Otto Piltz,  
**Kindergarten**, 1877  
oil on canvas  
Widener University Art Gallery, Alfred O. Deshong Collection

In May 1878, this painting, titled *Kindergarten* in Weimar was seen at Rudolf Lepke’s, a Berlin auction house, by Adolph Menzel, the esteemed German printmaker and painter. Menzel wrote Piltz, “I appreciate (from my own attempts) what it means to follow children closely with the eye of a painter…” Menzel praises what he calls the “busy mingling and bustling of such a large number of children of everyday parents.” He notes particularly the light and the way it is handled in the second nursery room to the back of the main room.

Otto Piltz had recently completed *Kindergarten in Weimar*, in the years between attending school in Weimar (1866 to 1871) and his 1882 appointment as Professor at the Weimar art school. His ability to capture the idyllic world of children quickly placed him at the forefront of this genre, helping to establish his reputation.

He began contributing work to the annual Berlin Academy shows as early as 1870. In 1870, one of his paintings of children was purchased by the Prussian King Wilhelm I. His paintings on this theme continued to be fashionable through the 1880s. In the late eighties, he moved to Berlin and then, in 1889 to Munich where he died in 1910.
In this school room, Piltz's ability to render closely observed children can be seen in the veritable catalogue of facial expressions and behaviors. For example, in the group to the right, a boy sticks his tongue out and another responds by making a face at him. In the window, to the left, a teasing boy raises his hands so high a little girl can't reach the bread and apple he is holding. The face of a little blonde boy in the foreground is covered with jam. In contrast to the mayhem, in the center of the painting, a teacher, comforts a crying child.

The painting sparkles with incident and humor as these healthy pink-cheeked children crowded at tables and seated on the floor, eat their apples, jam and bread, and play pranks. It is an innocent world of games and joy where children are being themselves.

White dabs of paint lighten the earthen tones of the room. Light enters through the window and Piltz opens the space up to show a classroom in the back, flooded with light. These tones as well as his subject matter from everyday life characterize the realist movement that emerged in the second half of the 19th century.