

# FIVE SCENOGRAPHERS, ONE FILM: WOLFGANG STAUDTE'S FAILED FILM ADAPTATION OF *MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN* (1955)

By Dorett Molitor

Bertolt Brecht's play *Mother Courage and Her Children: A Chronicle of the Thirty Year's War* was published in 1938-39. The play had its German premiere at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin in January 1949; Helene Weigel played Mother Courage, and Heinrich Kilger designed the costumes and built the stage design, based on the ideas of set designer Teo Otto.

As early as September 1947, Brecht had asked the screenwriter Emil Burri to assess whether the play would be suitable for a film adaptation. Work on the screenplay—by Robert A. Stemmle and other authors, and Erich Engel as the intended director—dragged on for six years, from 1949 to June 1955. Dissatisfied with the results, Brecht rejected all drafts and hired Burri for collaboration. The endless debates about the script, as expressed by the DEFA Studio as early as the fall of 1950, grew out of concern about the pacifist tendencies of the play. The backdrop for this criticism was the Formalism Debate<sup>1</sup> initiated in the Soviet Union and its demand for positive heroes. Brecht addressed this issue in part by adding the figure of the Young Miller to represent the forces opposing the war. In the meantime, screen tests had begun but work on the film stopped in 1953. In June 1955, DEFA accepted the last version of the screenplay.

By now, director Wolfgang Staudte (*Die Mörder sind unter uns*, *The Murderers Are among Us*, 1946; *Der Untertan*, *The Kaiser's Lackey*, 1951) was involved. He remembered the film project as follows:

It was a strange business. This *Mother Courage* project and how I got involved remains a mystery to me, really. Because it was only logical that Erich Engel, who had directed *Mother Courage* on stage, would of course make the film—a first-class director and a friend of Brecht. They worked on this project for many, many years—probably until things got critical for DEFA in terms of time. Anyway, to my utter surprise, DEFA asked if I would film *Mother Courage*. I can tell you an anecdote about that: When I got the job and was still astounded about it, I came home and found Erich Engel and Fritz Kortner there. They were sitting there, waiting for me. I said, 'Erich, good thing you're here! Can you believe it? They want me to film *Mother Courage*. What do you think of that?' Then he said, 'First of all, I knew they were going to offer you the job and, secondly, I can only advise you against taking it. You won't be able to get along with Brecht. I didn't get along with him, you won't either.' Kortner said nothing at first, and I had a glass of cognac and thought about it and said to Erich Engel, 'If you don't mind, I'll do the following: I'll film *Mother Courage* and run the risk of Brecht killing me afterward.' Then Kortner said, 'That's the least he'll do!' And he was right."<sup>2</sup>

As work continued on the screenplay, the project gained momentum in fall 1954. Production was commissioned to make the film in color, the contract for the global film rights was finally ready as well as the directing contract for Staudte. Oskar Pietsch was hired for the set design. Negotiations with France about cooperation opportunities resulted in contracts with the French actors Simone Signoret and Bernhard Blier, and a contract was signed with the French film scenographer Max Douy.

In addition to various conflicts between DEFA, Staudte and Brecht—about casting issues, costumes, the question of color or black-and-white film, the contract and Helene Weigel's work schedule—there were many unresolved conflicts about the film sets until the end.

The following incident occurred regarding the costumes. Manfred Wekwerth, Brecht's assigned assistant, observer and liaison to DEFA, paid a visit to the shoot one day. He got lost in the studio and ended up at the shoot for a different film, *Zar und Zimmermann* (*Tsar and Carpenter*, 1956, dir. Hans Müller). He didn't like the costumes he saw there and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ostkunstwest.de/kapitel/vom-kampf-gegen-formalismus-und-abstraktion/>. Accessed 15 August 2023.

<sup>2</sup> *Kein Untertan – Wolfgang Staudte und seine Filme*. Directed by Malte Ludin, ZDF-TV, 1976.

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informed Brecht by phone. Willi Teichmann, the production manager and witness to the telephone conversation, in turn informed Staudte of what he had overheard, who then referred to Wekwerth as a spy in a letter. As of September 8, 1955, during the shoot, conflicts intensified. Attempts were made to save the film and the invested funds in various meetings that went to the top of political and cultural committees. Brecht agreed to recast the Mother Courage role, but the search for someone to replace Helene Weigel failed. (Later Brecht insisted on maintaining the contract with Weigel.) On September 22, 1955, Wolfgang Staudte resigned the directorship.

On December 6, 1955, a commission appointed by GDR Minister of Culture Johannes R. Becher—tasked with clarifying causes and responsibility for the termination of the *Mother Courage* film project—concluded that the studio management was at fault and responsible and the Central Film Administration had violated the state control obligation: “At present, the commission does not presume there will be a resumption of work on the film. This would only be possible based on a clear decision at the highest level as to whether the film is to be made by Staudte or Brecht alone. A collaborative effort does not seem promising.”<sup>3</sup>

In retrospect, Wolfgang Staudte described the irresolvable conflict as follows: “For Bertolt Brecht, it is the jealousy of the image [...] he’s jealous of the image, he is a man of words [...] he basically only wants an illustration of his text.”<sup>4</sup> Many meters had been shot: 5,706 of CinemaScope and 3,165 of regular film stock. Of the 384 takes needed for the whole film, 53 had been shot; these 21 minutes of film footage are missing to this day. Of the 4.8 million marks dedicated to the project, 1.5 million were spent—a considerable portion of which went to the set design.

Brecht tried to save the film by securing Erich Engel to direct it. In February 1956, Brecht, Burri and Engel worked on the screenplay. Then, Bertolt Brecht unexpectedly died on August 14, 1956. From 1959 to 1960, Peter Palitzsch and Manfred Wekwerth finally produced a film adaptation of *Mother Courage*.<sup>5</sup>

What is unusual is that over the years that this project dragged on, it involved five film scenographers: Oskar Pietsch, Max Douy, Karl Schneider, Erich Zander and Walter Schulze-Mittendorf.<sup>6</sup> From the start, Brecht’s desire to eliminate all naturalistic elements collided with the shared concept of the DEFA Studio and Staudte: an international CinemaScope film in color, with famous cast members. The decor was to show only the essential: “Thinking about the *Courage* film [...] the set design should appear on screen only when it has a role to play.”<sup>7</sup> In keeping with his austere Epic Theater, the film too was supposed to achieve its effect through the use of minimal props. Brecht’s ideas had inarguably been applied, tested and proven in the successful theater production (Fig. 1).<sup>8</sup>



(Fig. 1) Sketch by Heinrich Kilger for the Deutsches Theater production of *Mother Courage*. Cited in Funke, Christoph. *Der Bühnenbildner Heinrich Kilger*. Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> Münzer, Georg. “Bericht der von dem Herrn Minister für Kultur eingesetzten Kommission zur Überprüfung der Ursachen und der Schuldfrage zu dem Abbruch des Spielfilms Mutter Courage in dem VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme.” Bundesarchiv (Federal Archive): DR 1/4362, 6.12.1955, Bl. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ludin, Kein Untertan – Wolfgang Staudte und seine Filme.

<sup>5</sup> With few exceptions, all set designs for Wolfgang Staudte, Peter Palitzsch’s and Manfred Wekwerth’s film project *Mother Courage* are now part of the scenography collection at the Filmmuseum Potsdam.

<sup>6</sup> Common practice was to have one scenographer, assisted by a member of the staff and, if necessary, architects.

<sup>7</sup> Brecht, Bertolt. Arbeitsjournal, Bd. II, P. 913. Cited in Wolfgang Gersch *Film bei Brecht. Bertolts Brechts praktische und theoretische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Film*. Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1975. 277.

<sup>8</sup> Compare: Akademie der Künste, Archiv Darstellende Kunst: Heinrich Kilger Archiv and Funke, Christoph. *Der Bühnenbildner Heinrich Kilger*. Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1975.

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Today, the creations of set designers Oskar Pietsch and Max Douy are part of the Potsdam Filmmuseum's collection. The contract with Pietsch, the production's first architect, began in January 1955. As a special arrangement, the contract noted that the co-producer would provide an architectural consultant, with a demarcation of responsibilities to be determined.<sup>9</sup> Also in December 1954, DEFA agreed on Max Douy's participation in the film project with Pandora Film Production Stockholm. The contract begins: "In Berlin, Mr. Douy will be exclusively available to the director, Mr. Wolfgang Staudte, as the architect for the film *Mother Courage* being co-produced by Pandora and DEFA, Berlin-Babelsberg, with immediate effect for a period of approximately 4 weeks." It continues: "All final designs for each decoration approved by the director are to be prepared in large format and in color, according to the wishes of the director."<sup>10</sup> From January to March 1955, the architectural consultant Max Douy thus designed the set, while his brother Jacques created the construction plans. Staudte noted that he worked "... in Paris and later in Berlin with the French architect Max Douy on the film sets, for which we were particularly interested in the color design."<sup>11</sup>

In a *Zeitzeugengespräch* interview,<sup>12</sup> Pietsch recalled that he had assumed that hiring Douy was a personal initiative on Staudte's part; Douy made the designs at Staudte's home, and Pietsch never came into contact with him. Long before filming began, Douy gave the designs to Staudte, who gave them to Pietsch. According to his recollections, Pietsch managed the construction alone. As Simone Signoret, who was cast as Yvette, recalled:

... Staudte lived in West Berlin and worked for both DEFA and Bavaria [film studios]. He had hired us—I of all people—because he had seen us perform. He had also recruited Max Douy, [Claude] Autant-Lara's set designer. In the enormous and excellently equipped studios, Max had built beautiful, strange and bleak decors, war paintings, pictures of all wars in general. Members of the Berlin Ensemble told us about their lives. [...] Sometimes they rehearsed a piece for six months if Brecht decided so.<sup>13</sup>

In his memoir, *Meine unruhigen Jahre* [*My Troubled Years*],<sup>14</sup> Erwin Geschonneck, who was to play the field chaplain, recounts Brecht's visit to the studio: placing his foot on the sand, he slipped because of his crooked heels and said, quite dryly, "I didn't build *Courage* on sand"<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 2).



(Fig. 2) Robert Baberske, "Yvette on Sand Floor." Studio, 1955, film still, Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.

<sup>9</sup> Oskar Pietsch und VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme, *Anstellungsvertrag für Filmschaffende* 27. Dezember 1954. Filmmuseum Potsdam: Oskar Pietsch Collection.

<sup>10</sup> Max Douy und A. B. Pandora-Film Stockholm i.V. Erich Mehl, 15. Januar 1955, *Anstellungsvertrag für Filmschaffende*. Filmmuseum Potsdam: Max Douy Collection.

<sup>11</sup> Compare to the collection on *DEFA Mutter Courage 1952 – 1955*. Filmmuseum Potsdam: Albert Wilkening Collection.

<sup>12</sup> "Oskar Pietsch." *Transkription des Zeitzeugengesprächs mit Oskar Pietsch, April 1996*. Filmmuseum Potsdam. 52.

<sup>13</sup> Signoret, Simon. *Ungeteilte Erinnerungen*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1986.

<sup>14</sup> Geschonneck, Erwin and Günther Agde. *Meine unruhigen Jahre: Lebenserinnerungen*. Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> The production photo (Fig. 2) shows that the floor in the studio was covered with sand.



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Which of the existing sketches and drafts by Pietsch or Douy were actually realized is difficult to determine, since only a few photos of the production and scenes, or film stills, have been handed down. Although not all the sketches and drafts are available at the Filmmuseum Potsdam (part of Douy's work is archived at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris), we can assume that both Douy and Pietsch drew the entire film, closely following the screenplay, be it as a sketch or draft. Also available, evidently for the entire film, are Jacques Douy's very precise construction drawings, which are partially in color. They show broad studio landscapes, which created depth by means of receding painted backdrops (Fig. 3).



(Fig. 3) Without specifications. Work photo: *Mother Courage*, 1955. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.

The following examples attest to the similarities between Pietsch and Douy's drafts; surviving scene and production photos show which of the sketches, drafts, and construction plans were actually realized.

Both set designers begin sparingly, against a backdrop with a wide, snow-covered landscape—as setting 3<sup>16</sup> in the screenplay<sup>17</sup> suggests—with the “introduction of the ensemble of figures (Mother Courage and her children), and the most important prop: the covered wagon (Fig. 4-5). Both Douy and Pietsch characterized Setting 10 of the screenplay, entitled “The Swedish Camp,” with stalls, drinking tents, camp followers and soldiers. At its center was the theme of recruitment into the Swedish army, in front of a “splendid knight’s armor.” Douy does this with a long shot (Fig. 6), while Pietsch does it with a close-up (Fig. 7). Both scenographers add accents in subtle colors. In Setting 31, the tent of an officer in the Imperial Army and a group of officers exuberantly celebrates a victory. Yvette dances and sings the “Song of Fraternization.” Highlighted in color are Yvette’s charms: red shoes, red bodice, red mouth (Fig. 8-9). Douy’s quill and watercolor sketch convincingly hints at the opulence of the celebrations, as specified in the screenplay. The rapturous mood, fueled by alcohol and Yvette’s provocative, bare-breasted performance, is almost palpable (Fig. 10). This mood is reflected in the built set design: gorgeous fabrics and lavishly laid-out carpets, chandeliers, luxurious drinking cups and a provocative Yvette in the center (Fig. 11).



(Fig. 4) Max Douy, “Covered Wagon in Snowy Landscape.” Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil, ink. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 5) Oskar Pietsch, “Covered Wagon in Snowy Landscape.” Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil, chalk, ink. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.

<sup>16</sup> Editor’s Note: The German word here is Bild, which traditionally denotes a section of a play—usually shorter than an act but longer than a scene—determined by a given stage setting. Although changes in setting usually coincide with scene changes in Anglo-English theater, we have translated Bild as “Setting” to avoid confusion.

<sup>17</sup> Burri, Emil; Brecht, Bertolt; and Staudte, Wolfgang. *Drehbuch Mutter Courage vom 28.6.1955*. Potsdam Film Museum: Screenplay Collection.

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(Fig. 6) Max Douy, "Swedish Camp." Set design sketches for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil, ink. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 7) Oskar Pietsch, "Swedish Camp." Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil, ink. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 8) Oskar Pietsch, "Imperial Officer's Tent: Yvette Sings on the Table at the Victory Celebration." Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Ink, watercolor. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 9) Max Douy, "Imperial Officer's Tent: Yvette Sings on the Table at the Victory Celebration." Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Ink, watercolor. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 10) Max Douy, "Imperial Officer's Tent: Yvette Sings on the Table at the Victory Celebration." Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Ink, watercolor. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.

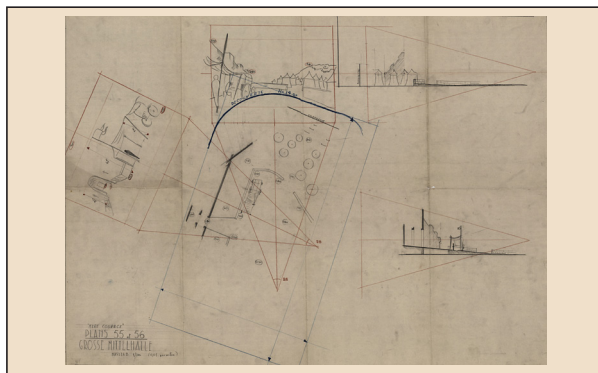


(Fig. 11) Without specifications. Film still of *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



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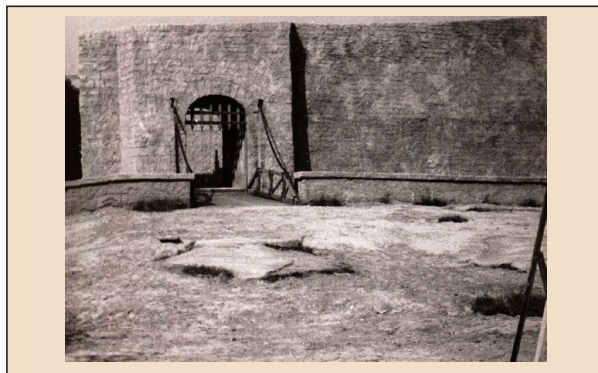
The following two examples demonstrate a flawless interplay between architectural drawing, set design and actual set construction. In the first, Jacques Douy's architectural drawing, sketched in pencil (Fig. 12), features the entrance to the gated town bridge to the left, in a 90-degree rotation. Max Douy identically translates this drawing into the full-color design (Fig. 13). The construction in the open studio space follows these templates without changes; only the ropes needed for the drawbridge have been added (Fig. 14). The second example is Setting 38 of the screenplay, a procession of pallbearers in Ingolstadt. Again at 90-degree rotation (with floor and elevation plans for camera positions included), the upper part of Jacques Douy's architectural drawing shows tables, chairs and the covered wagon below the stairs (Fig. 15). Max Douy's design (Fig. 16) shows the funeral procession in the background, with buildings flanking the stairs and Mother Courage and the field chaplain kneeling in the foreground. The charcoal drawing evokes a gloomy, threatening mood. The scene photo shows the incomplete construction of the staircase from the perspective of the sketch (Fig. 17).



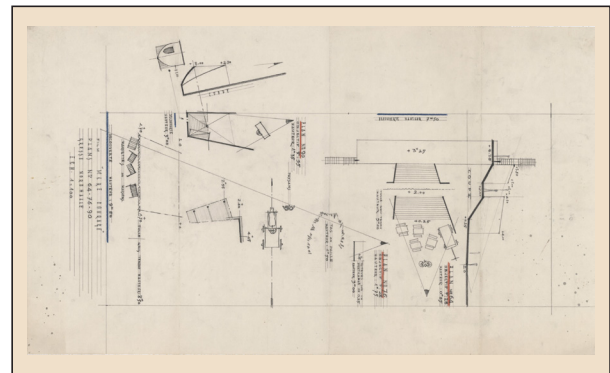
(Fig. 12) Jacques Douy, construction drawing for *Mother Courage*, (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil; blue and red colored pencil. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam. .



(Fig. 13) Max Douy, "Covered Wagon with Tent at the Bridge Entering the City of Regensburg." Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil and ink drawing. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam. .



(Fig. 14) Without specifications. Work photo, *Mother Courage*, 1955. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.

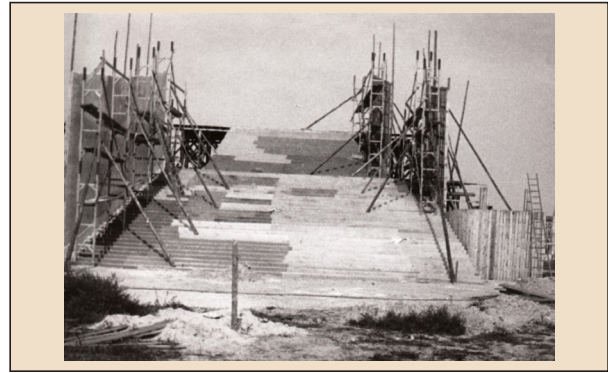


(Fig. 15) Jacques Douy, construction drawing for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil, blue and red colored pencil. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.

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(Fig. 16) Max Douy, "Courage and the Field Chaplain at the Covered Wagon; Funeral Procession in the Background." Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Charcoal. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 17) Without specifications. Work photo, *Mother Courage*, 1955. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.

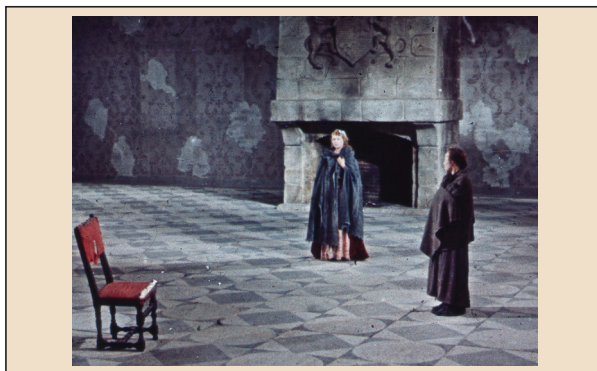
Further examples refer to episodes set in the manor house in Setting 64 of the screenplay. Pietsch (Fig. 18) and Douy (Fig. 19) design a bare, cold hall with a fireplace and library. Not only are the layout and size of the hall almost identical, but the sketches of the library and floor are also strikingly similar. Both designers worked in pencil and ink, and Yvette's dress is once again red (albeit a bit more vivid in Pietsch's rendition). Only their designs for the fireplace differ. The scene photo (Fig. 20) shows the implementation of Douy's fireplace design; to emphasize the sparseness of the room, the library has been omitted in the staging.



(Fig. 18) Oskar Pietsch, "In the Manor House." Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Charcoal. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 19) Max Douy, "In the Manor House." Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. In Filmmuseum Potsdam. Potsdam Film Museum.



(Fig. 20) Without specifications. Work photo, *Mother Courage*, 1955. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



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The next design (Setting 48, in the manor house) bears witness to better days. Pietsch designs the vestibule with a curved staircase, the tapestry and the guard indicate wealth (Fig. 21). The interior design, the colors and Yvette's costume create a cheerful, carefree atmosphere that is also reflected in the scene photo (Fig. 22). Gray tones and various gradations of gray dominated Brecht's theater production; the only exceptions were Yvette's shoes and costume. The adoption of Kilger's theater costumes—which, in the interim, Brecht had thought to use in the black-and-white film he was planning—did not come to fruition; only Helene Weigel wore her theater costume in the film. Brecht firmly rejected Walter Schulze-Mittendorff's costumes for the film, deeming them too similar to operetta costumes.



(Fig. 21) Oskar Pietsch, "In the Manor House." Set design sketch, *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil, color drawing ink. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 22) Without specifications. Film still, *Mother Courage*, 1955. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.

Erich Zander's and Karl Schneider's set designs are now in the film museums in Berlin and Düsseldorf, respectively. Research on their production background, especially on the multiple commissions that were involved, is still pending. As Pietsch remembers, there was an indication that Erich Zander really wanted to make the film.<sup>18</sup> Zander had already worked with Staudte on *The Kaiser's Lackey*, *Die Geschichte vom kleinen Muck* (*The Story of Little Muck*, 1953) and *Leuchtflecken* (*The Beacon*, 1954). As with other films, the assumption is that Zander first made the sketches for *Mother Courage*, and Schneider then implemented the designs. The drafts discussed here relate to Setting 5 of the screenplay, "A Snowdrift," which depicts the encounter of Mother Courage and her children with the corpses of two farmers hung from a tree. Schneider's colored drafts (Fig. 23) basically mirror Zander's sketches (Fig. 24).



(Fig. 23) Karl Schneider, "A Snowdrift." Set design sketch, *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Watercolor. Erich Zander Collection, Filmmuseum Düsseldorf.



(Fig. 24) Karl Schneider, "A Snowdrift." Set design sketch, *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil. Erich Zander Collection, Filmmuseum Berlin.

<sup>18</sup> "Oskar Pietsch." *Transkription des Zeitzeugengesprächs mit Oskar Pietsch*.



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Ten drawings by Walter Schulze-Mittendorff, the fifth confirmed scenographer, are in the Deutsche Kinemathek - Museum für Film und Fernsehen in Berlin. He, too, had previously worked with Staudte (*The Kaiser's Lackey*) and designed film costumes for *Mother Courage* (see above). For Setting 14 of the screenplay, "In a Cathedral," all three designs utilize the massive, gutted episcopal church that, because of the war, is now being used as storage and parking for camp followers. Horses are being fed; two women—mistress and maid—kneel at the altar. Compared to Douy's (Fig. 25) and Pietsch's (Fig. 26), Schulze-Mittendorff's designs are strikingly more colorful (Fig. 27). Again, for Setting 61, it is clear that Pietsch and Douy adhere to the screenplay, which says: "a Swedish soldier walks past [the kneeling women] carrying a large bundle of hay." In his design, in contrast, Schulze-Mittendorff allows himself to merge different shots, combining Setting 61 with the subsequent one, in which Yvette sits in the center aisle, sewing "a pleureuse to a large hat." For this shot, Pietsch instead uses a devotional picture (Fig. 28). In the center, a brown Madonna is enthroned with a baby Jesus figure on her arm. To the right—partially covering the Madonna, and thus overlapping meanings—Mother Courage (dressed in the Madonna's colors of blue and red) carries a naked man in her arms, clearly picking up the Pietà motif. Mother Courage's face shows more suffering than the Madonna's. To the left of this group, Yvette, glowing with white skin, golden hair and a red dress, sits sewing a pleureuse to a large hat. In the background, before barrel vaults, pews are strewn about and, in their midst, there is a fallen cross. In this sketch, Pietsch denounces war and the misery linked to it, transcending the play and the (failed) film.



(Fig. 25) Max Douy, "At the Cathedral." Set design sketch, *Mother Courage*, 1955. Charcoal. Collection Oskar Pietsch, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 26) Oskar Pietsch, "At the Cathedral." Set design sketch for *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil, color drawing ink. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.



(Fig. 27) Walter Schulze-Mittendorff, "At the Cathedral." Set design sketch, *Mother Courage*, 1955. Pencil, color drawing ink. Walter Schulze-Mittendorff Collection, Deutsche Kinemathek - Museum für Film und Fernsehen.



(Fig. 28) Oskar Pietsch, "At the Cathedral." Set design sketch, *Mother Courage* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), 1955. Pencil, color drawing ink. Oskar Pietsch Collection, Filmmuseum Potsdam.

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In 1984—almost 30 years later—Albert Wilkening, then head of production at the DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme, wrote: “It is very difficult to describe the Brecht-Staudte story. We did not take into account that, as long as Brecht was alive, it would be impossible to commission a film director that did not come from the Brecht School.”<sup>19</sup>

Translated by Hasret Eleby

*This article is based on Dorett Molitor's longer text, “Zur Entstehung und zum Bestand der Szenographie-Sammlung des Filmmuseums Potsdam: Einblick in die Produktion und das Szenenbild des gescheitertes Filmprojektes Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder (1955) von Wolfgang Staudte” (“On the Creation and Inventory of the Filmmuseum Potsdam's Scenography Collection: A Look at the Production and Set Design of the Failed Film Project Mother Courage and Her Children (1955), by Wolfgang Staudte”). The original text grew out of the research project “Spielräume. Szenenbilder und -bildner in der Filmstadt Babelsberg” (“Spaces, Set Designs and Set Designers in the Babelsberg Film City”), funded by the Volkswagen Foundation. It was published in the online journal *kunsttexte.de* in 2014. We are grateful to the author for abridging this text for the 2023 release of *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1960).*

**Dorett Molitor** studied cultural studies, aesthetics and art history at the Karl Marx University in Leipzig, as well as film history at the Konrad Wolf Film University of Babelsberg. She was in charge of the Program Department at the Filmmuseum Potsdam from 1990 to 2008 and, from 2008 to 2019, she oversaw the Collections Department there. From 2011 to 2016, she was involved in the research project on “Spielräume. Szenenbilder und -bildner in der Filmstadt Babelsberg” (“Spaces, Set Designs and Set Designers in the Babelsberg Film City”) and has published numerous articles and books on DEFA films.

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Mittenzwei, Werner. *Das Leben des Bertolt Brecht oder der Umgang mit den Welträtseln*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989.

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<sup>19</sup> Compare to the collection on *DEFA Mutter Courage 1952 – 1955*. Filmmuseum Potsdam: Albert Wilkening Collection.