



BAUER

BY LAUREN GUNDERSON



DRAMATISTS
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Based on the true story of Rudolf Bauer ...

NOTE ON IMAGES

To use images of Rudolf Bauer's paintings in theatrical productions of BAUER please see his work here: <http://weinstein.com/artists/rudolf-bauer/>

The Weinstein Gallery has given permission for the use of Bauer's paintings free of charge to producers of the play. For high resolution files of desired images, email bauer@weinstein.com.

The world premiere of BAUER was commissioned and presented by San Francisco Playhouse (Bill English, Artistic Director; Susi Damilano, Producing Director) with the support of Rowland Weinstein, in association with the Weinstein Gallery, on March 18, 2014. It was directed by Bill English; the costume design was by Abra Berman; the lighting design was by Mary Louise Geiger; the sound design was by Theodore J.H. Hulsker; the original score was by Savannah Jo Lack; the scenic design was by Ewa Muszynska; the projection design was by Micah J. Stieglitz; and the stage manager was Tatjana Genser. The cast was as follows:

RUDOLF BAUER Ronald Guttman
LOUISE BAUER Susi Damilano
HILLA REBAY Stacy Ross

The San Francisco Playhouse production of BAUER moved Off-Broadway at 59E59 in New York City, on September 2, 2014, with Sherman Howard in the role of Rudolf Bauer.

CHARACTERS

RUDOLF BAUER — 62, brilliant but hardened man, can't get out from under his own shadow — gray-white hair. Louise calls him Rudi (pronounced “Roody”).

LOUISE BAUER — 50, very pretty, defensive, likes things to be calm and ordered (pronounced closer to “Louise*h*” than “Loueezz”).

HILLA REBAY — 60, powerful, tempestuous, a natural force of a woman.

PLACE

The abandoned art studio in Bauer's massive beachfront mansion in Deal, New Jersey. The room is spacious but past its prime. No one goes in here anymore.

Stark white in every way — white, dusty furniture though there's not much of it. Drop cloths cover stools or seats. An empty easel stands somewhere. Some unframed, limp blank canvases. A few leftover brushes on a table. An old typewriter. Cold white light sneaks into the room from the between the drapes and under the doors.

A door exiting toward the kitchen or hallway.

This room might be the only room in the whole universe — a pocket of existence.

TIME

1953, January.

Projected Before the Play Begins ...

“It is my further wish that during the lifetime of Miss Rebay the Foundation accept no gifts and make no purchases of paintings without her approval, and that after her death the Foundation make no addition to its collections of paintings, unless they come from Mr. Bauer.”

— Solomon Guggenheim,
March 1949, adjust letter to his will

BAUER

A large white room in a large white mansion that no one ever goes in anymore. It's winter outside. It sounds like winter outside.

Footsteps outside the studio. Someone is outside the door but hesitates before opening ...

Suddenly the door opens wide and Rudolf Bauer enters. He is prepared to battle with this space if need be. He scans the room. A lot happened here once.

BAUER. And here we are. Unsettling the dust. Among other things. *(He uncovers unfinished canvases, mainly blank canvases. He uncovers a dusty box or folder. This is what he wanted. He wants to open it but can't. He puts it in a safe place. While doing that, discovers a pile of early Non-Objective Museum catalogues with his work on the cover. He opens it carefully. We see snatches and snippets of his paintings projected on the wall. Colors and shapes trying to emerge from his mind. Perhaps they are faded instead of full-color ...)* Order and disorder. That's all we have. *(He finds old newspapers and magazine clippings about his work, in the catalogue. He is lost in it until —)*

LOUISE. *(Offstage.)* Rudolf? *(The projections drop and vanish.)* Rudolf Bauer, Who Lives In This House, where are you? *Wo bist du, mein Liebling.* *(He shoves the newspapers under a tarp, hides them. Louise's shoes click down the hall closer and closer. Louise enters. Sees him. Turns on the lights. And the room blanches to stark white.)* Rudi? *Mein Gott*, what are you doing in here? I was looking for you all over. Is this a game? Are we hiding today? Is that what we're doing?

BAUER. I'm not hiding. I'm right here.

LOUISE. In the dark? In the room no one uses? This is not my husband, this is a mouse.

BAUER. Mice are good at hiding.

LOUISE. So are children. I woke up, you were gone — not at lunch — I call and call, no answer — I was calling all across the house, it's a big house, I've been calling for *hours* —

BAUER. I'm sure it wasn't hours.

LOUISE. For *hours* shouting all over this house, when you could just say something or ring a bell.

BAUER. I don't have a bell.

LOUISE. *Break a window* — something — anything. I thought you'd fled for Canada instead of seeing her.

BAUER. That's not a bad idea.

LOUISE. I hid the keys. You're not leaving me. What are you doing in here?

BAUER. I couldn't sleep. I never sleep anymore. I got up, I wandered, I wandered here and ... that is the complete opera of my afternoon. Don't worry.

LOUISE. Don't make me. Now come out of here, please. You shouldn't be up in the cold like this, this dust. We go.

BAUER. No. We don't.

LOUISE. *Liebling*. It's not good for you. This room is full of — no. The drawing room is best, it's all prepared. Come get some tea.

BAUER. I don't want tea. I want to stay in here.

LOUISE. Rudi.

BAUER. In here is best, in here.

LOUISE. Why? I know this room. This room is not a patient, pensive room. This room makes you throw things.

BAUER. It does not.

LOUISE. It does and *I* clean it up. Not today. Today we are tidy. Today we put things in order.

BAUER. If we haven't found an order for them yet I don't know if they have one.

LOUISE. This is ridiculous. Let's go.

BAUER. Louise. We're meeting her in here.

LOUISE. No we're not.

BAUER. She comes today, she comes here.

LOUISE. Rudolf Bauer Who Lives In This House, we're not. I made up the drawing room.

BAUER. And you can unmake it.

LOUISE. I don't have time to make up this room. She's not coming here.

BAUER. She will. She will only come here.

LOUISE. She comes today, she sits in the drawing room, you two

will talk, and things will be put right between you so that we can all move on. That's what's happening and it's not happening in this room. You haven't been in here in years, and it looks like it. It's freezing, it's ... blank. She'll think I keep you in a manger.

BAUER. I thought you didn't care what she thinks.

LOUISE. Of course I care, I hate her.

BAUER. Oh now she's not so bad. Just like odorless poison.

LOUISE. *Rudolf.*

BAUER. You'll never know what hit you.

LOUISE. She's on her way, I am losing my mind, and you joke? This is not easy for me to let her in here after all she's done. But she asked, and I agreed, and that makes me a very nice woman. But I swear to god, I am not enjoying this, and you are not helping, and *why god why are we in this room?*

BAUER. Because the past is coming to get me and I want it to be on my own terms. Also I don't want her poison on the nice furniture. *(Pause.)*

LOUISE. How domestic of you.

BAUER. I try.

LOUISE. You do not.

BAUER. I do actually. A quiet country life for Mr. Bauer.

LOUISE. And his very patient wife.

BAUER. And his very patient wife. Who reminds him of himself when he forgets.

LOUISE. Does she?

BAUER. *(A kind of third-person daydream.)* She does. Though he doesn't mind forgetting. At least forgetting is quiet. He likes the quiet. He didn't always like it, he used to like chaos. He used to conduct it, cacophony and symphony into shape and line.

LOUISE. Why are you talking like this?

BAUER. But now the quiet suits him. So he says nothing.

LOUISE. Rudolf.

BAUER. She tries again ...

LOUISE. *Rudi.*

BAUER. He hoped to sit in this white silence, but he thought he'd be polite and narrate for clarity.

LOUISE. Rudi, listen to me. Please hear me say this: Don't be strange. Not today. Do not make me do this day alone.

BAUER. *(Sincere.)* You're not going to be alone. We're stuck together. I am the gum to your boot.

LOUISE. Which I will take as a compliment. *Ich liebe dich von ganzem Herzen* ["I love you with all my heart"].

BAUER. You are very good to me. You should stop it.

LOUISE. I know I should. I won't, but I should

BAUER. You know how happy you make me. Which is contrary to my natural state.

LOUISE. I like your natural state.

BAUER. I don't. I can't stand being around a cranky old man. How do you do it?

LOUISE. Love is a mystery.

BAUER. And what can I do for you? What can I do?

LOUISE. You want to make me happy? Go to the drawing room. Or at least allude to the fact that we have real furniture. Or ... prepare to try and ... forgive her. She comes, you talk, who knows. We could all end up friends in the end.

BAUER. Can we please decide if we hate her or not?

LOUISE. That museum is going to be a success for both of you. The Non-Objective Museum already is. And now a brand new one? No matter the anger from the inside, from the outside? It's your work driving the next great museum of modern art. Perhaps she might be ready, *you* might be ready to forgive each other after all this time.

BAUER. Or perhaps forgiveness is impossible. And art is just very colorful commerce and the buying and the selling is the heart of it, not the vision, not the soul.

LOUISE. She could be coming to apologize, to make amends —

BAUER. That's not why she's coming.

LOUISE. Maybe things are changing and you can have more control —

BAUER. *That's not why she's coming. She's coming because she controls everything about my life, and she knew I'd let her in, that I'd have to, that I'm begging for something of value in all this. (Pause.)*

LOUISE. You will never beg for value. That entire museum, her entire career, is built on your value. And she will use her power at the Guggenheim to —

BAUER. Don't say that.

LOUISE. Why not? It's being built for you.

BAUER. It's not for me, she gave the damn thing to the architect.

LOUISE. Frank Lloyd Wright is designing it for your work.

BAUER. That showman is designing it for himself. It's not for me, it's barely for the art. How do you hang a painting on a curve?

LOUISE. Let's not talk about this, it's upsetting you.

BAUER. *She's coming is what's upsetting me. She is and always has been up-to-something is what's upsetting me.*

LOUISE. Then why answer her letter?! Why let her in at all? We didn't have to see her, but here she comes and now what do you expect me to do?

BAUER. I don't know, we can hide.

LOUISE. Oh, stop it.

BAUER. Or shoot her.

LOUISE. *Durchdrahter* ["Crazy child"].

BAUER. Those are my best ideas.

LOUISE. We can't turn her away now. She's coming here and we're seeing her.

BAUER. Yes, we certainly can't turn away an old friend. Who ruined my life.

LOUISE. Don't talk like your life is finished, it's not.

BAUER. I'm skipping to the end.

LOUISE. Well don't. And don't pretend that some part of you doesn't enjoy two women fighting over you.

BAUER. Is that what your plan was? Fighting her?

LOUISE. You know what I mean.

BAUER. You should stretch.

LOUISE. I mean that some part of you needs to see her, I know you do. She hadn't written in years, and you hadn't written in years, and the last time you did write her was a fifty-page rant wishing her "Good luck in hell." Why else would you let her in if you didn't need to?

BAUER. I don't know why! I'm curious! I'm vengeful! Or I'm dying and she reminds me of a time when I wasn't. (*Pause.*) Everyone thinks they want to know why. But *why* doesn't work. It's an impotent question. *Why* changes. "Because I loved you," "because I hate you." *Why* doesn't matter. What matters is the wreckage of *what*.

LOUISE. You're being dark. I hate when you get dark.

BAUER. And ... *why* would I do that?

LOUISE. Because you need her, and you hate *that*, so you hate *her*. (*She's right.*) Or love. (*She's right. Pause.*) You do realize that those feelings should be much easier to tell apart.

BAUER. She asked to come. It was in a telegram. Which made the message unusually brief and pleasant. That's enough of why. (*Pause. Louise sees the uncovered canvas and newspaper ...*)

LOUISE. What's this?

BAUER

by Lauren Gunderson

1M, 2W

Love. Art. Defiance. The visceral and visual true story of forgotten modern artist Rudolf Bauer, struggling with his fading place in the history of art as his paintings are removed from the walls of the Guggenheim Museum.

"[A] beautifully written play ... Gunderson goes deep in her exploration of greed's effect on love and art ... it brings its audience to tears."

—**The New Yorker**

"Lauren Gunderson constructs layers of edgy, fraught dialogue to probe a real-life mystery: Why did ... Rudolf Bauer, a pioneer of Non-Objective art, stop painting after signing a contract with Solomon Guggenheim that would promise all his future work to Guggenheim's new museum? ... [A] love triangle provides plenty of fuel for Gunderson to explore the sometimes-fragile nature of the artistic impulse, the moral obligations of the artist, the significance of art and art-making, and the convoluted relationships that can foster or block the artist's singular spirit."

—**The San Francisco Examiner**

"There's brittle, witty repartee ... [with] terse, poetic statements of Bauer's evocative aesthetics."

—**San Francisco Chronicle**

"Gunderson's work of historical fiction tackles the complex emotions and motivations behind Bauer's disappearance from the art scene in the early 1940s. Fluctuating between a living-room drama and an avant-garde display, Gunderson lands on a few genuinely intriguing moments ... "

—**TheaterMania.com**

Also by Lauren Gunderson
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ISBN: 978-0-8222-3378-7



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