

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Egon SCHIELE (Tulln 1890 - Vienna 1918)

Portrait of August Lederer

Black crayon.

Signed and dated EGON / SCHIELE / 1918 in pencil at the lower left.

Inscribed and numbered A. L. / Nr. 1. and 56. / E. L. in pencil on the verso.

463 x 293 mm. (18 1/4 x 11 5/8 in.)

Drawn in the final year of Egon Schiele's short life, the present sheet is a portrait of the Viennese industrialist and art collector August Lederer (1857-1936). August Lederer, his wife Serena and eldest son Erich were among the artist's most significant patrons. The second wealthiest family in Vienna, after the Rothschilds, the Lederers assembled a superb art collection, mostly devoted to artists of the Vienna Secession. They were the most important patrons and collectors of the work of Gustav Klimt, by whom they owned some twenty paintings and numerous drawings, although much of the collection was destroyed during the Second World War.

It was through Klimt that Schiele was first introduced to the Lederer family in 1912, and he became especially close to their young son Erich Lederer (1896-1985), a budding collector who greatly admired the artist's work. Schiele was to spend Christmas and New Year of 1912 as a guest on the Lederer estate in Győr in Hungary, when he began work on a painted portrait of the fifteen-year-old Erich,

commissioned by the sitter. It is said that, upon first meeting Schiele, August Lederer asked him if he was as good as his son Erich said he was. In response, the young artist, then aged twenty-two, took out some paper, pencils and watercolours and, looking into a hallway mirror, produced a striking self-portrait drawing on the spot.

Over the next few years Schiele established an enduring friendship with the Lederer family, often visiting them at their home in Vienna and occasionally giving Erich drawing lessons. As Alessandra Comini has noted, 'The patronage of this sympathetic and influential family was an important factor in Schiele's eventual personal rehabilitation and one which deepened his appreciation of and interest in others.' August and Serena Lederer always remained somewhat aloof from Schiele, however, and only owned one other painting him, apart from the portrait of their son, along with several drawings. Erich Lederer, on the other hand, became a lifelong friend of the artist and continued to collect his drawings for many years after Schiele's death.

Schiele produced drawings of every member of the Lederer family, including three other portraits of August Lederer, all drawn in 1918, which were each acquired by the sitter and share the same later provenance as the present sheet. A stylistically comparable drawing of Lederer, showing him facing to the right, was on the art market in 2013, while another charcoal drawing of him looking to the left is in a private collection⁵. A third portrait drawing of August Lederer of the same date, again showing him looking to the left, is also in a private collection. As has been noted by one scholar, in the present sheet, 'deftly sketched in only a few moments, Schiele sensitively captures the formally attired sitter, looking off to the left, a rather remote figure.'

The authenticity of the present sheet has been confirmed by Jane Kallir, who has assigned the drawing the catalogue raisonné number D.2455a in her archives.

Exhibitions

New York, Neue Galerie, Egon Schiele: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sabarsky Collections, 2005-2006, no.D158; Vienna, Belvedere, Egon Schiele: Self-Portraits and Portraits, 2011, no.89; Liverpool, Tate Liverpool, Life in Slow Motion: Egon Schiele / Francesca Woodman, 2018, unnumbered.

Literature:

Renée Price, ed., Egon Schiele: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sabarsky Collections, exhibition catalogue, New York, 2005-2006, p.316, no.D158; Agnes Husslein-Arco and Jane Kallir, ed., Egon Schiele: Self-Portraits and Portraits, exhibition catalogue, Vienna, 2011, p.201, no.89; London, Christie's, Impressionist/Modern Works on Paper, 19 June 2013, unpaginated, under lot 119; Hamburg, Le Claire Kunst, Modern Line. New Acquisitions: Works on Paper, Sculptures, Paintings, 2014, unpaginated, no.7.

Artist description:

In a brief artistic career that lasted just twelve years, Egon Schiele produced a few hundred paintings and nearly three thousand drawings and watercolours. Born in the town of Tulln, on the Danube river northwest of Vienna, Schiele drew obsessively from an early age. In 1906, he was accepted at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna, where at sixteen years old he was the youngest student.

The following year he met the prominent artist Gustav Klimt, who was to become a friend and mentor, and whose stylistic influence is noticeable in Schiele's works of 1908 and 1909. In 1908 he exhibited his work in public for the first time, and the following year, at the invitation of Klimt, sent four paintings to the Internationale Kunstschau. The same year Schiele was one of several young artists who left the Academy and established the Neukunstgruppe (New Art Group), exhibiting their work at the Kunstsalon Pisko in Vienna. Through this exhibition Schiele met several important collectors and art critics, who began to acquire and promote his work. He also began to establish a reputation as a portraitist, and received a number of portrait commissions, although he nevertheless continued to struggle financially. After his first solo exhibition in Vienna in 1911, Schiele settled outside the city, eventually living in the village of Neulengbach. In 1912 he was arrested there on charges of kidnapping and rape of a minor – one of several village children who had posed for the artist - and was imprisoned for over three weeks. The artist was eventually acquitted of the charges of kidnapping and rape, but was found guilty of public immorality on account of the indecent imagery of some of his drawings.

After his release from prison Schiele returned to Vienna, and his work took on a less overtly erotic tone, with allegories, landscapes and urban scenes becoming more prominent, alongside portraits. He began to exhibit his work widely throughout Germany, and also began experimenting with printmaking. Drafted into the Austrian army in May 1915, Schiele's poor health meant that he was assigned office duty, serving in a suburb of Vienna where he was tasked with guarding Russian prisoners of war. His work continued to be exhibited, however, although his output lessened. In 1917 he was transferred to a supply depot in Vienna, where he was able to live at home and continue to paint. It was not until the last year or so of his life that he began to achieve a modest amount of financial success. With the critical and financial success of his one-man exhibition at the Vienna Secession the following month, when every one of his works was sold, Schiele's reputation was secured. By the final months of the First World War, and following the death of Gustav Klimt in February 1918, Schiele had become established as the leading avant-garde artist in Vienna. Sadly, this late taste of success was short-lived, as the artist died in October 1918 at the age of just twenty-eight, a victim of the worldwide Spanish flu pandemic.