

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Jessie Marion KING (New Kilpatrick 1875 - Kirkcudbright 1949)

Book Cover for Werke Alter Meister, Berlin

Offset lithograph printed on textile book cloth.

Signed and dated JESSY. M. KING. 1902 at the lower left.

Inscribed WERKE - ALTER – MEISTER / 1 KÖNIGL. / MUSEUM – BERLIN at the top.

338 x 272 mm. (13 1/4 x 10 3/4 in.) [sheet]

In 1899, Jessie Marion King received her first large-scale commission, in the form of a series of German book designs. On the recommendation of her teacher Fra Newbery, Georg Wertheim, the owner of a large department store in Berlin, employed the artist to design the covers and endpapers for a series of books showcasing photographs of German cities and landmarks. King ultimately designed four covers for the project, which were published by Wertheim's associated firm of Globus Verlag. These included a book of photographs of Dresden and Saxon Switzerland, the album Rund um Berlin, and two versions of the Album von Berlin. The second version of the latter, the most figurative design of the four, featured the figure of a young woman. A similar character reappeared three years later in two further designs by King for the covers of books published in Berlin in 1902; an album of music entitled Musik und Gesang, and an album of paintings, Werke Alter Meister.

The present sheet is the printed cover of the art book Werke Alter Meister, a collection of photographs of Old Master paintings in the collection of the Royal Museum in Berlin, published by Globus Verlag in 1902. This design is aptly described by the King scholar Colin White as, 'Together with [Musik und Gesang]...the most splendid covers that J[essie] M[arion] King ever devised. They form a fitting climax

to her work for Globus.' The young girl placed prominently in the centre of the design, 'dressed in a high-waisted, ankle-length robe, with her hair in heavy coils held in place by a large full-blown rose behind the ear', was to serve as a model for much of the future work for which King was to become so well known.

As White further notes: 'The maidens on the Globus covers were the prototypes of all the forlorn princesses that Jessie was ever to draw. Their faces, usually in profile or three-quarter view, were not always beautiful...Jessie's princesses were attractive because they looked ingenuous and helpless, rather than arrogant in their beauty.'

Colin White has further noted of this particular design that 'The signature, with a 'y' at the end of the artist's name, is believed to be unique in her book designs; all other recorded signatures from 1902 use 'Jessie'.

Literature:

Colin White, *A Guide to the Printed Work of Jessie M. King*, London, 2007, p.31, no.B25.

Artist description:

Born in Dunbartonshire, Jessie Marion King studied at Glasgow University and the Glasgow School of Art, under Francis Henry ('Fra') Newbery, in the early 1890s, where she concentrated on drawing and illustration. In 1898 she won a silver medal in the South Kensington National Art Competition, and also won a travelling scholarship that allowed her to visit France and Italy. By this time she was much admired for her highly individual illustrative style, characterized by a pen and ink technique reminiscent of the work of Aubrey Beardsley, whom she admired. In 1899 King joined the staff of the Glasgow School of Art, teaching book decoration and design. By 1902 she was the subject of an admiring article in the magazine *The Studio* and had won a gold medal in the category of book design at the International Exhibition of Decorative Art in Turin. Two years later she gained a commission to produce ninety-five illustrations for William Morris's *The Defence of Guinevere and Other Poems*, and she continued to work as an illustrator in later years.

King's work in the years between 1898 and 1905 were characterized by fine detail and meticulous technique. Her compositions were sometimes heightened with gold, while many of her drawings and illustrations were executed on vellum. She also worked as a designer of textiles, jewellery, wallpaper, posters, wall tiles, theatrical costumes, ceramics and book covers.

In 1908 King married a fellow artist, Ernest Archibald Taylor, and the following year an exhibition of her drawings and watercolours of France, Germany and Scotland was mounted. In 1911 the couple moved to Paris, where they soon established an art school known as the Shealing Atelier. Living in Montmartre, they became friendly with several artists working in Paris at this time, including Henri Matisse, Maurice Utrillo and Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, as well as fellow Scots Samuel John Peploe and John Duncan Fergusson. King was particularly influenced by the work of Leon Bakst and his designs for costumes for the Ballets Russes, and her work became stronger in colour and line.

With the outbreak of the First World War, King and Taylor moved back to Scotland, living near Kirkcudbright and setting up a summer school on Arran. In 1915 King drew sixteen colour illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *House of Pomegranates*, and in later years produced landscape paintings and designs for batik fabrics. Although King remained active for the remainder of her career, she died in relative obscurity in August 1949. A reassessment of her oeuvre, however, began in the 1970s, when commemorative exhibitions were held in Glasgow in 1971, at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh in 1971 and 1978, and at the Fine Art Society in 1971. In June 1977, in the midst of this series of exhibitions, the remains of the contents of King's studio were dispersed at auction in Glasgow.