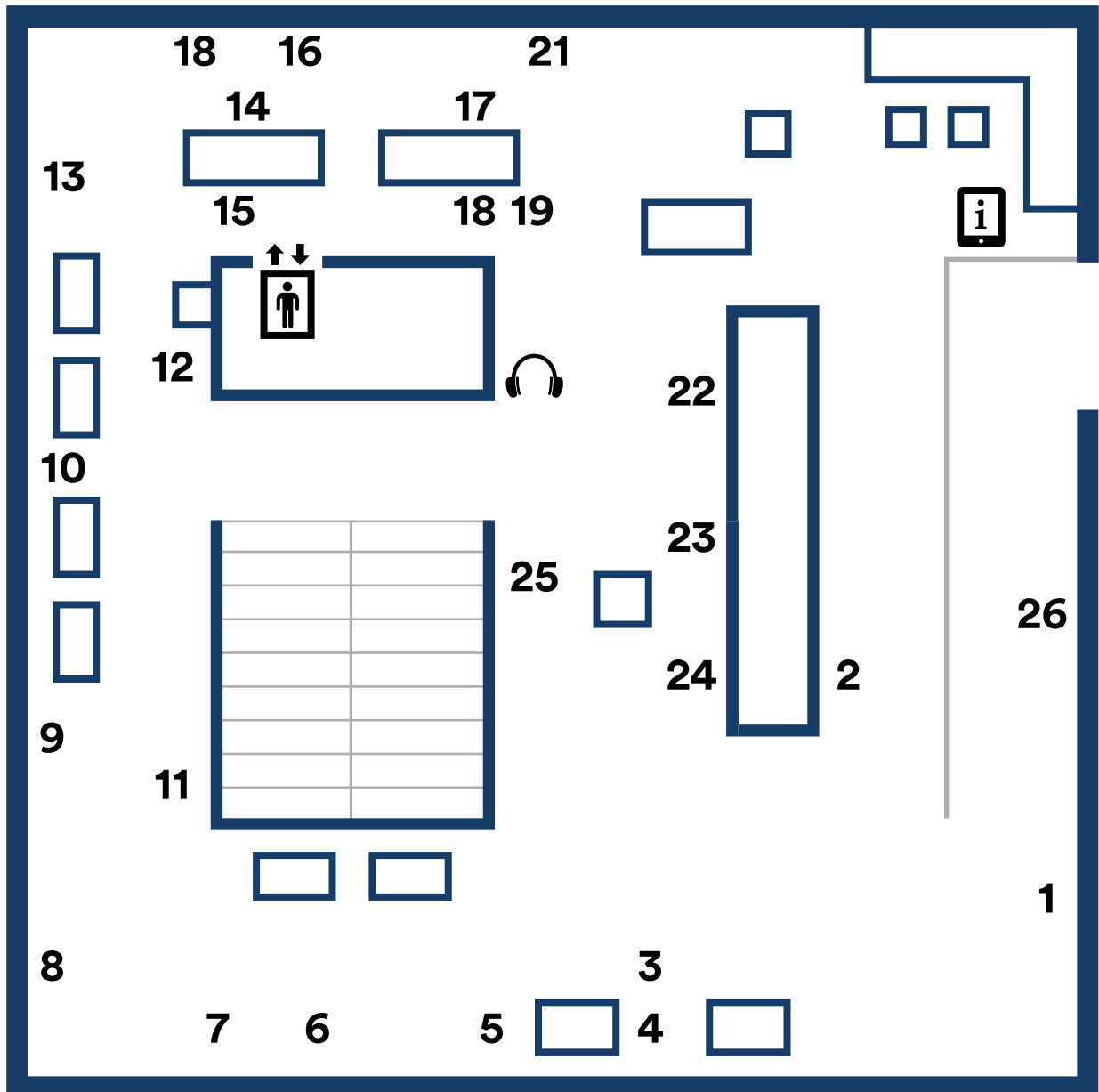




# Auf zu neuen Werken!

On to new works!  
Max Slevogt and his  
publisher Bruno Cassirer

## The exhibition space



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Tablets with digitized books.

# **1 On to new works! Max Slevogt and his publisher Bruno Cassirer**

For almost thirty years, the artist Max Slevogt and the publisher Bruno Cassirer maintained a unique and highly productive collaboration. From 1903 to 1928, they worked on 51 illustration projects, combining the strengths of a prolific and original illustrator with those of an innovative publisher. This partnership played a decisive role in establishing Slevogt's reputation as the »King of Illustration«. In Cassirer, he found a publisher who not only encouraged him to explore new themes but also granted him the freedom to develop his distinctive artistic vision. The resulting »new works« rank among the pinnacles of Impressionist printmaking and book design. This exhibition is organized into seven sections that highlight the full thematic range of this collaboration – from fairy tales to Goethe's Faust – across drawings, prints, and paintings.

Some of the works on display contain depictions that are now considered racist, discriminatory, exoticised, or sexist. They reflect the power relations, cultural projections, and colonial mindsets of the period in which they were produced. We reject these discriminatory perspectives and worldviews. At the same time, we deliberately present the works in their historical contexts in order to encourage critical engagement. We ask visitors to be mindful of potentially distressing content.

## **2 A special collaboration**

It is a genuine stroke of luck that much of the extensive correspondence between Max Slevogt and the Bruno Cassirer Publishing House has been preserved. The sheer extent of this correspondence is due to Slevogt's frequent stays at his Neukastel estate in the Palatinate, where he usually spent the summer months. While away from Berlin, joint projects and other business matters had to be coordinated by post. More than 380 postcards and letters provide valuable insight into the collaboration and friendship between Slevogt and Cassirer. Their bond is also evident in Slevogt's dedications to the publisher, which appear on many of his drawings.

### **3 Harness racing**

Cassirer was passionate about harness racing. He ran a successful stud farm in Damsbrück near Berlin-Spandau and later at Lindenhof near Templin. He also served on the board of the Mariendorf trotting track and supported it financially. His enthusiasm for horses and racing influenced Slevogt, with the trotting races providing the artist with numerous subjects for his studies of animals and movement. Two portfolios on this theme were published by Cassirer. A small sketchbook from the trotting track shows further variations on these scenes and bears a dedication to the publisher.

### **4 The Publishing House**

Bruno Cassirer and his cousin Paul Cassirer founded the Kunst- und Verlagsanstalt Bruno & Paul Cassirer in 1898. Their business soon became one of Berlin's leading addresses for Impressionist and German Secessionist art, both as a gallery and a publishing house. The partnership was dissolved in 1901, with Paul continuing to run the gallery and Bruno handling publishing.

The Bruno Cassirer Publishing House was known for its wide-ranging programme on art and culture, while also issuing poetry collections and novels. Particular attention was paid to artist-designed books and portfolios. These were renowned for their outstanding print quality and meticulous design. Alongside Max Liebermann, Slevogt was among the publishing house's foremost artists. Works were often published in two formats: a more affordable book edition and an elaborate, strictly limited portfolio edition signed by the artist, which was highly sought after by collectors.

The Publishing House promoted its publications through brochures, catalogues, and two almanacs. In 1925, Cassirer organised an exhibition on the publishing house's premises to provide insight into Slevogt's illustrations for *Faust II*. Slevogt also expressed his particular appreciation for the Bruno Cassirer publishing house in 1922, when he donated his share of the proceeds from the book edition of *König Drosselbart* (King Thrushbeard) to the firm's employees.

## **5 Art and Artists**

Shortly after taking over the publishing house, Bruno Cassirer founded the influential magazine *Kunst und Künstler* (Art and Artists) in 1902, which primarily promoted Secessionist and Impressionist art. It was aimed at collectors, dealers, and artists. Slevogt designed the cover, which was used from 1910 to 1931, and also contributed drawings for vignettes and other sections. The magazine regularly featured articles on Slevogt's illustrated books and exhibitions.

## **6 The Arabian Nights**

Slevogt devoted himself to tales from *The Arabian Nights* from 1898 onwards. In these stories, Scheherazade tells the Persian king a story each night, breaking off at a dramatic moment to sustain his interest and thus postpone her execution. The stories revolve around love and adventure, long journeys, and the overcoming of peril through cunning and courage: sorcerers and wondrous creatures are defeated, while flying carpets and magic potions help secure a treasure or win a loved one. Among the best-known tales are *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and *Sinbad the Sailor*. Some stories, such as *The Islands of Wak-Wak*, are explicitly sexual in content and were intended for adult audiences. These wondrous, exoticised worlds offered an escape from the realities of everyday life. Today, however, such depictions – particularly of people, and especially women, from the Persian-Indian cultural sphere – reflect a romanticised construction of cultural »otherness« that calls for critical reappraisal.

## **7 Scheherazade**

The painting was shown in 1899 at Slevogt's first exhibition at the *Kunstsalon Bruno & Paul Cassirer* (gallery) in Berlin. Here, Slevogt's works were displayed alongside those of French painters such as Edgar Degas and Edouard Manet. This juxtaposition of German and French artists was a completely new approach, especially since French artists were still largely unknown in Berlin at the time. A year later, Slevogt was represented with *Scheherazade* at the German pavilion at the World's Fair in Paris.

## **8 Ali Baba**

The first joint illustration project was *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, published by Cassirer in 1903. Beginning in 1898, Slevogt produced numerous drawings and watercolours depicting different versions of scenes from the story. From these, Slevogt and Cassirer ultimately selected 42 illustrations, which were reproduced in the book using a variety of techniques. A layout book preserved in the artist's estate provides insight into this process.

The illustrations in *Ali Baba* were unusual for the public at the time. For the publisher, this first project was therefore initially a commercial loss.

»Originally, we didn't have any agreements whatsoever for *Ali Baba*. I saw the publication more as an artistic endeavour than a business venture, and since the whole thing was an experiment, we didn't discuss your share of the profits or anything like that. I spared no expense in giving the book the form you wanted.«  
(Letter from Bruno Cassirer to Max Slevogt, 9 February 1906)

In the story, the magical cave containing the treasure of the 40 thieves is famously opened with the words »Open Sesame!«. The duped thieves pursue *Ali Baba* to recover their treasure, but the quick-witted and courageous slave girl *Morgiane* ensures a happy outcome through her clever interventions.

## **9 Sinbad**

The second major illustration project, *Sinbad the Sailor*, is also based on a tale from the *The Arabian Nights*. The merchant *Sinbad* recounts to a porter how he amassed his wealth over seven voyages filled with adventure. For the book, published in 1908, 33 chalk lithographs were carefully printed into the text for the first time as original prints using a hand press. Slevogt dedicated an album containing 15 draft drawings for *Sinbad* to the publisher on his birthday in 1929: »To his dear Bruno Cassirer, the first joint »lithographic« opus in the drafts! Berlin, December 1929.«

## **10 The Islands of Wak-Wak**

*The Islands of Wak-Wak* followed in 1921 with 56 illustrations accompanying another tale from *The Arabian Nights*. In the tale,

Hasan of Basra is kidnapped by a sorcerer. After escaping, he falls in love with the enchanted princess Manar al-Sana, whom he abducts and takes as his wife. The princess eventually manages to flee with her two children to her homeland, the Islands of Wak-Wak. Hasan pursues Manar al-Sana and, in the course of numerous adventures, tries to win her back. Rather than critically examining the plot, Slevogt's depictions focus on presenting the supposedly romantic love story. The figure of the princess serves primarily as an erotic projection.

The book's elegant silk cover features a watercolour arabesque with exoticised figures and opulent vine motifs, designed to immerse the reader in the tale of the legendary Islands of Wak-Wak. The emphasis on the physicality and perceived »wildness« of the central figure is now considered a racist cliché.

In the lithograph *The Magician Drums*, Hasan and the Dromedaries, appearing in the first part of the story, the magician beats his drum to conjure up magical dromedaries to bring the travellers safely through the desert. The sheet *Hasan's Wife, the King's Daughter, with her Two Children in the Bath* draws on the stereotype, popular at the time, of a Western Asian or »Oriental« bath. In 1923, twelve of the illustrations accompanying the poems from the *Islands of Wak-Wak* were reprinted separately in a small edition of 20 copies under the title »Arabische Liebeslieder« (»Arabic Love Songs«).

## 11 Fairy tales and songs

Slevogt was also fascinated by European fairy tales and legends. In 1909, Cassirer published the legend of the capricious mountain spirit *Rübezahl* with 47 illustrations. Even during the First World War, the publisher conceived a plan for a series of books illustrated by various artists entitled *Das Märchenbuch, eine Folge von Märchenbüchern für Kinder und Erwachsene* (*The Fairy Tale Book, a Series of Fairy Tale Books for Children and Adults*). The first volume in this series, *Deutsche Märchen, erzählt von den Gebrüdern Grimm* (*German Fairy Tales Told by the Brothers Grimm*), was published in 1918 and featured 35 drawings by Slevogt. The drawings were reproduced as line etchings. Like the subsequent projects, the publisher issued both a numbered special edition with a suede cover and a more affordable book edition.

In addition to this series of fairy tale books, Cassirer also published fairy tales and songbooks in which Slevogt's pen-and-ink drawings were printed using pen-and-ink lithography. These are original prints that were hand-pressed into the text. The prints were also available without text as signed portfolios in limited editions.

Cassirer always tried to find the most suitable printing technique for Slevogt's nuanced and lively drawings. For *Kinderlieder, Tierfabeln und Märchen* (Children's Songs, Fables and Fairy Tales), published in 1920, Cassirer attempted to revive woodcut printing, which had fallen out of fashion in book design. In Oskar Bangemann, he found a wood carver able to apply Slevogt's drawings sensitively and accurately to the woodblock.

## **12 A different approach to illustration**

»You know that I have a different view of illustration than other people, by which I mean other publishers, and since Ali Baba I have been striving to reclaim the book from the book trade and give it to the artist. This idea has been on my mind for a long time now, and it is one that I cherish. (...) Meanwhile, Mr Schaffstein has been quietly cultivating his Kreidolf rubbish, only now, sensing an opportunity, to encroach on my territory.«  
(Letter from Bruno Cassirer to Max Slevogt, 22 September 1910)

At the end of the 19th century, efforts were made to reform book design in the spirit of the arts and crafts movement. To this end, relatively strict systems were developed for typeface, typesetting, book decoration, and binding, to which the illustrations were expected to conform. Cassirer and Slevogt, by contrast, saw book illustration as an art form in its own right and sought new approaches that would grant the artist greater creative freedom.

With their spontaneous, seemingly rapid execution, Slevogt's lively drawings did not initially meet the expectations of an audience still shaped by 19th-century fairy-tale illustration. Typical examples of this earlier tradition can be found in the work of Ludwig Richter, whose illustrations often depict idyllic fairy-tale settings.

## **13 Adventures and heroes**

Ancient heroes such as Achilles and ruthless conquerors like Ferdinand Cortez also provided Slevogt with material for extensive series of

illustrations. Rather than following the narrative in a strictly linear fashion, he brought minor episodes into focus and reinterpreted the text with considerable freedom. The figures often display tragic qualities as they struggle with their fate. Portrayed in all their ambivalence, they are not always presented as likeable characters. In these works, Slevogt did not shy away from depicting brutal battles and scenes of war. His concern was not historical accuracy, but rather the emphasis on features that sharpen the figure's character and make it immediately recognisable.

#### **14 Achilles**

The 15 lithographs depicting Achilles from the Iliad, the ancient Greek epic poem, had already been published in 1907 as a portfolio by Albert Langen Verlag in Munich. For the new edition published by Cassirer in 1916, Slevogt reworked the lithographic stones.

#### **15 Cellini**

Slevogt illustrated Goethe's translation of the autobiography of the sculptor Benvenuto Cellini – a subject that appealed to his predilection for dramatic scenes. He was also drawn to the character of the adventurous artist. Cellini was involved in numerous fights, intrigues, and love affairs, and even committed three murders. At the same time, Slevogt repeatedly highlighted the comic elements of the narrative.

Featuring over 300 ink lithographs printed for the portfolio edition using a hand press by the renowned Parisian printer Auguste Clot, this was the first joint large-scale costly project. Individual lithographic stones were even sent to Paris, and in return Clot came to Berlin in July 1913 to print the special edition. A special blind stamp featuring Cellini's profile was intended to further increase its appeal as a collector's item.

#### **16 Cortez**

The *Eroberung von Mexico* (Conquest of Mexico) is a problematic text today because it recounts the brutal battles waged by the Spanish conquistadors against the indigenous Aztec population, which ultimately led to the extinction of an entire culture. The conqueror Ferdinand Cortez reports to Emperor Charles V on the course of the military campaigns. Many of the 112 pen lithographs

therefore depict fighting and battlefields, which probably also reflect Slevogt's own experiences of war. It is certainly no coincidence that this publication was released in 1918, while the First World War was still in progress.

## **17 Dark sides**

Although Slevogt is often remembered as a cheerful bon vivant, he was not free from gloom and anxiety. He expressed this darker side in several prints, which depict not only people tormented by hellish creatures but also destructive human impulses such as greed, envy, and bloodlust. For these sombre and terrifying scenes, Slevogt favoured etching, a technique that emphasizes strong contrasts between light and dark.

## **18 Under the spell of destruction**

Shortly after the outbreak of the the First World War, Slevogt travelled to the front as a volunteer war artist. On 8 October 1914, his 46th birthday, he received permission to join the Western Front as part of the Bavarian Army High Command 6. He first went to the Supreme Army Command in Charleville, France, and then visited several Belgian cities under German occupation—including Antwerp, Dinant, Mechelen, and Leuven—before reaching the front near Arras and Lille.

Along the way, Slevogt produced numerous sketches, watercolours, and paintings, capturing both the stages of his journey and his immediate impressions. The horrors of the battlefields, however, affected him deeply. After only three weeks, he cut short his stay at the front.

The sketches, watercolours, and paintings were published in 1917 in the »Kriegstagebuch« (»War Diary«) by Cassirer, accompanied by a text probably written by Slevogt's friend, General Karl von Wenninger. In his preface, Slevogt writes:

»Under the spell of devastation, we are still able to regard the mutilation of houses and trees as atmospheric, enchanting and even depictable, but not so the mutilated human being, the corpse.«

## **19 Passion of Christ**

Like earlier masters of printmaking, Slevogt drew inspiration from biblical stories. In 1924, he published a series of 13 etchings on the Passion of Christ, which still shows traces of Rembrandt's influence. At the same time, Slevogt developed his own distinctive interpretation of Christ's suffering—a vision also evident in his last major work, the mural of the Crucifixion in the chancel of the Friedenskirche in Ludwigshafen, destroyed during the Second World War.

## **20 Black scenes**

The second project published by Cassirer was the portfolio *Schwarze Scenen* (Black Scenes, 1905). This is a series of six etchings, which deal with various aspects of human darkness. Initially, 50 copies of the portfolio were printed, which were already sold out by 1911. Due to continuing demand, the publisher then reprinted a few sheets as single prints.

## **21 Shadows and Dreams / Macbeth**

The series *Schatten und Träume* (Shadows and Dreams) from 1926 once again depicts the artist's dark imaginings. This time, twelve prints were partly inspired by mythological and literary texts, such as William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The following year, Slevogt devoted a separate series of colour lithographs to this subject, which was also published by Cassirer.

## **22 Faust**

The illustrated edition of Goethe's *Faust II* was both technically and thematically the most ambitious—and the final major—joint project by Slevogt and Cassirer. Considered Slevogt's magnum opus in illustration, it was announced in the publisher's brochure as »the most significant work of German printmaking«. The artist produced more than 500 lithographs and etchings for the book edition between 1924 and autumn 1926. This long and arduous undertaking was a major challenge for both Slevogt and the Cassirer.

Cassirer took significant financial risk due to the high production costs. According to the subscription prospectus, the portfolio edition cost 3,600 Reichsmarks and the book 1,400. With the average annual income in 1926 estimated at 1,642 Reichsmarks, these prices made the editions

affordable only to wealthy collectors. Despite extensive efforts to promote the project—including a brochure, articles in the magazine *Kunst und Künstler* (Art and Artists) and in the *Verlags-Almanach* (Publishing Almanac), as well as an exhibition in late 1925 on the publisher's premises—the edition was not a commercial success.

### **23 The technique of lithography**

In the printing technique of lithography, the image is drawn directly onto stone or transfer paper. This was particularly well suited to Slevogt's working method. The sketch-like and dynamic effect of his brushstrokes is faithfully preserved in the print. In the film by Hans Cürlis from the summer of 1923, Slevogt can be seen drawing a scene from the tales of *The Arabian Nights* on a lithographic stone using chalk.

Lithography (from the Greek *lithos* »stone« and *graphein* »to draw«) is a flat printing process that uses a limestone plate and exploits the immiscibility of oil and water: The image is drawn directly on the stone with a greasy substance, usually ink or chalk. The plate is then moistened with water, which is absorbed into the porous areas of the stone but repelled by the greasy drawing. When an oil-based ink is applied, it adheres only to the drawn areas and is repelled by the water elsewhere. A press is then used to transfer the image from the lithographic stone onto paper or card.

### **24 The process for the Faust illustrations**

The technical effort involved in this project was enormous. Each illustration was printed individually into the text using a hand press. Preserved preliminary drawings, tracing papers, and lithographic stones give an indication of this process: To help Slevogt gauge how much space his drawings could occupy alongside the text, the publisher prepared templates with sections of text pasted onto them. Slevogt drew in pen on these sheets or on tracing paper. The drawings were then transferred to the lithographic stones in the printing shop.

Slevogt drew the final chalk lithographs directly onto the stones, on which the type area had been marked in advance. Test prints were made, which served as a basis for corrections and for selecting the best impression as the master for the printer. After

printing, Slevogt signed each individual print for the special edition. With a print run of 50 copies, this amounted to over 21,000 sheets!

## 25 Reynard the Fox

In the fable »Reineke Fuchs« (»Reynard the Fox«), Reynard saves himself from predicaments again and again with lies and intrigues, outwitting the other animals by exploiting their greed and vanity. For the painting on leather, which was intended as wall covering for his friend Josef Grünberg, Slevogt chose a dramatic moment from the story: Reynard's execution after his sentencing by King Noble. In the twelve etchings, however, Slevogt transferred the scenes to the Weimar Republic. Scenes such as those at the racecourse or of the painter Mandrill have no direct connection to the fable and instead offer a critical perspective on contemporary culture. The etchings were published in 1928 without any accompanying text. Instead, the title »Reineke von Max Slevogt« (»Reynard by Max Slevogt«) stresses that these are interpretations by the artist. Slevogt dedicated them to Cassirer with the words: »Dedicated to the publisher and friend« – also as a thank you for his efforts in organising the exhibition for Slevogt's 60th birthday.



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