



Boris Kegel-Konietzko 1925-2020

Boris Kegel-Konietzko
Belgish Congo 1955

Boris Kegel-Konietzko was a successful dealer, a competent collector, a curious researcher, a captivating storyteller, a cosmopolitan globetrotter, a romantic fine spirit, a talented linguist and improvisationist, and a passionate sailor. The latter quality in particular was crucial to his success at German art fairs of the 1970s and 1980s.

Boris spent the first three years of his life in a Bedouin tent. At least, that must have been the impression his parents' bedroom of the family house in Hamburg-Wandsbek, which was completely furnished with oriental fabrics, had on him. His little bed stood by two old divans and it faced an Indian temple shrine. A brazier from Arabia filled the "tent" with cozy warmth. From all sides, various figures of gods, ancestors, and masks from Asia and Africa met the curious eyes of the young man.

Even stronger was the influence of his parents and their entourage. His father was the worldwide active ethnologist Julius Konietzko traveled to the Sudan, who, among other places, as early as 1913. Julius was also an author and, of course, a collector and dealer of ethnographic art. Starting in 1910, he supplied German museums, sometimes in exchange for their objects. After a few years, he had become so well known that he had only to label his collectibles that were to be shipped "J. K., Hamburg" in order to bring them safely home from all over the world. Boris' mother, Lore Konietzko, was a painter from a wealthy family. Behind this educated, cultured, and decidedly strong personality, the circle centered around Rosa Schapire, a German art historian, collector, patron, and author. Personalities such as Karl Schmitt-Rottluff, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, Carl Otto Czeschka, and the sculptor Friedrich Wield (a student of Auguste Rodin) enjoyed both friendship and business relationships with the Konietzkos. In addition, well-known dealers such as Charles Ratton, Jacob Aalderink, and Matthias L. J. Lemaire belonged to this circle, as did, of course, Hans Himmelheber. Others, such as the artist and African art collector Klaus Clausmeyer, had known Lore since her childhood in Düsseldorf.

Thanks to these early impressions and experiences, Boris was well versed in the world of (tribal) art and its trade routes and rules. He probably caught his final "infection" at the age of eleven. At that time, his mother, who had since married the doctor and African art collector Georg Kegel, who set her up with her own business, had acquired a considerable number of African works of art from Hans Himmelheber, who himself had just returned from his extensive West Africa expedition

(1934–35). These works, which were to become the core of the family collection, were Boris' first African project of his own, as he was the one entrusted with documenting them. Boris himself was later in Africa between 1950 and 1959, predominantly in the Belgian Congo and West Africa, first on behalf of the Institute of the Parc National de Belgique and later engaged in private research or acquisition tours for the maternal gallery, which was signed over to him in 1964.

Then came the year 1968 and with it the answer to the question of why, of all things, Boris' passion for sailing was key to his business and personal golden period. That year he met Ingeborg, the great love of his life. She loved sailing even more than he did, and at that time she had a small dinghy moored in the same harbor as Boris' historic sailing cutter. With Inge at his side, a breath of fresh wind came into his life and into his business activities. She proved to be extremely adept at sales and was—indeed, still is—full of captivating energy. From 1969 on, the Kegel-Konietzko couple exhibited at the important German art fairs in Düsseldorf, Cologne, Hanover, and Munich. Almost twenty-five years followed, characterized by a great deal of successful business, which alternated with sailing trips of up to three months.

In the period from 2000 onward, Boris increasingly shifted his activities to private projects of the heart. He wrote his memoirs, helped the Brücke Museum in Berlin curate the Schmidt-Rottluff exhibition, and arranged another show for his mother's drawings and paintings. Boris loaned or donated top pieces from his collection to various museums and capped his life's work by selling several particularly noteworthy African artworks in collaboration with Roberta Entwistle, including a powerful *nkisi nkondi* figure from the Congo to The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

On the evening of October 3, 2020, Boris passed away peacefully at the age of ninety-five. I will miss him dearly.

Alexander Dorn

