

Wilhelm Heinrich Focke, Rowing Boy on the River Wümme, c. 1910, oil on canvas, c. 34 x 27 cm, unsigned, unframed.

The picture was provided – in museum quality – with a new passe-partout (70 x 50 cm) of the company HALBE. A fitting frame – in museum quality – with museum glass (anti-reflective, very high UV protection, anti-static, abrasion resistant) of the company HALBE can be provided on request.

Wilhelm Heinrich Focke (1878 Bremen – 1974 Bremen) is one of the most exciting and important figures of the 20th century in Germany, yet today he is hardly known to the general public. In an almost Leonardesque manner, he left an outstanding mark as a painter, sculptor, aviation pioneer, inventor, poet, and co-founder of FC Bayern Munich.

Born as the eldest son of Johann Focke (1848–1922), Bremen city councilor and founder of the Focke Museum of cultural history, and his wife Louise, who came from a French noble family and was a niece of the painter Souchay de la Duboissière, his diverse interests and outstanding talents became apparent at an early age. In 1908, he designed the famous *Ente* aircraft, which he used to take to the skies in September 1909 at Bornstedter Feld near Potsdam as one of the first German aviation pioneers. By 1908, he had also built the first beach buggies and ice sailing sleds with large sail areas. He supported his younger brother Henrich (1890–1979), who would become one of Germany's most important aviation pioneers and helicopter designers, as well as co-founder of Focke-Wulf Aircraft Works. Throughout his life, he developed numerous air, water, and beach vehicles, partly due to his experiences in World War I, when he first had to fight against the British landing attempt at the Dardanelles in Turkey and, after a serious injury in 1916, served as a reconnaissance and rescue pilot over the North Sea.

Focke was a passionate horseman, aviator, sailor, and ice skater, and later also a skier. Above all, however, he was a protagonist of the early days of soccer in Germany. After studying under Peter Janssen the Elder (1844–1908) at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, he transferred to Carl von Marr (1858–1936) at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts in 1899. During his time in Munich, he initially played for MTV Munich from 1879 before forcing the resignation of the football department along with 16 others and founding FC Bayern Munich in 1900. He was appointed second captain of the team. For several years now, Bayern have been commemorating their founding member Focke in the media and also openly discussing his homosexuality. However, Focke's sexual orientation has been excluded from the few exhibitions and articles of the last few decades, which have been dominated by his descendants and their circle. He apparently did not live openly as a homosexual, but the unmarried and childless Focke was closely friends with several prominent (and later persecuted) homosexuals, such as his schoolmate from Bremen, Rudolf Alexander Schröder (1878–1962), a well-known writer, translator, poet, Protestant hymn writer, architect, and painter at the time.

After Düsseldorf and Munich, he continued his studies in 1903/04 with the highly influential Ludwig von Hofmann (1861–1945) at the Grand Ducal Saxon Art School in Weimar. Although he was subsequently accepted into the master class of the history painter Arthur Kampf (1864–1950) at the Berlin Art Academy, it was his time with Hofmann, with whom he remained close friends, that had a formative influence on all his subsequent work. Hofmann probably introduced him to the circles of the Berlin Secession and the impressionist Max Liebermann (1847–1935), which also included the two cousins Bruno and Paul Cassirer (1871–1926), famous publishers and gallery owners. It was probably at Bruno Cassirer's (1872–1941)

publishing house that the first major exhibition of around thirty paintings by Wilhelm Focke took place around 1909 – mainly equestrian paintings from Berlin's Tiergarten park. Liebermann was enthusiastic about his paintings of horses and is said to have remarked, “No, Focke, I can't do that.” He maintained friendly relationships with Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980), Max Slevogt (1868–1932), and Olaf Gulbransson (1873–1958), among others.

From 1919 to 1929, Focke taught nude, animal, and landscape painting at the Bremen School of Applied Arts. At the same time, he continued to work as an inventor. During these years, he produced his first designs for double-hulled boats (now known as catamarans) and even for tidal and wind power plants. From 1930 onwards, he worked exclusively as a freelance artist. This carefree period was overshadowed by the rise of National Socialism. Focke kept his distance from the Nazis and withdrew into internal emigration until 1945. After the Second World War, his national significance waned, even though he received numerous honors and exhibitions in the Bremen area.

The painting offered here is an excellent example of Focke's talent for capturing the atmosphere of a cheerful summer day with color and light, which is also suggested by the strong shadows cast on the meadow on the left. It shows a boy wearing the sailor's clothing common at the time, rowing a traditional flat-bottomed boat on the canal and river landscape between Wümme and Worpswede, equipped with a paddle. With short, impasto strokes, Focke merely hints at the forms, as is characteristic of German late Impressionism. The reflection of the rowing boy on the water in the foreground of the picture, for example, is wonderfully successful. The strong colors may also reflect the influence of the Brücke painters, with whom he was close friends during his years in Berlin. The oil sketch is certainly one of Wilhelm Focke's most outstanding works from this main creative phase.