁷ Moma's collection only has two drawings from this year—from August 20 and August 21.

¹⁸ Lux Feininger, "Lyonel Feininger in West-Deep."

¹⁹ Despite being one of the most popular artists in Germany Lyonel Feininger was always on the precipice of financial trouble – Julia in her letters over the years frequently mentions their financial instability, having to rely on sporadic unpredictable commissions. MS Ger 146-MS Ger 146.3, MS Ger 146.1, (1234-2428).

²⁰ Feininger's numbering on all the works from Hoff never augments beyond 1-5, instead the numbers restart every time he takes up this motif after a break. It is as though in his recreations of the same ruins he restarts a miniseries of 5 drawings every time.

time, as if rejecting his adopted second language in a time when the country's politics started to put the livelihood of his family in jeopardy.

1930, oil.

Despite the anxieties prompted by global unrest Feininger manages to find a cheerful tone. The colors of the painting recall a letter he wrote to his wife during his first year in Deep: “The western sky was green and yellow and marvelously luminous after the violent thunderstorm [...]—and the sea, as we came over the dunes, was golden, only more copper in colour than the sky, which was greenish.”²¹ This oil painting appears to be an imaginative interpretation of what the church could have looked like in the past—the artist reconstructs the ghost of the rest of the wall on the right, the rays of light emanating from the arches and restoring them to their Gothic splendor. This backward-looking image becomes the most optimistic and elated of the entire series.²²

This nostalgia for a medieval scene he could not have witnessed first-hand yet again recalls the Bergsonian framework of time. Unlike Descartes who distinguished the spirit from the body, Bergson argued that the distinction lies only in the temporal domain.²³ While the body remains in the present, the spirit lives in the dominion of the past: “to have or take consciousness of anything, means looking at it from the viewpoint of the past, in light of the past.”²⁴ This

²¹ 28 June 1924 letter from Lyonel Feininger to Julia Feininger. MS Ger 146-MS Ger 146.3, MS Ger 146.1, (1234-2428).

²² In my research I came across mentions of other oil paintings of the same motif, particularly one from 1940 seen in a photograph by Lux at the Harvard Art Museums <https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/27802> and another one which appears to have been sold to a private collector <http://www.artnet.com/artists/lyonel-feininger/untitled-ruin-on-the-cliff-ygzvJ7n30Bi0hnWlNtwlLw2>. Lux also mentions an “unfinished” oil painting in one of his letters, but I could not find more information on any of these paintings.

²³ Henri Bergson, M. E. Dowson, and Nancy Margaret Paul, *Matter and Memory* (London, New York: Allen & Co., Macmillan Co., 1919), 29.

²⁴ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 127.

retrospective gaze becomes not only central to Feininger's philosophy, it seeps into his working process as well. It is another reminder of Feininger's preference for completing his paintings from his desk, removed from his subject, as he believed that physical proximity bound him too closely to its literal appearance.²⁵

Thus, for Feininger reinterpreting a physical monument from his desk becomes his means of connecting the Bergsonian present (physical) and past (memory)—oil painting his preferred mode of transportation. Feininger encapsulates this process of moving from something more tentative in the charcoal sketch of 1929 toward something clear, embodied in the oil painting of 1930 in one of his letters:

[I]n the medium of charcoal I have discovered a great relationship with pure painting. Jotting down one's first nebulous, chaotic conceptions, one gradually can work... through to firm ground and precise form. That which has been halfway indicated is open to further evolution. Nothing is quite definite until it has reached final clarity in the finished painting in oil.²⁶

This painting was originally bought by a collector in Berlin, where it stayed throughout the war. Many of the works that Feininger left behind in Germany were either destroyed as “degenerate art” or lost, making it a miracle that this painting survived. In 1966 MoMA purchased it, partially with funds provided by Julia Feininger. Thus 1966 becomes another crucial point in the kaleidoscopic flux of Bergsonian time encoded in this painting. The moment when Julia saw the painting's return to New York, three decades after their departure from Germany and a decade since her husband's passing, made of it simultaneously a memory of the past and yet something physical, embodied in the present.

1934, Ruine am Meere II, watercolor.

²⁵ Lieberman, *The Ruin by the Sea*, 5.

²⁶ June 4, 1932, letter from Lyonel Feininger to Julia Feininger. MS Ger 146-MS Ger 146.3, MS Ger 146.1, (1234-2428).

Despite continuing to come back to Deep every summer, Feininger does not return to painting the ruins for four years.²⁷ In the meantime, the Nazi threat grows throughout the continent, and Bauhaus gets shut down under political pressure. The police start to repeatedly appear at Feininger's studio, monitoring for unlawful undertones in his work.²⁸

Then finally in the summer of 1934, Feininger paints a watercolor he named *Ruine am Meere II*, using that title at least a third time around (after works in charcoal and ink). That summer he recreates the ruins several times in watercolor as well as in yet another new medium—colored pencils (Fig. 10).²⁹

In this work, Feininger uses the same hues on the walls of the church as on the cliff supporting it. The border between where the foundation of the church ends and where the cliff begins disappears. These motifs eventually become signature of Feininger's oeuvre—melting of architecture into the landscape, or not distinguishing between natural and man-made elements. Thus this description of the woodcut Feininger created for the Bauhaus (Fig. 4) can be equally applied to most of his architectural depictions – *Red Fiddler* (Fig. 11), or *The White Man* (Fig. 12), or these sketches from Deep: “the building here is hardly “rendered” as architecture but is presented as a dynamic figure, harmonious and yet asymmetrical, in vibrating interaction with its environment. The building, the putative “figure” in the composition, is notably unrelieved in relation to the dynamic, pulsing “ground.” The building's openings especially—the doors, windows, and flying buttresses-produce patterns of light and dark that knit the building to earth and sky. [...] The treatment suggests an extendable logic of fractal embedding. The various arts

²⁷ At least as far as I can tell from the public collections.

²⁸ Haskell and Carlin, *Lyonel Feininger: At the Edge of the World*.

²⁹ Other similar watercolors can be found in private collections. The second work from 1934 is made on July 17 in colored pencils, yet another medium, along with another pencil sketch of the same motif. Pictorially it is a return to the first encounter, a rushed sketch of a man on a walk. It is likely the artist indeed made it en plein air, as both of these are made on paper of the same size and type as the first drawings from 1928. Perhaps it was an attempt to return to something lost in 1928.

are integrated and embraced in the composite structure (Gropius's "*vielgliedrige Gestalt*" or "Multifaceted Gestalt"), which is itself integrated into larger, cosmic rhythmic patterns."³⁰

With this watercolor Feininger returns to his Cubist experimentations of deconstructing physical space—the sky only exists where the line of the nonexistent roof carves it out in the picture plane. The cliff only exists where it merges with the base of the ruins. On both sides of the church, as well as in the apertures of extinct windows, there is nothing at all. Space, and, as a consequence, time, stopped. Perhaps it is something that the artist may have wished to be able to do during this tumultuous period.

1935, unsigned, untitled, charcoal.

Lyonel Feininger, known for the meticulous organization of his work, does not date, sign, or label this charcoal sketch.³¹ Only a mysterious "X" looms in the bottom left corner.³² And although Feininger's sketches never look entirely "finished", these charcoal drawings feel particularly incomplete, undefinable. Is it a fire in the building? Is it an incoming storm? Bergsonian space continues to break down, slipping away through the fingers.

The next sketch Feininger names in English (Fig. 14)—*The Ruin on the Cliff*. Looking at this sketch we experience déjà vu—it becomes a variation on the sequence heard before—1928 pencil, 1929 charcoal—repeated 7 years later—1934 pencil, 1935 charcoal. Again, these dark charcoal sketches become reminiscent of the apprehension of the charcoals of 1929. Throughout

³⁰ Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 245-246.

³¹ "Lyonel Feininger maintained a master file of his prints. His etchings were kept in a modest string portfolio on the cover of which were a series of labels. One read. "Collection Julia and Lyonel Feininger": the next was marked, "Only woodblock prints," and was crossed out; the third had "Feininger" in block letters; and the last said, "Etchings." The woodcuts were organized in matboard-type folders, hinged at the side, and arbitrarily numbered, "Parcel 1" through "Parcel 9." In addition, there was a large black case of oversized woodcuts between glassine tissues." – Cole Jr., *Rare Prints: 100 Etchings and Woodcuts from the Artist's Estate*, 27

³² Probably meaning it is number X in a series, the rest now lost or sold to private collectors.

his letters Lux refers to this year as “üblen Jahr 1935”—the “miserable” 1935.³³ The artist described this year’s visit to Deep in even more anguished hues:

...jetzt ist es mit Deep endgültig aus- und tot! [...] [Ich] hatte einen kleinen Schwatz mit dem braven alten Förster (Hegemeister) - es tat gut, die Ansicht eines wirklichen Mannes zu hören über das, was die Nazis Deep antun - die Arbeiter müssen nach Befehl handeln, aber es besteht keine Sympathie. Laurence und ich gehen immer noch „Ost” - denn nach West trauen wir uns gar nicht, dort ist für uns die Stätte, wo am meisten unser Deep gemordet wird...” [...]... Laurence und ich halten die Totenwache am geliebten, nun gestorbenen Deep...(..now it's finally over and dead with Deep! [...] I had a little chat with the good old forester (Hegemeister) - it was good to hear a real man's view of what the Nazis are doing to Deep - the workers must act according to orders, but there is no sympathy. Laurence and I still go "East" - because we don't dare to go West at all, there for us is the place where our Deep is murdered the most...” [...] Laurence and I walk as if in a territory surrounded by invisible walls - we just want to avoid overwriting old memories through seeing all the defacements. The whole fairytale forest and dune area is gone, where you went with Andreas and we both went so often - to the "clearing" and beyond. No, I don't regret that you don't have to see this devastation now...Laurence and I keep the wake on the beloved, now deceased Deep.)³⁴

These lines cry out with the sense of funereal finality, something irrevocably lost. But, as Bergson would argue, it is only Deep’s physical presence that vanishes in the departure, while its memories will remain in Feininger’s psyche unperturbed for the rest of his life.

1953, Church on the Cliff, pen ink watercolor and charcoal.

Most of us take the safety of national borders and our place enclosed within them, for granted. And although, incomprehensibly, having to leave your entire life behind due to fears of war is still the reality for millions of people in 2022, most of us possess the privilege of never experiencing such displacement firsthand. Thus, it is almost impossible to imagine what it would be like to involuntarily leave a country after fifty years of life there. But luckily, although the

³³ Lux Feininger, “Lyonel Feininger in West-Deep.”

³⁴ 1935 letter from Lyonel Feininger to Julia Feininger. MS Ger 146-MS Ger 146.3, MS Ger 146.1, (1234-2428).

Feiningers' return was prompted by political pressure, it was still a homecoming, as the artist reunited with his whole family in New York in 1937.³⁵

In the first few years after his return, Feininger experiences a creative block.³⁶ The dense urban space of New York City lies as far away as one can go from the wild unruliness of the Baltic Coast. Eventually, he starts painting again and even adopts the modern architecture of New York as his chosen subject. But he does not forget about the little church in Hoff either. In 1953 he comes back to the ruins, for the first time in four different media in one sketch (pen, ink, watercolor, and charcoal), using them as building blocks to reconstruct the church from the ground up. As a result, for the first time he titles it *Church* on the cliff, not simply *Ruins*, as in previous works. Twenty years after his last visit to Deep, Feininger completes the construction of his Gothic cathedral, at least in his memory.

Paradoxically, the building looks the least complete of all his depictions of the site. It is a ghost of a church, a dream-like mirage. The distinction between the background and the church vanishes, only the gaping holes of the windows. The stark contrast between highlights and shadows recalls the charcoal sketches from 1935—the last summer he saw the ruins in person.

This image appears simultaneously backward-looking, a distant memory, and forward-looking—depicting what will eventually happen to the church as the time will make it vanish into dust. Lux later writes: “Wieder und wieder gemalt, nicht seinerzeit, nicht an Ort und Stelle, sondern Jahrzehnte später, zwischen den Wolkenkratzern von New York - dies sind die Entdeckungen, die an Stelle des Erhofften traten.” (“Painted again and again, not at the same time, not on the spot, but decades later, among the skyscrapers of New York—these are the

³⁵ He returned to the United States for the first time in 1936. Ulrich Luckhardt, *Lyonel Feininger* (Munich, Germany: Hirmer Verlag GmbH, 2019), 37.

³⁶ Luckhardt, *Lyonel Feininger*, 48.

inventions that replaced what was hoped for.”)³⁷ In this watercolor Feininger feels nostalgic both for the past that he saw, and for the future of what the church will become which he will never see. And yet, as Bergson would argue, the physicality of the drawing is what roots it deeply in the present moment.

How is one to examine an artist’s life? We may pore over his letters and journal entries, trace historical events surrounding his life, or analyze the critical reception of his works. Yet after having read through hundreds of letters and diaries from Feininger’s archives, I found the most eloquent “documents” to be in charcoal, pencil, and ink. The sketches from Hoff emerged as the most enduring witnesses, unraveling the richness of Feininger’s life and legacy. Progressing through time and changing medium like variations on a theme, the works transformed into uncanny records of disasters of war, expatriation and return, the non-linearity of time itself. These sketches also told a more personal story—that of his family, his lifelong partnership with Julia, the tireless keeper of his works, a search for artistic freedom and a sense of belonging in an uncertain world. This sentiment was best expressed by Feininger’s son Lux: “Über das, was den Aufenthalt eines Malers in einer bestimmten Ortschaft oder Landschaft wesentlich macht, müßten eigentlich seine Bilder genügend Auskunft geben.” (“His pictures should really give enough information about what makes a painter’s stay in a certain town or landscape essential.”)³⁸ Perhaps Lux knew that in understanding the artist’s life his works provide the most reliable testimony.

³⁷ Lux Feininger, “Lyonel Feininger in West-Deep.”

³⁸ Lux Feininger, “Lyonel Feininger in West-Deep.”

About the author

Daria Rose is currently a student in the History of Art and Architecture at Harvard and spends most of her time thinking about the questions of repetition/reproduction/reevaluation of images across time and memory, as well as the metaphysics of where images stand in relation to “truth” or “reality.”

Appendixes

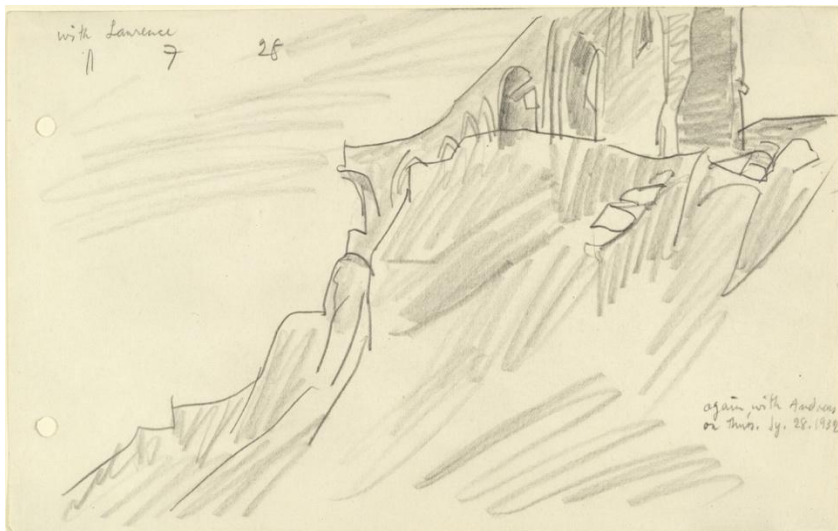


Fig. 1. Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1928, 14 x 22 cm, pencil on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

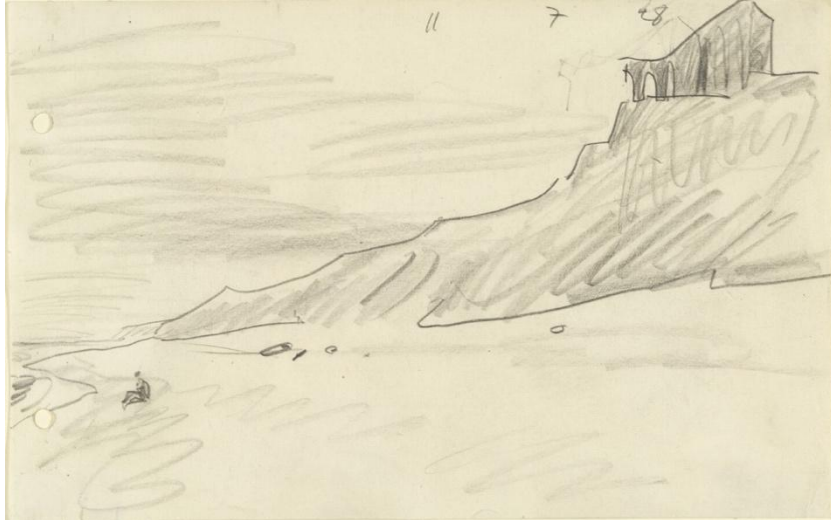


Fig. 2 Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1928, 14 x 22 cm, pencil on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

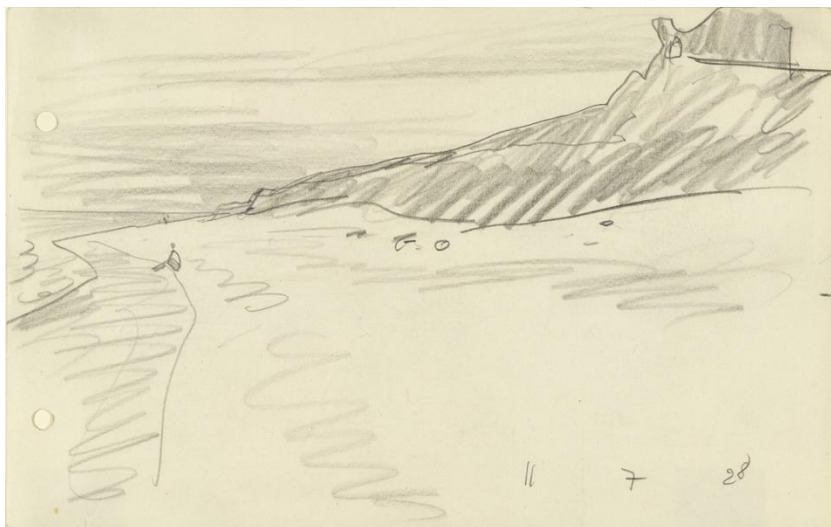


Fig. 3 Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1928, 14 x 22 cm, pencil on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 4 Lyonel Feininger, *Bauhaus Proclamation Cover*, 1919, 30.2 x 18.6 cm, woodcut. Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge.

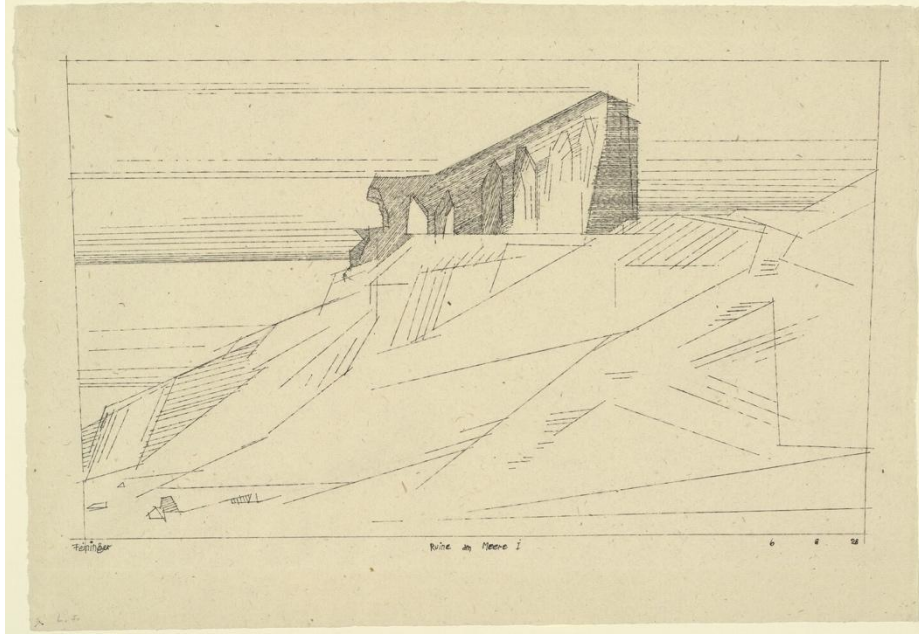


Fig. 5. Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1928, 28.4 x 40.8 cm, pen and ink on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 6 Lux Feininger, Lyonel Feininger drawing on the veranda in Deep, 1929, photograph. Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge



Fig. 7. Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1929, 29.5 x 46.7 cm, charcoal on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 8. Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1930, 68.4 x 110 cm, oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 9. Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1934, 30.2 x 47.0 cm, watercolor and ink on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 10 Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1934, 14.6 x 22.5 cm, graphite and colored pencil on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 11 Lyonel Feininger, *Red Fiddler*, 1921, 30.8 x 24.0 cm, Indian ink on watercolor. Private collection.



Fig. 12 Lyonel Feininger, *The White Man*, 1907, 68.3 x 52.3 cm, oil on canvas. Thyssen-Bornemisza museum, Madrid.



Fig. 13. Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1935, 31.8 x 48.3 cm, charcoal on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 14 Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1935, 31.4 x 47.0 cm, charcoal on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 15. Lyonel Feininger, *Ruins by the Sea*, 1953, 32.1 x 48.6 cm, pen, ink, watercolor, and charcoal on paper. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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