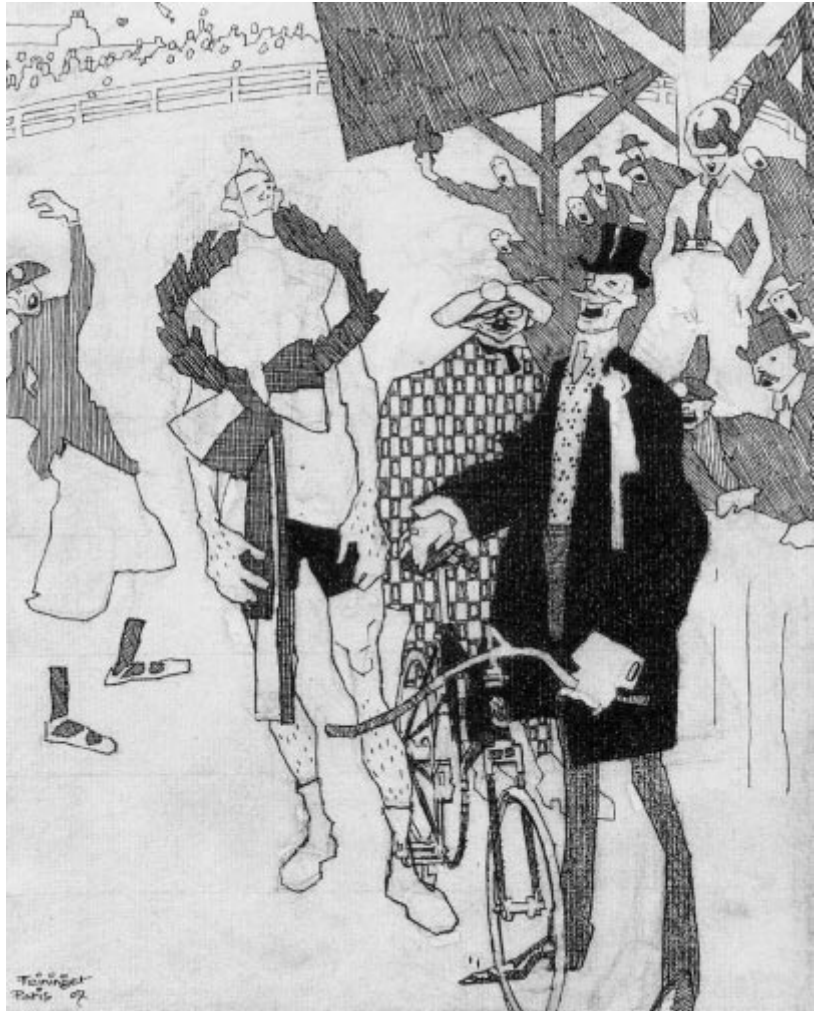


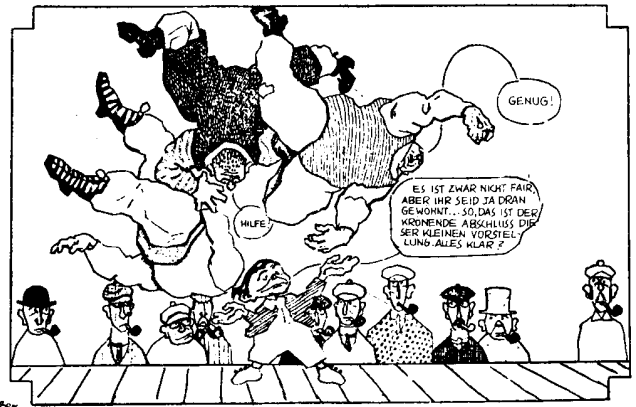
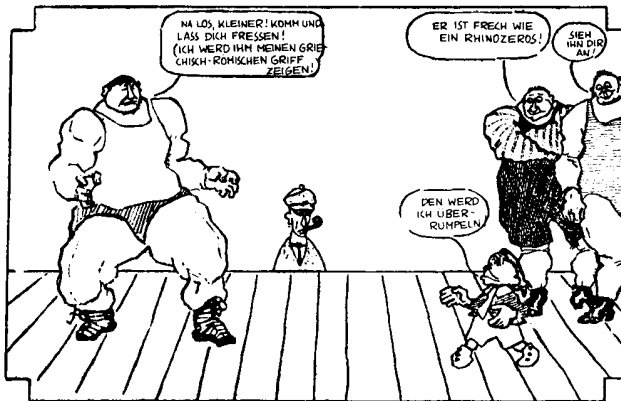
LYONEL FEININGER AND SPORT

it is surprising how, amongst the thousands of artists, few of them take physical exercise as a theme in their work. Rarely do creative people consider sport to have a place in culture. Conversely, however, very few of the many practising sportsmen and spectators visit art exhibitions and relate to painting, graphic art or sculpture. Such a divide must be why sports officials have rarely commissioned artists to decorate sports halls or conference centres. Many people have lost their interest in modern art, especially because of its tendency towards abstraction and modern art has increasingly dissociated itself from movement, preferring more static modes of expression.



All the more remarkable then, that a man should have tried to depict sport on a purely artistic level at the time when this evolution was starting. He was Lyonel Feininger (1871-1958), an American-German painter like his friend Paul Klee, he came from a family of musicians and had originally intended to follow in his parent's footsteps by devoting himself to music. He was sent to Germany to study music, but soon realized his talents lay elsewhere and

By F. K. Mathys



Feininger earned his living in the beginning by selling series of comic sketches like those of "Wee Willie Einkie" (above) and "Kinder Kids" (next page).

decided to attend the Hamburg school of art from 1887 to 1891, then the Berlin Academy, and, finally, to go to Paris to learn how to become a painter. It was a difficult road to travel alone and it took Feininger a long time to make a name for himself as an artist. At first he earned a living drawing caricatures for a satirical magazine in Berlin called "Ulk", and for "Fliegenden Blätter", "Das Narrenschiff" and "Narrenrad" until Chicago's "Sunday Tribune" hired him to draw a comic strip series, a rising art form at the time, for the Sunday paper. Naturally, this was just a way to earn a living, but it was done with a subtle and artistic touch, and not just his caricatures which had appeared in Germany, but what he sent to the USA as well — the "Kinder Kids" and "Wee Willie Ein-

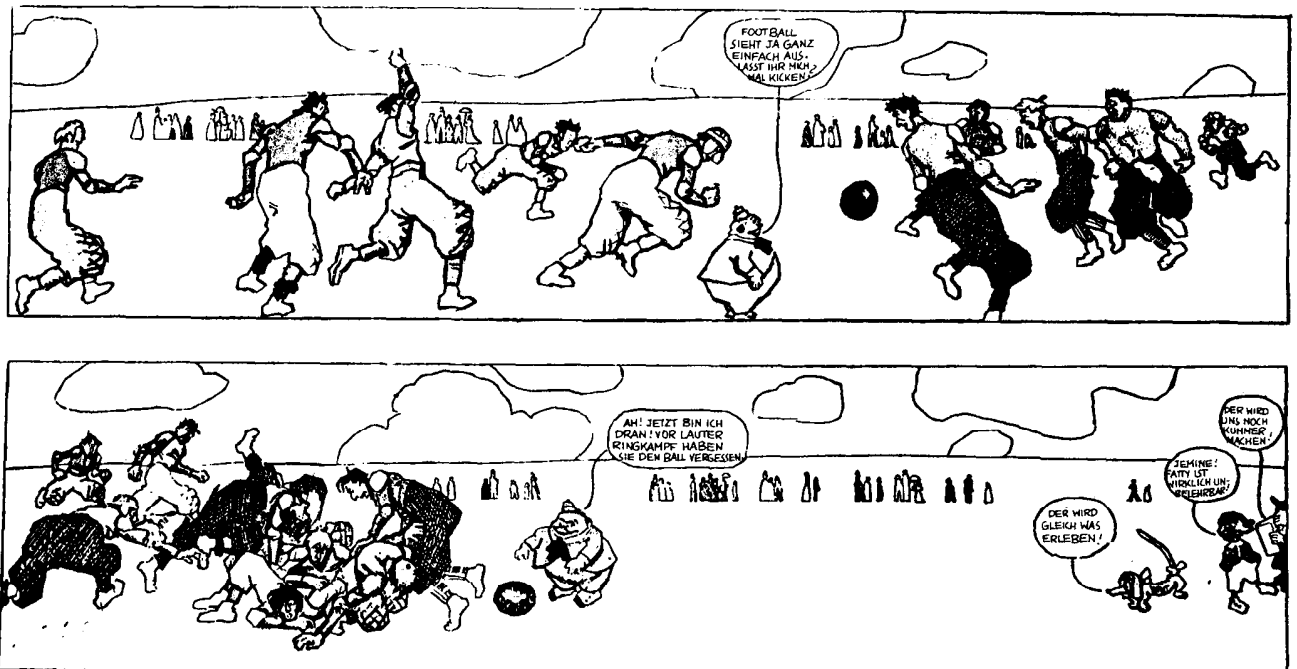
kie's World" series (which became available in 1975 when the Verlag Melzer, Darmstadt, published a German edition with a witty preface by Günter Methen) — reflected the hand of a brilliant artist. The caricatures in "Kinder Kids" and in "Wee Willie..." portray more than just sports activities such as boxing, balloon flying, parachuting and American football, they are also the first manifestations of the master of graphic cubism. Somewhat earlier, Feininger had dealt with cycling in detail. He had even been an enthusiastic cyclist in his Berlin years.

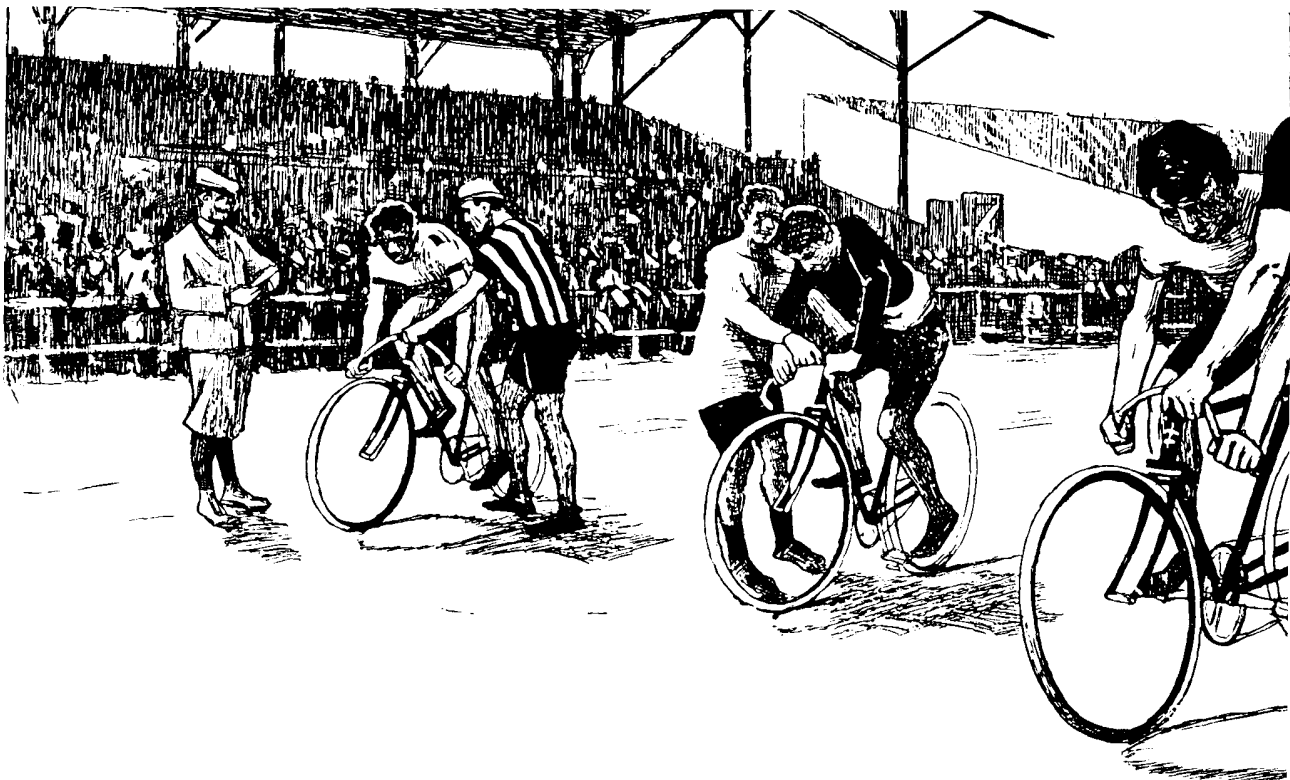
At that time it was still a rarity. Not everyone rode a bike to work, rather, cycling was still more or less a man's sport — when it was not practised professionally on

a track. Like the automobile later on, the bicycle was then a status symbol and Feininger cleverly poked fun of the gentlemen on their bicycles. Feininger also followed the street and track races with much interest. His drawings were not just ungainly caricatures, but demonstrated a remarkable attention to detail. His caricatures in "Narrenrad" also portrayed ladies dressed in trousers venturing out on the vehicles, only to be smiled at by the bourgeois. The prudishness of the time is illustrated by the circumstances under which another magazine, "Das Narrenschiff", published by the same company as "Narrenrad", had to cease publication because of official harassment. An announcement to the readers stated that "With this edition the voyages of the Narrenschiff (ship of fools) come to an end. The government's ban on the sale of this magazine in railway stations has hurt its distribution to the point that we have decided to let it fold... but the idea behind our paper, like all ideas, cannot be destroyed." Fortunately Feininger came into

contact with the Paris magazine "Témoign" during his second stay in Paris in 1907 and joined the staff. His drawings and etchings of this period already presage the linear elements of his later style. Besides their sense of humour and the grotesque — which are somewhat American — these drawings already have some of the traits that made Feininger great, then an artist described as "classical". After his return to Berlin his pictures still had a caricature-like quality in the predominance of the decorative figures, but soon the structural elements began to take over, a tendency seen not only in his urban scenes and landscapes, but also in his sailing pictures.

His style first emerged decisively, however, when Walter Gropius asked him to teach at the newly founded Bauhaus in Weimar. There he met Oskar Schlemmer, Paul Klee and Vassili Kandinsky. Their acquaintance grew into a friendship which eventually produced the group of German cubists.





A dedicated cyclist during his Berlin days, Feininger revealed a talent for observing detail.

Of course, Feininger did not become famous for his sports drawings, even though he was an avid fan of water sports and his later works recall something of the sailing pictures. Rather, it was for his subtle urban scenes of old German cities. Not only is his incredible musicality evident in these paintings and contours, but the subtle colouring creates dreamy landscapes, reminiscent of Turner and Caspar David Friedrich in many ways — but of course from a much more modern aspect. Consequently, his portrayals of sailors and regattas show his love for the wind and water, elements of those sports which were his lifelong passion. His watercolours are not just light

touches of colour but include contrapuntal pen and ink strokes. Nevertheless, the Third Reich's policies regarding art did not include talent like Feininger's and so he moved back to his country of birth. There, in addition to his small-format pictures, he also did a painting for the wall of the "Marine Transportation" building and one for the 1939 World Exhibition. Of course, only a few of his admirers know that besides his enthusiasm for sports he also composed a series of fugues for the organ, thereby honourably continuing the family tradition inherited from his father, a musician, and his mother, a singer.

F. K. M.