

# Angels of the First Class: The Anthroposophic Art of Ernesto Genoni, Goetheanum, 1924



VITAL YEARS CONFERENCE 2016 – CRADLE OF A HEALTHY LIFE

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**Image 2: Ernesto Genoni, self portrait, oil.**

“He was dark, with flashing eyes, hair swept back off his forehead and an erect exotic look. If his brothers were jovial, easy going and inclined to be portly, Ernesto was slender, serious, aesthetic and elegant. His voice was clipped, his sentences crisp and his manner refined. They called him ‘il filosofo’ the philosopher, but he was really an artist” (Maria Triaca, 1985, p.116).

**Front cover: Image 1. Angels of the Cradle.**



**Image 3: Ernesto Genoni, 1916, AIF, Stretcher Bearer.**

“Every young man was then enlisting so I thought to enlist too ... I enlisted in order to serve in the medical corps ... Then we were sent to the Somme ... Pozières ... The sergeant calls for volunteer stretcher bearers. I came forward ... the first vision of dead bodies. My inner trust of Christ as Lord even of the shells!” (Genoni, c.1955, p. 12-14).

“I dare say that in the long run a good many of those who did become stretcher-bearers ... did volunteer for it because they were that kind of man, who deep in their hearts preferred being killed to killing” (Charles Bean, 1947, p.116).



**Image 4. Ernesto's poster of the interior of the first Goetheanum.**

"I arrived in Dornach at the inauguration of the first Goetheanum. There Mrs Ferreri introduced me to Dr Steiner and I was received by him with great warmth. Unfortunately he was speaking in German which I did not know, but by his long handshake and smiling expression ... I could feel his sincere welcome" (Genoni c. 1970, p.6).

"In 1920 ... I went to Dornach. What a strange impression I received from the first view of the Goetheanum building ... the meeting with the Doctor ... the bewildering impression of the interior of the Goetheanum. I could not enter in such saturated life of the spirit and after a few days I left ... In the following years it was a painful search to find my way in life" (Genoni, c.1955, p. 19).



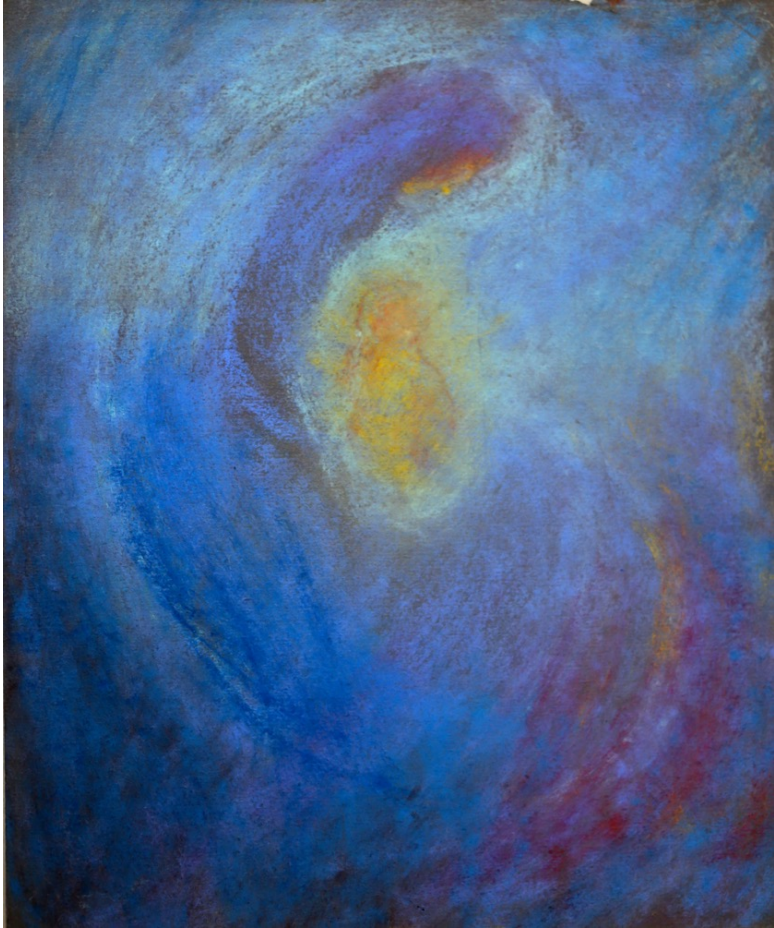
**Image 5. The Thinker.**

“When I was eighteen ... I then commenced painting studies at the Milan technical school which was the beginning of a decided effort on my part to learn more of the art of drawing and painting. The first year was considered so successful by the teachers that the following year I could attend the Academy of Brera and did so for about five years. This entrance into the artistic life brought before me an ideal which gave wings to my spirit and I experienced what seemed to be a re-birth of my soul” (Genoni, c.1970, pp.1-2).



**Image 6. Flight of the Angel.**

“It turned out that I had to go into the Italian Army ... I protested against being sent into a fighting corps ... I was asked to swear allegiance to the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel, to which I said ‘No, I am not going to swear’ and asked why, I said ‘Because it is against my religious and moral principles’. In the evening I found myself in prison for very serious ‘military disobedience’. After a few weeks in prison I was summoned to the presence of the colonel who said to me - ‘You must have a very good saint in paradise looking after you’ to which I answered ‘Yes Sir’ ... I was sent to the Great Military Hospital of Verona ... and was assigned as a common orderly in one of the wards” (Genoni, c.1970, p.5).



**Image 7. The Blue Madonna.**

“... the Great Military Hospital of Verona ... a letter came from my sister ... stating that there was a strong hope that Italy might make peace with Austria. I was reading the letter to my comrades but unfortunately an officer overheard this ... In consequence I was court-martialled as a defeatist ... I was imprisoned in the local prison ... I waited for 3 months in a fortress prison ... The Judge ... said that as I had already been in prison for three months I would now be let off ... my good Angel mentioned earlier was looking after me and I was kept in the military hospital [as a medical orderly] to the end of the war” (Genoni, c.1970 , p. 5-6).



**Image 8. Eurythmy Trio.**

Milan, c.1918:

“Rosa tells me of Anthroposophy ... Signorina Schwarz was inviting Rosa to an Anthroposophy reading in the afternoon. She could not go but asked me if I would like to go. So I went ... to the first Anthroposophy meeting. For nearly 18 months I went regularly to the weekly Anthroposophy readings. Meanwhile I took up again painting” (Genoni, c.1955, p.18).





**Image 9. Eurythmy Solo.**

Dornach, 1924:

“Dr Steiner ... also gave me some good advice concerning the new impulse in Art, especially in the field of painting. The conversation was rather long” (Genoni, c.1970, p.8).



**Image 10. The Guiding Spirit.**

“Dornach ... I was trying to paint in the anthroposophic way. Again at bottom I was not happy with my painting. I was admitted to the Class. My gradual understanding of the German language at the lectures” (Genoni, c.1955, pp.19-20).



**Image 11. The Golden Dawn.**

“... the world is beautiful and glorious and sublime and the endless glow of revelation in all that lives in leaf and blossom flows to our eyes with colour on colour from the visible universe; it is meant to remind us how the divine is manifested in what is lifeless in earthly matter, in the thousands upon thousands of crystalline and non-crystalline forms at our feet, in the water and air, in clouds and stars; it makes clearer to us that the animal life that frolics in the world and delights in its own existence and the warmth of its existence – that all that is divine-spiritual revelation ... Nature ... it glows to us as grand in tone and strength and warmth” (Rudolf Steiner, First Class, first lesson, February 1924, p.7).

“In September of that year [1924] the Doctor became ill. I returned to Milan” (Genoni, c.1955, p.20).



**Figure 12. Moonlight Lake.**

“I could not understand it then but of course there was a reason - this return to Italy was not in accordance with my my karma, my karma being in Australia” (Genoni, c.1970, p.3).



**Image 13. Ethereal Figure.**

"Mr Genoni will proceed to Melbourne, where he will open a studio and hold an exhibition of his work" (The Australasian, 1926, p.47).



**Image 14. Blue Peak.**

### **Abstract**

A century ago, Ernesto Genoni (1885-1975) joined the AIF and served as a stretcher bearer on the killing fields of the Western Front in 1916, in the battles of the Somme and Pozzières.

In 1923, Ernesto wrote to Rudolf Steiner from Sondrio (Valtellina, Italy) offering his labour for advancing the Anthroposophy project. Ernesto arrived at Dornach early in 1924 and successfully applied to Dr Steiner for acceptance into the First Class (Erste Klasse der Freien Hochschule für Geisteswissenschaft). The First Class was Steiner's new course of instruction in Spiritual Science for Anthroposophists who were established in their practice.

Ernesto had trained for five years in classical art at the prestigious Brera Academy of Fine Art in Milan (Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera). At Dornach, in 1924, Ernesto experimented with painting "in the anthroposophic way". The works in the exhibition, *Angels of the First Class*, are believed to be those works. Eleven images (front cover image and images 5 through 11) were recently revealed stored in a folder in a private collection along with Ernesto's personal poster of the first Goetheanum (image 4). Images 15 and 16 are from two other private collections and are included in this exhibition because, by size, content, and style, they appear to be part of Ernesto's suite of Anthroposophic paintings of 1924.

In 1926, Ernesto migrated to Australia (after two previous visits) with the intention of exhibiting his art - most probably his classical style oil paintings - but he was thwarted in this plan by the prevailing Depression.

In Australia, Ernesto cofounded the Michael Group in Melbourne (in 1928) for the study of Steiner's works. He taught the First Class in Melbourne and Adelaide.

Ernesto was the first Australian member of Steiner's Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers & Gardeners (in 1928) and he pioneered biodynamics and organics in Australia.

*Angels of the First Class* is believed to be the first exhibition of art works of Ernesto Genoni.



**Image 15. Contemplation of Eternity.**

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**Image 16. The Rainbow Madonna.**

### **Acknowledgments**

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