

HANS VOLKERT

(Erlangen, 1878 - Puchkirchen, 1945)

The construction of the Laufenbrücke at Laufenburg on the Rhine, 1911

signed and inscribed, lower right: *Hans Volkert Beim Brueckenbau in Laufenburg a. Rhein*

gouache and chalk

483 x 372 mm

Since the Middle Ages, a bridge over the Rhine has connected the two sides of the town of Laufenburg. From the 14th until the 19th century, the town remained chiefly under Habsburg control. In 1801, however, the would-be emperor Napoleon plundered the forest towns of the Rhine and burned the bridge at Laufenburg. At the ensuing Treaty of Lunéville, the frontiers of the French and Austrian empires were renegotiated, and a new border was formed along the Rhine. The old town of Laufenburg, with its population split on either side of the river, was divided in two, and two distinct towns with the same name were formed, one in modern-day Switzerland, the other in modern-day Germany. This remains the case today.

In 1911, Hans Volkert, a painter, illustrator, and medallist from Erlangen, Bavaria, came to Laufenburg and witnessed the construction of a new bridge over the Rhine. The bridge was to replace Blasius Balteschwiler's partially covered wooden structure, constructed in 1810 following Napoleon's conquest, which can be seen to the left of the present drawing. By the turn of the 20th century, Blasius' bridge had proved inadequate for the requirements of industrialised life, and the celebrated civil engineer Robert Maillart was commissioned to build a new bridge adjacent to the old one. The daring construction of a new wooden frame, provisionally adjoined to the old bridge for structural support, is depicted here. The drawing is one of three known depictions of the bridge's construction from Volkert's time in Laufenburg and the elevated viewpoint acclaims the daring of the builders, emphasising the speed of the river, and continuing a German tradition of bridge drawing that reaches back to Dürer.

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