Madness and Method in the Junkerhaus: The Creation and Reception of a Singular Residence in Modern Germany

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Abstract
The Junkerhaus in Lemgo, Germany, is very eccentric, even rather eerie. Slowly built by the reclusive architect Karl Junker over the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was whittled and carved into existence, its textures knobby and web-like, its walls and furnishings coated in uncanny forms and dreamy images. For decades after the death of Junker, rumors of his insanity were cited to explain the form of his home. These rumors were not merely local legend, but rather were bound up in a strain of early Modernist discourse that sought to theorize and celebrate the art of the mentally ill. In recent years, a few historians and critics have labored to push beyond the mythology and analyze Junker with a more scholarly rigor, chipping away at the notion that the Junkerhaus was formed by a totally unfettered mind. They have situated the building in a larger context, comparing it to the artists’ residences and artists’ studios then prominent in Germany and Austria. There is undoubtedly much insight in this, but something is still missing; artist spaces of these types tended to exhibit either Classical order or Romantic chaos, but Junker’s work exudes both. Gaining a better understanding of the Junkerhaus will require not only ongoing reconsideration of its impassioned expressiveness, but also a more direct confrontation with its academic Classicism. The latter has been neglected for too long.

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Abstract

The Junkerhaus in Lemgo, Germany, is very eccentric, even rather eerie. Slowly built by the reclusive architect Karl Junker over the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was whittled and carved into existence, its textures knobby and web-like, its walls and furnishings coated in uncanny forms and dreamy images. For decades after the death of Junker, rumors of his insanity were cited to explain the form of his home. These rumors were not merely local legend, but rather were bound up in a strain of early Modernist discourse that sought to theorize and celebrate the art of the mentally ill. In recent years, a few historians and critics have labored to push beyond the mythology and analyze Junker with a more scholarly rigor, chipping away at the notion that the Junkerhaus was formed by a totally unfettered mind. They have situated the building in a larger context, comparing it to the artists’ residences and artists’ studios then prominent in Germany and Austria. There is undoubtedly much insight in this, but something is still missing; artist spaces of these types tended to exhibit either Classical order or Romantic chaos, but Junker’s work exudes both. Gaining a better understanding of the Junkerhaus will require not only ongoing reconsideration of its impassioned expressiveness, but also a more direct confrontation with its academic Classicism. The latter has been neglected for too long.
In the small, German Hanseatic town of Lemgo, located near the city of Bielefeld, sits a strange house that is not very famous, but has for many decades been quietly keyed into important debates on art and architecture. Called the Junkerhaus (Figure 1), it is a large villa that was designed and then slowly whittled into being by a reclusive architect, sculptor, and painter named Karl Junker (1850-1912), starting in 1889 and continuing for twenty-two years until his death in 1912. Legends have enveloped the life of Junker at least since the day he died, describing the man as insane and his work as the expression of insanity. Such mythology arose not only because the unusual building is striking to passersby, but also because aspects of both the house and its architect lent themselves to a series of avant-garde art theories that encouraged critics to seek out and celebrate work created by social “outsiders” who were ostensibly liberated from tradition. These theories owed much to the work of Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933), an influential but often forgotten scholar who was obsessed with the art of the mentally ill. He ran in the circle of the Bauhaus and helped shape both Modernist and, inadvertently, anti-Modernist rhetoric in the years leading up to World War II.

Most of the studies of the Junkerhaus have been written in the long shadow of Prinzhorn’s pioneering but problematic work, casting Junker in the role of madman or, at least, of outsider. A few critics and scholars—such as Eckart Bergmann, Regina Fritsch, Carolin Mischer, and Götz J. Pfeiffer—have recently challenged these interpretations to describe the Junkerhaus not as the work of a disconnected spirit on the fringe, but rather as a culturally engaged iteration of the then-popular phenomena of exemplary artists’ houses (Künstlerhäuser) or artists’ studios. Their analyses are insightful. With the Romantic intensity of an all-encompassing Gesamtkunstwerk, Junker’s home and workplace does indeed resonate with some of the more striking artist studios in such cultural capitals as Vienna and Munich. With its regimented symmetry and ornate...
formality, it also echoes the grand artist residences that were contemporaneously erected by state authorities in a number of European cities. It is, however, Junker's synthesis of these two qualities—the contrived chaos of a Romantic artist studio and the civil grandeur of a Classical artist residence—that no scholar has yet satisfactorily explained.

The wild eccentricities of material and texture in the Junkerhaus make a shocking first impression, but in all of Junker's work the overall ordering principles and pervading iconographic language are strictly Classical. As subsequently discussed, when the Junkerhaus was first publicized by historians and physicians in the years following Junker's death, the building's rigorous Classicism was ignored, likely because traditional and formal design was anathema to Prinzhorn's increasingly popular theories about liberated art. More recent scholars have labored to illuminate Junker's unusual work as something other than the spectacular ramblings of a madman, but their efforts to rehabilitate Junker's strangeness have had the unfortunate side effect of continuing to foreground that strangeness to an undue extent. Junker's pervasive Classicism must be considered not as the neutral base upon which his eccentricity was overlaid, but rather as an integral part of his work, and a part that inevitably positions it in larger architectural discourses. Unfortunately, Junker gave no recorded explanation for any of his creative output, so the only sources that can be consulted on the man and his work are a meager amount of biographical information and, of course, the work itself, specifically the house and its contents.

Due in no small part to the mystery that has long haunted the building, the story of the Junkerhaus is inseparable from the history of its evolving reception. This paper is thus not only a study of a notable work of architecture, but it is also a study of the subsequent century's worth of interpretive apparatuses that, like the whittled wooden pieces that Junker applied to the core structure of his Meisterwerk, have been overlaid upon the building, drawing attention to some aspects while obscuring others. A critical account of the building's reception by various strains of the avant-garde offers insights into a crucial period in the history of architecture, when traditions of all varieties came under attack by advocates for a radically new Modernism invested with a liberated and “primal” back-to-basics creative spirit. Recent revisions to these analyses are also worthy of discussion, asserting as they do that the Junkerhaus' peculiarity is, upon deeper consideration of historical context, not quite so peculiar as had once been thought. We will build upon these recent studies, taking the reevaluation of Junker further by arguing that the Junkerhaus' magnificent oddity was deliberately ordered, and that this order was precisely the kind of order that Junker's earliest critics entered his house to escape: academic Classicism.

The Artistry of the Mentally Ill

In 1919, Karl Wilmanns (1873-1945), director of the Psychiatry Clinic at the University of Heidelberg, sent out a letter to the heads of mental institutions all across Germany asking them to take a look at the “artistic productions of mental patients” and gather up a sampling of them to send to him. Importantly, he wanted pieces that were “not simply copies of existing images or memories of [patients’] days of health, but intended as expressions of their personal experience”—which is to say, expressions of their madness. Wilmanns planned to assemble these works into a comprehensive artistic collection, the best examples of which were to be placed in a specialized museum that would be of interest not only to clinical psychiatrists and other physicians, but also, it was surmised, to students of art and even art-loving members of the general public.

Among the many students of art who responded with great interest to Wilmanns’ project was Hans Prinzhorn. After receiving his doctorate in aesthetics and art history from the University of Vienna in 1908, where he had almost certainly been steeped not only in emerging avant-garde art discourse but also early psychiatric theory, Prinzhorn had developed a keen interest in mental illness. When Wilmanns issued his call for artwork submissions from mental hospitals, Prinzhorn's only clinical background had been a stint as an army surgeon during World War I. Nonetheless, after informing Wilmanns that his professional interests had become firmly fixed on “the border area between psychopathology and artistic composition,” Prinzhorn was not only invited to view the growing collection of so-called “pathological art” in Heidelberg, he was also asked to join the clinic as an assistant, which he did in 1919. His role was to enlarge and scientifically catalog the collection, and within three years the University of Heidelberg was in ownership of around five thousand pieces, gathered throughout German-speaking countries and far beyond. In 1922, Prinzhorn distilled his efforts into a book entitled The Artistry of the Mentally Ill, billing himself as a “Revolutionary on Behalf of Things Eternal.” The work was an international sensation, guaranteeing its author a voice in the discourses of both clinical psychiatry and fine art.

Both Wilmanns and Prinzhorn were, of course, building upon a pre-existing popular discourse that had some years before been invested with great energy by the tragic epic of Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). The social and economic dys-
function that stemmed in part from that artist’s mental illness was, after his suicide, seen as an unquestionable stamp of emotive authenticity by many critics, art lovers, and fellow artists. The romanticizing of artistic madness can perhaps be seen at its most extreme in the case of the American landscape artist Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847-1919). When Blakelock suffered a catastrophic mental breakdown in 1899, it was almost certainly linked to the humiliation and poverty he and his family had endured after his artistic career failed to get off the ground. Almost as soon as he was institutionalized, however, his artworks—and many forgeries bearing his name—began to sell at record prices. He was swindled out of every dollar, and in 1919 he died while cranking out paintings for an unscrupulous promoter only too happy to cash in on the growing fetish for the art of madmen. With his landmark 1922 publication, Prinzhorn elevated this fetish to the realm of scholarly discourse and scientific credibility.

Prinzhorn’s interests were not strictly limited to the art of the insane. As his career rose, he also branched out to what has been somewhat ambiguously referred to by scholar Eric Trump as the “Nicht Normal,” or “Not Normal”—what is today categorized, and indeed celebrated, as Outsider Art. Prinzhorn adored, studied, and publicized the art of children, of prisoners, of so-called “primitives,” and of the avant-garde, seeing these categories as an interrelated body of art-making subgenres. Essentially, he was interested in any artistic production that he perceived as coming from uninhibited personal expression, rejecting mainstream art as inherently sterile due to the fact that it was academically conditioned and therefore formed, or at least filtered, by tradition. What his preferred artists had in common was less, of course, what they were, than what they were not. The artworks that children, the insane, and, say, Pacific Islanders created did not need to appear similar in order for them to be grouped together, because their forms were not as important as the processes by which they had been made—or at least, the processes by which Prinzhorn imagined they had been made.

Among the countless drawings pulled into Prinzhorn’s collection of pathological art—some of them mundane, others surreal, a few deeply disturbing—is one by Karl Junker (Figure 2). It has no title but shows us, in section, a monumental building composed of several stories—five principal floors, to be exact—with a number of domes and cupolas above stairwells, open courts, and lightwells. At the bottom of the largest open space, under the grand dome on the right, is an ornate fountain. Atop many of the lesser domes and cupolas are figurative statues. The building is drawn to Classical specifications, including colonnaded arcades and spiral stairways, revealing a knowledge not only of the aesthetic conventions of formal, civic architecture but also, due to the presence of telling solids where floors and walls are sliced in half, structural systems and drafting conventions. This is no surprise, as Junker had indeed been trained as an architect. The drawing is indisputably expressive and mannered, and the imagined build-

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Figure 2. Karl Junker, untitled, 1883. Inv. No. 4920, © Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.
ing that it presents is certainly epic and rather whimsical in both overall form and detail—but does it reveal the insanity of its maker? Prinzhorn himself warned against attempting to diagnose mental illness solely through the analysis of an artist’s work, because “not every artist who paints like a mentally ill person is mentally ill. That is to say, it is superficial and wrong to draw inferences from the similarity of external appearances to the hidden mental conditions.”9 Karl Junker was never institutionalized in a mental hospital, so how did his work come to be included in a gallery of madness? Unfortunately, this specific question cannot be resolved,10 but the mottled history of Junker’s “diagnosis”—a diagnosis that was largely made posthumously—and its propagation in art discourse is interwoven with the history of his work’s reception.

A Madness to the Method

Two years after Karl Junker died in 1912, a few of his artworks were brought to Berlin for inclusion in the sixth exhibition of the Neue Secession (New Secession) modern art group. The curators presented these pieces as “the works of a decadent and “recluse” that, by “strange fact” of their “primitiveness of expression,” presaged the “spirit that animates the aspirations of the youngest generation.”11 Six years later, in 1920, more of Junker’s works were included in a show of Modern and Expressionist art in a private gallery in Hannover. Again the artist was positioned as a strange, raw forebearer of Modern art, and again his Classicism was ignored, but he was not billed as a madman. Uncoincidentally, a few months after the Hannover show including Junker drew to a close, Hans Prinzhorn gave a slide lecture about the artistry of the mentally ill in the very same gallery.12 The discourse on the raw and unfettered virtues of Modern art was shifting.

In 1927, some fifteen years after the death of Karl Junker, the Lemgo-based author Karl Meier—founder of the still-extant Old Lemgo Society (Verein Alt Lemgo), which is dedicated to preserving and promoting local cultural treasures—summed up Junker’s work as that of a “psychopath.” Meier also avowed the proximity of insanity and genius, continuing: “To reject [Junker’s work] because of this would be ridiculous. Since nowadays it is a truism that genius and insanity are close neighbors . . . [Junker’s] megalomania is a symptom of mental abnormality. But his work is and continues to be worthy of high recognition as a document of a unique man with traces of the strongest, style-inventing creative force.”13 Around this time, psychiatrist Gerhard Kreyenberg (1899-1996)—a student of psychiatrist Wilhelm Weygandt (1870-1939),14 follower of Hans Prinzhorn, and a reader of Meier—took a trip from his office at Bethel Hospital in Bielefeld to visit the Junkerhaus, and subsequently published an influential 1928 essay about the building and its inhabitant. Kreyenberg wrote that conventional language cannot explain the forms of the house: “one would have to invent new expressions in order to describe it all.”15 He recalled the story of an old colleague who had visited Karl Junker at home many years before and, to quote the translation by scholar John MacGregor, “penetrated his defenses sufficiently to discover a concealed, but highly organized delusional system [Wahnsystem].”16 Junker reportedly thought that he controlled German politics and was convinced that he knew the inner workings of the minds of the Kaiser, the Pope, and Otto von Bismarck. This does, indeed, sound more than a little unusual. But Kreyenberg continued, “Other reports of [Junker’s] nature come sparingly; they must be taken with caution. Now, what can his life’s work [Lebenswerk] say about his nature?”17 To pry further into the mind of the architect, the psychiatrist explained, one must analyze the architecture: “All these manual expressions leave no doubt that we are dealing here with a mental illness in the field of schizophrenia, a paranoid dementia.”18

In short, Kreyenberg depended a great deal upon his “overall impression” (Gesamteindruck) of the Junkerhaus itself for his own detailed diagnosis of Junker, despite Prinzhorn’s warning against this method.19 His authoritative verdict on the architect and his work have since been reiterated again and again, even as Junker’s actual life has receded further into history. In 1941, for example, Walter Ense wrote that the “person and work of this raging and carving loner cannot be surveyed from the art-historical perspective but only on the basis of a medical diagnosis, i.e. a psychiatric analysis. Revealed to us here is . . . the work of a psychopath.”20 After decades of similar pronouncements, some of which are discussed below, psychoanalyst Hartmut Kraft wrote a 2010 essay about the artist entitled “Karl Junker war schizophren. Ja und?” (“Karl Junker Was Schizophrenic. Yes, and?”), expressing his frustration at the apparent inability of Junkerhaus critics to understand that, even if Junker did suffer from mental illness, this would not have defined his entire life or all of his work.21 Indeed, it is our contention that the work itself resists, or at least complicates, Romantic assertions that Junker was driven by unfettered and detached expressive impulses.

The Junkerhaus is, without question, markedly unusual. It is simple in layout, but extremely complex in its treatment of architectural surfaces. Thirty-one by thirty-one feet in plan, the house is set approximately eighty feet from the
Figure 3. Front approach to the Junkerhaus from the roadside in Lemgo.
street, perched on a small hill (Figure 3). It was visible from a substantial distance until newer houses began to encroach on the site at the beginning of the twentieth century. A visitor to the house approaches the building frontally from the north, walking up a sloping path toward a symmetrically structured facade that recalls a Classical villa of clear Renaissance derivation, evoking the work of Andrea Palladio, as well as the Weser Renaissance merchants’ houses that fill the nearby town center of Lemgo. With its half-timbered Fachwerk construction of wooden members with brick infill—erected for Junker by the local house builder Heinrich Schirneker—22—the core structure also owes a great deal to local medieval traditions throughout Northern Europe, and visibly asserts this lineage through the gaps left between the Classical forms overlaid on top of it.

In its external appearance the house is bilaterally symmetrical, with facades that are tripartite both vertically and horizontally and subdivided using multiples of squares and golden section rectangles. All facades clearly articulate story divisions, rising from the brick podium to present a first-floor piano nobile, second floor, and Classically proportioned pediment gable. Each level is individually subdivided by a rigorous regime of wooden stringcourses and pilasters, nailed directly into the brick walls, terminating in strongly articulated corners (Figure 4). Mustard yellow, slate gray, and pale gray paint on the brick and timber core reinforce the geometric subdivision. The pilasters are divided in orthodox Classical fashion with a paneled pedestal, base, decorated and banded shaft, composite capital, and entablature block complete with a mannered triglyph and guttae. The cornice of the pilasters’ entablature blocks feature egg-and-darts, and these are carried across the facades on the aforementioned stringcourses. Every aperture is crowned in Renaissance fashion with a pediment cap. Casement windows are mullioned into playfully anthropomorphic forms, evoking human torsos and heads (Figure 5). Like many other formal country homes—such as the Villa Rotonda—the Junkerhaus consists of four formal façades, each articulated with the same quality of detail. The building originally sported a cupola, as well as a number of wooden figurative sculptures and acroteria that punctuated the roofline, again recalling Classical and especially Palladian buildings.

As one approaches the house, it becomes clear that while the facades are ordered according to the Classical tradition, the ornament was handcrafted in a sensuously interpretive manner, causing the building to visually tremble as more detail comes into view. The wooden details were not planed and carved and carefully joined into integrated members, but rather appear roughly whittled and sculpted as small, knobby, hand-held pieces that Junker then tacked together to form the composition. In 1983, Joachim Huppelsberg—who initiated a new turn in scholarship about Junker’s work by taking a second look at the house from an art historical rather than a purely pathological perspective—compared the resulting richness of Junker’s work with the constructions of contemporaneous Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926), using the word Überschwingung (overtone) to describe the optical vibrations that animate both the Junkerhaus and the basilica of the Sagrada Familia, especially at the edges of their sculpted surfaces, where both of the buildings seem to stir the air around them. Huppelsberg argued that “the building organism appears itself as a monumental ornament. The conventional orthogonal wall surfaces have been dissolved ornamentally.”23 Such a comparison between Junker and Gaudí is, in addition to being helpful for purposes of visual analysis and description, important from a theoretical point of view, and will be discussed more below.

The dynamic effects of Junker’s whittled architecture achieve their climax not when viewers reach the door, but rather after they step inside, where the ordering system of the main facade is shattered by an asymmetrical and wildly sculptural vestibule that directs the visitor to either side of the first floor rather than pulling them into the building’s
Figure 5. Detail of the south façade of the Junkerhaus.

Figure 6. Intense carved vaulting of the entrance vestibule of the Junkerhaus.

Figure 7. Karl Junker, building plans for the Junkerhaus, 1889. (Courtesy of the Museum Junkerhaus Lemgo.)
center (Figures 6 and 7). It is a potent, and somewhat disorienting, first impression—a transformative shock of sudden and unexpected immersion. The house can only be entered after the visitor steps into, and then emerges from, this encrusted grotto-like passage, draped by spider-web-like carvings. It is a threshold into an unknown world that feels simultaneously seductive and repellent. In the words of scholar Inge Jádi, here is a "work of art that absorbs and downright devours the visitor into its interior."24

Except for this entry vestibule and a number of the circulation spaces, however, the symmetry that Junker employed on the exterior continues on the interior. Some recent writers even concede that, at least in terms of its plan, the house fits in well with conventional domestic types as it exhibits a "great similarity with other contemporary residences of the bourgeois middle class."25 In addition to the vestibule, the ground floor consists of a studio, workshop, kitchen, storage space, staircase, and toilet (Figure 7). The second floor contains a salon, living room, a master bedroom, a nursery, and a guest room, all furnished with beds, cabinets, and other pieces of Junker's own making. There are two more spare bedrooms in the attic story, plus another bedroom under the west gable where Junker purportedly slept during the last years of his life. Finally, in the center of the attic a short ladder leads up to what, in Junker's time, was a glazed belvedere cupola—now lost—that offered views of the surrounding countryside and the town of Lemgo.

The surfeit of furnished bedrooms helped sustain the popular mythology of Junker's madness. This is primarily because they seem rather strange when one considers the fact that he lived alone, as a recluse. The notion of a single, childless man whittling for weeks on an empty crib, in an empty nursery (Figure 8), for a baby he would never have, with a woman that he would never love, admittedly lends itself to speculation on that man's mental health. A sign stood outside the Junkerhaus from the 1950s to the '70s reading "Monument to an Unhappy Love,"26 and local legends circulated well into the twenty-first century about a tender, young, and poorly treated fiancée lost at sea, followed by a lifetime of howling, crippling regret. Today the curators of the Junkerhaus, which has been a formal museum only since 2004, would never dream of erecting such a sign, as there is no proof whatsoever of anything so epically tragic.

What is more, the design of the furniture suggests that it was carefully conceived as an integral part of the house, rather than assembled as a spontaneous palliative for overwhelming grief. Junker's knobby, hand-carved, whimsically assembled furniture aesthetic is, as with the facades outside, almost always ordered by a rigorous, even monumental, Classicism. In the second-story living room, for example, is a magnificent writing desk filled with ornate drawers (Figure 9). It is surmounted by a grand ensemble of miniature architectural forms offering nothing less than a Classical urban composition (Figure 10). A central octagonal building, perhaps a cathedral or baptistery, rises from a piazza that is in turn wrapped by an arcade supported by piers with engaged columns. The corners of the arcade consist of Baroque pavilions with eccentric columns, segmental pediments, and dramatic conical roofs capped by figurative sculptures. The main entrance into the piazza is a magnificent triumphal arch, beautifully detailed in Junker's
gestured fashion, featuring not only miniature Classical orders but also garlands, relief panels, and a quadriga. With its lower roundels and upper figures, this arch recalls Constantine’s triumphal arch in Rome but Junker has added a central pediment, similar to those seen in triumphal arches at Orange and Rimini. Every surface of the Junkerhaus—even its coffered ceiling—appears to undulate by way of small bits of carved and painted wood that Junker either glued or nailed in place, and is punctuated by paintings of figures, buildings, and landscapes (Figure 11). It is as if, during the twenty-four years Junker worked on the house, it received an exquisitely crafted and hand-fitted diaphanous gown that both obscures and reveals its structural and spatial architectural body. His scratchy, often pointillist paintings are aesthetically reminiscent of Impressionist art, which seems fitting, given the veritably impressionistic textures of the house itself. What “impressions” do the paintings convey? They are windows onto Classical scenes—religious and mythological iconography in symmetrical figure compositions, representations of sun-drenched formal gardens, and views of ancient town centers with temples and towers. Interestingly, a number of Junker’s cityscape views combine Greco-Roman temples with Renaissance Classical structures from Northern Europe, featuring, for example, steeply pitched roofs with crow-step gables (Figure 12). The synthesis of German and Mediterranean traditions is, of course, also visible in the house overall, with its northern-European Fachwerk core peeking through the outer “garment” of southern-European Classical orders. As will be discussed shortly, Junker’s biography offers hints that this cultural synthesis is not accidental. When the carving that enlivens every part of the house does not provide abstract geometric ornament, it often takes on anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, or vegetal forms, reinforcing Huppelsberg’s reading of Junker as evocative of Gaudí, who, together with other Art Nouveau or Jugendstil architects, employed naturalistic curves, richly articulated seams and joins, encrustations of surface detail, and other “organic” visual cues. Such designers carefully crafted not only “high-art” sculpture and architecture, but also furniture and other “low” objects, as Junker did. Of course, Gaudí’s intense and idiosyncratic work has never been explained by critics as the eccentricity of a madman, but rather is usually seen as part of the same Romantic turn away from machine production and towards the handmade and natural shared by William Morris (1834-1896) and John Ruskin (1819-1900).

Such an interpretation could also, perhaps, be considered for Junker, whose dedication to expressive handcraft is certainly in evidence. On the other hand, while Gaudí, Morris, and Ruskin all supported various modes of the Gothic as part of their anti-industrial credos, Junker embraced the Classical. His demonstrably hand-made Classicism could, in fact, be leveraged as rebuttal to Ruskin’s famous assertions that the modular, repetitive forms of the Classical tradition were inherently antagonistic to the creative power of independent craftspeople. If Junker sculpted his villa with Ruskin’s popular and well-known architectural theories in mind, then the Junkerhaus would be nothing less than a manifesto for a Classicism redeemed by craft. But while Junker did suggest that he harbored ordering motivations of some kind—declaring early in his career, after he had left the academy in Munich, that he would invent a new style of architecture and that he would fare like “Richard Wagner with his music. Only later, after fifty or perhaps even
one hundred years will people realize who I was”—he left no clues as to what those might be, outside of the work itself.\(^{29}\)

What little we know about the architect’s life, however, reinforces the dual importance of handcraft and academic Classicism, as well as that of Northern and Southern European architectural traditions, that are so powerfully paired in his house.

Junker’s youth was a difficult and changeful one, but it was also full of opportunities that facilitated his education and development as an artist. Soon after he was born in Lemgo to a master smith, both of his parents died—his mother in 1853, his father in 1857. Young Karl grew up with his grandfather, the head of a local family with the name of Böckhaus. After completing ten years of school, Junker apprenticed as a carpenter in the local firm of Wilhelm Stapperfenne between 1866 and 1869, then moved to Hamburg where he worked as a carpenter and cabinetmaker from 1869-1871.\(^{30}\) From Hamburg he moved to Munich and enrolled in architectural training courses at the Königliche Kunstgewerbeschule (Royal School for Arts and Crafts) from 1873 to 1875. At this time his grandfather passed away and Junker, then twenty-four years old, inherited his fortune, which allowed him to shift into the more prestigious Akademie der Bildenden Künste (Academy of Fine Arts), where he studied art between 1875 and 1878. It should be noted that Junker’s teachers at the Academy of Fine Arts were not interested in modern aesthetic movements such as Impressionism, but insisted instead on traditional Classical genres. It would not be until 1892, when Junker was already back in Lemgo, that the Münchner Sezession would break with academic traditions to develop alternative exhibition venues and take on progressive modes of painting.\(^{31}\) Eckart Bergmann goes so far as to argue that Junker created his own personal secession by moving away from Munich and settling in relative isolation in his provincial hometown.\(^{32}\) This argument is provocative because it casts Junker’s hermitage and eccentricity as a deliberate artistic turn rather than the results of a mental breakdown—but it is also complicated by the enthusiastic loyalty that Junker obviously felt towards Classicism.

Before returning home, Junker took the opportunity to travel. In 1878, he registered as a “painter from Munich” in the Roman municipality of Olevano Romano, and over the
next five years he toured extensively, making detailed drawings of monuments and cityscapes in northern and central Italy. These included, for example, the Arch of Constantine, St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice, and the Piazza San Firenze in Florence (Figure 13). Junker’s drawing of the latter features the Palazzo Gondi on the left and the Complex of San Firenze on the right, and, rising in the background, the Bargello, the bell tower of Badia Fiorentina Abbey, and the top of the Duomo. This is a rich view, encompassing in a single glance many of the most important periods in the history of Italian architecture, from the Middle Ages through the Quattrocento and to the Baroque, with the latter not easy to find in the center of Florence. Karl Junker, the carpenter and cabinetmaker turned architect, seems to have worked diligently to absorb all of the Classical architecture that Italy had to offer.

In 1883, Junker gave up the picturesque life of an artist in Rome and moved back to Lemgo to design and build his house, his financial fortune still intact. He did not initiate the building as a spontaneous, gushing reaction to uncontrollable internal forces—rather, he submitted a set of design drawings to the local government (Figure 7), as he was by law required to do, including not only floor plans but also structural drawings in both elevation and plan, a building section, and a site plan, and after these drawings were deemed adequate he received official permission to proceed with construction. In addition to the formal drawings submitted to the local municipality, Junker created a number of conceptual drawings that reveal subtle differences from the executed design, suggesting a thoughtful developmental process. Furthermore, he created a highly detailed 1:20 scale model for the house, including its impressionistic textures, which is of course further testament to the methodical manner in which this work of architecture developed as a concept before it was executed. Even if Junker did suffer from a mental illness, his work exhibits a coherence and consistency over time that seems incompatible with what Kreyenberg described as the “manual expressions” of schizophrenia. Of course, we assert that this coherence and consistency was in part tied to the characteristic order of Classical architecture. Due to his wealth, Junker had no need to court commissions as a professional designer, nor to perform any work other than the work he wanted to perform. He occasionally participated in public design competitions for prestigious monumental projects, though he never won. One of his submissions was a fountain for the market square of the nearby town of Detmold. He also built an enormous model for what seems to be a college or an art museum (Figure 14). All of these designs continued the iconographic themes and aesthetic qualities that had been developed in the Junkerhaus—the expressive hand of a down-to-earth German woodcarver is seen guided by the mind of an academically trained Classicist, fresh from the Grand Tour.

Junker spent the last third of his life whittling and painting his home into existence, combining all of his previous learning and experiences into a building that was, on the one hand, a rigorously Classical essay of order and reason, and on the other, an exuberantly Romantic, impressionistic poem of whimsy and craft. Taken together with the furniture and paintings, the Gesamtkunstwerk of the Junkerhaus visibly reflects the manual training, academic education, and artistic travels of Karl Junker in a way that is idiosyncratic but nonetheless synthetic. Towards the end of his life, his house attracted visitors, and he welcomed them, giving them a tour for the price of twenty pfennigs a head, what today would amount to a little over one United States dollar. When Junker died, his inheritance was still worth 36,000 marks, or 197,000 United States dollars today. Perfectly sane artists have squandered far more.

In Search of a Second Opinion
Regina Fritsch and Götz J. Pfeiffer, in their pamphlet Junkerhaus Lemgo, suggested that the Junkerhaus was not built for a hypothetical family that was tragically stolen from Junker, but rather was intended to be an artist’s house or Künstlerhaus, a late-nineteenth century building type in Germany and other parts of Europe that played host to visiting artists and offered exhibition space for artwork and the self-representation of the artist.33 Peter Hirschfeld went so far as to argue that in this period, the “self-designed and executed artist house [Künstlerhaus], next to written documents and self portraits [is] the most
important personal testimonial of artistic intentions.‖ Perhaps
the theory that Junker filled his house with family rooms
because he was creating just such an ideal artist home is less
exciting than the idea of a dark retreat in which sudden, cata-
strophic heartbreak instigated a mental unraveling. However,
the artist home theory seems to sit easier with the fact that
Junker had his wits about him sufficiently to manage his
finances and submit architectural drawings of the house to the
city for approval—let alone employ a consistently Classical
aesthetic throughout not only the house, but also all of its
furnishings and paintings. At least one scholar, Wolfram Bangen,
has positioned the Junkerhaus as a hybrid (Mischform) between
a “conventionally equipped residence and an artist house [Kün-
stlerhaus] with representative rooms.”65 Our analysis of Junker’s
aesthetic supports this direction of thinking, identifying as it
does the additional hybridities of Northern and Southern
European traditions, and of the Romantic craftsman and the
Classical architect. Junker’s personal development—from his
local roots in the Heimat (homeland) to his cosmopolitan
maturity as an artist—is reflected in the fact that the house
exhibits local German structure and traditional handwork ordered
and brought to flowering life by elevated Mediterranean art.
European cultural centers such as Vienna and Munich had
many artist’s houses and studios, and it is very possible that
Junker saw one or more of them while studying in the latter
city.66 The villas of such Munich-based painter princes as Franz
Lenbach (1836-1904) and Franz Stuck (1863-1928) were
erected to exhibit their artwork as much as to represent their
social status. Lenbach specifically chose to “show his own work
next to copies of old masters,” essentially living—and thereby
accessioning himself—into a private museum.67 Importantly,
while the most prominent artist’s houses were grandly Classical
in form, many studio spaces were often designed according to
what historian Stefan Muthesius described as “a highly con-
trived disorder.”68 Bedecked in thick carpets and tapestries,
piled up with the keepsakes from a host of foreign destinations
and artifacts from sundry historical periods, these were dark,
smoky, sensual dens of artistic foment, arguably verging on the
chaos and instability of madness. Among the most famous
was that of the painter Hans Makart (1840-1884) in Vienna
(Figure 15).69 As transformative heterotopias, such carefully
curated studios recalled the exotically themed interiors of
panorama travel fantasies, but instead of simulating an excur-
sion to the gorgeous Orient, they took visitors into the strange

Figure 14. Karl Junker,
model for a monumental
building, date unknown.
(Courtesy of the Museum
Junkerhaus Lemgo.)
and wonderful minds of their otherworldly denizens. The paintings purchased here were taken home as authentic souvenirs of a sublime and surreal place.

It seems quite possible that Junker formulated the Junkerhaus as an immersive, expressive Gesamtkunstwerk that would remain in perpetual progress as a lifestyle. Carolin Mischer suggested that an artist’s house had the power to demonstrate the “link between art and life,” as well as express “the equality of art and craft.” For Bergmann, a Künstlerhaus in general, and the Junkerhaus in particular, have potentially utopian dimensions, as some late-nineteenth century artists advocated a deliberate shift from the passive dwelling space (Wohnraum) to an active living space (Lebensraum) in the hopes that an artistic revolution could reform private life, and then go on to reform the political and economic realms. As far away as the United States, at least one late nineteenth-century artist residence in Providence, Rhode Island, took on an exuberantly Romantic and spooky air both inside and out: the Fleur-de-Lys Studio (Figure 16), constructed in 1885 by the Providence Art Club for artists-in-residence. Its Gothic, half-timbered construction still cuts a distinct profile among the neighboring restrained Georgian buildings, and its otherworldly carvings of grotesque gargoyles and creatures of the night evoke the cult of otherworldly artistic passions (Figure 17). Of course, such expressively sculpted and medievalizing architecture also echoes the teachings of Ruskin. But this is where the Junkerhaus is unique, emerging as fundamentally different from the larger traditions of the alternatively grand and rational or Romantic and sensual artist spaces. Junker’s work was emphatically both. In the Junkerhaus, the wildness of Makart is civilized by the academic order of the Palladian monument, while the regimentation of the Classical is vivified by the liberated hand of the craftsman. Scholars have finally begun doing good work teasing out the meaning of one side of this coin, but neither side can be appreciated without the other.

Epilogue: An Indefinite Committal
The cult of artistic madness had dreadful unintended consequences in Germany. Many figures at the Bauhaus, including Paul Klee, Hannes Meyer, and Mies van der Rohe, found Hans Prinzhorn’s work seductive, and the psychiatrist became active at the school. When the relationship between the Bauhaus and the Nazis grew complicated, Prinzhorn used his contacts on both sides to act as a mediator. Eventually, however, Hitler’s desire to commandeer traditional art and architecture insured that the avant-garde was marginalized.
With his professional standing much diminished, Prinzhorn died in 1933, and four years later the Nazis drew upon his collection for their infamous Degenerate Art exhibition in Munich. As art historian Hal Foster explained, “a reversibility haunts the modernist reevaluation of the art of the mentally ill, for if this art could be revealed as somehow modernist in affinity, the art of the modernists could also be branded as somehow pathological in tendency.”43 The production and reception of the wild sets and psychosis-centered plotline of the popular 1921 German Expressionist film The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, as famously analyzed by Siegfried Kracauer, clearly reinforces this notion.44 During the Third Reich, visitors to the Junkerhaus described it as they might a journey into the angular, shadowy cityscapes of Caligari, as a “world of horror,”45 an “uncannily bizarre, spider-web-covered drip-stone cave,”46 or, less creatively, a “haunted house.”47 Yet, in a time that was notoriously inclined to violence of all kinds, nobody ever threw a lighted match into what was surely one of the most flammable structures ever built. Nor was it ransacked for firewood in the twilight years of the war, when the local population was desperate to eat and stay warm. Junker’s legacy, as strange as it is, has proven tenacious.

Fixations on the question of his sanity have proven equally resilient. Many scholars continue to assign Junker to the “ Outsider Art” category, which directly descends from the work of Hans Prinzhorn through the efforts of French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985), who was inspired by The Artistry of the Mentally Ill to coin the term “Art Brut” in 1945, and the scholar Roger Cardinal, who was in turn inspired by Dubuffet to invent the phrase “Outsider Art” for the title of his germinal 1972 book.48 In 2002, John MacGregor published an article in Raw Vision—a journal that specializes in the genre of Outsider Art—entitled “Junker House: The Architecture of Madness,” describing the building as “the most plausible example in the world of true schizophrenic, as opposed to merely eccentric or fantastic architecture.”49 As recently as 2011, Cardinal published an essay entitled “The Junkerhaus as Masterwork of Outsider Architecture” in an edited volume about Junker with the unambiguous title An Artistic Outsider (Ein Außenseiter in der Kunst).

And then there are those, discussed previously, who have questioned either the existence or the importance of Junker’s mental illness, and have pointed to his academic training and travel experience as evidence that he was no “outsider,” and indeed have suggested his house may have stemmed from the rather mainstream Künstlerhaus tradition. We have made it clear that we believe this to be a plausible argument, although we insist that it is an argument that must be nuanced and enriched.
through an acknowledgment of the formal traditionalism present in Junker’s exceptional aesthetic. By combining expressive and Romantic handcraft with a rigorous academic Classicism, Junker’s house posits a remarkable answer to many of the key questions circulating in his day. At a time when highly educated, wealthy, and famous critics of industrial modernity were calling for a rebirth of vernacular Gothic architectures in their efforts to empower craftspeople, Karl Junker (Figure 18), an anonymous man who sprang from a humble background as a craftsman and then later gained wealth and formal architectural training, achieved the opposite: an academic Classical building positively vibrating with expressive, idiosyncratic craft. The selective analyses that have for years obscured the eccentric but consistent design methodologies evident in the work of Karl Junker have themselves been skewed by reductive mental fixations. If madness can in fact be found in the Junkerhaus, it may not be Junker’s.

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ENDNOTES

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2. Ibid., 8.


4. Ibid., 195.

5. Ibid., 194.


7. Eric Trump, “Junkerhaus,” German Life (April/May 2003): 16. It should be noted here that the term “Outsider Art” did not come into being until 1972, as the English description (coined by Roger Cardinal) of the French art brut category conceived in 1945 by French painter and sculptor Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) who, as discussed briefly below, was influenced in his desire to collect art by psychiatric patients and those living on the edges of society by none other than Hans Prinzhorn.


10. According to Sabine Hohnholz from the Prinzhorn Collection, “the provenance of Karl Junker’s work in our collection is unknown.” Since “Junker was not a patient in an asylum,” she continued, “we don’t have more information about the works which are in our collection.” In the Prinzhorn archive there is “one invoice for four works which the clinic in Heidelberg bought for our collection” from Karl von der Porten, a private collector of art from Hannover, and it is possible that Junker’s works were among these. Even if they were, it is still unknown how this collector got ahold of them, and under whose authority they were categorized as the work of a madman; Hohnholz, e-mail message to the authors, August 21, 2015.

12. Jörg Katendahl, “Karl Junkers Werk als Quelle psychiatrischer Begutachtung nach dem Tode,” in Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler, eds., Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus: Kunst und Architektur in Lippe um 1900 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 100. Katendahl clearly connects the Expressivist exhibit at Hanover’s Von Garvens gallery with the larger vector of Prinzhorn’s lecture, demonstrating that they were part of the same discourse.

13. Karl Meier, Das schöne alte Lemgo (Lemgo, 1927), 93.

14. Kreyenberg and Weygandt would later play important roles as members of the NSDAP (both) and SA (Kreyenberg only) with respect to the party’s push for racial hygiene protocols. Long before the rise of the Nazis, Weygandt promoted sterilization of “undesirable” members of society.


19. Ibid., 171.


26. See Jochen Georg Günzettel, “Der Architekturmalier Karl Junker und der Zimmermeister Heinrich Schirmeke,” in Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler, eds., Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus: Kunst und Architektur in Lippe um 1900 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 42. Such legends were heard by both authors of the present article—by Muecke when he was growing up in Lemgo, and by Walker when he visited the Junkerhaus in the year 2000.

27. It should be noted that Carolin Mischer argues that Junker’s paintings cannot be considered Impressionist or even Neo-Impressionist. Despite the superficial aesthetic similarities, such as the use of thick layers of paint and the appearance of pointillism, Junker did not use complementary colors and most images show fantastic scenes, not the natural scenes depicted by impressionists who tried to interpret and represent in the light of what they saw. Her argument should not to be summarily dismissed, but we think she may be looking through a retrospective scholarly lens that Junker could not have shared; see Mischer, Das Junkerhaus in Lemgo und der Künstler Karl Junker, 44-45.


40. Mischer, Das Junkerhaus in Lemgo und der Künstler Karl Junker, 89.


47. Enste, “Irrsinn und Kunst.”

