

Fritz von Uhde, *Heath Princess* (1889)

Abstract

Fritz von Uhde (1848–1911) decided to paint this little girl on a large canvas measuring 140 x 111 centimeters. Seen close up and in full length, the girl projects a kind of self-confidence that is rare among the “urchins” that figured so prominently in nineteenth-century art exhibitions. Uhde’s painting follows the contemporary trend away from a sentimental and towards a more sober realism, which was echoed in the naturalist dramas of Gerhart Hauptmann and others. It appears that Uhde was trying to capture the individuality of this girl, just as he had tried to do with the children in [The Nursery](#), which dates from the same year. In the present case, however, he seems to have been more successful, achieving a greater sense of naturalness by the avoidance of any hint of charm or amusement. Moreover, the urbanity of *The Nursery* is completely abandoned here in favor of an outdoor setting, which literally suggests the child’s closeness to nature. Equally important is her placement in a wild, uncultivated heathland, as opposed to a flowery meadow. Like Max Liebermann, Uhde travelled to Holland, where he developed a *plein-air* style that accelerated the German trend from Realism to Impressionism in the late 1880s. (The French term *plein air* was translated into a variety of German terms, which have been rendered in English as light-color painting, open-air painting, and outdoor painting.) According to some art historians, the profound inner depth of Uhde’s work helped make the new art of the 1880s acceptable to Germans, who had previously regarded it as an unwelcome style imported from France. By 1889, Uhde was aiming to convey as much light, air, and immediacy in his work as possible, and he could hardly have chosen a better subject than this bright, free, unconstrained little girl.

Source



Source: Fritz von Uhde, *Heath Princess* [*Heideprinzessin*]. Oil painting (1889). Original: Nationalgalerie, SMB.

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Recommended Citation: Fritz von Uhde, Heath Princess (1889), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/forging-an-empire-bismarckian-germany-1866-1890/ghdi:image-1317>> [May 08, 2024].