

Alexander ROTHAUG (Vienna 1870 - Vienna 1946)

Coastal Landscape with a Figure Looking out to Sea [recto]; A Man in a Rowboat by the Edge of a Sea Cliff [verso]

Gouache and watercolour, over traces of a pencil underdrawing, with a painted brown border, on card.

Colour tests and a small sketch of the same composition drawn in pencil on the verso, together with notes in German: '*Wasser: I der Grund / II die Wasserfläche / III die Spielung*' and '*Luft: I. die Dunst-Wolken / II [?] die Luft*' in pencil.

Further inscribed in pencil on the verso.

266 x 197 mm. (10 1/2 x 7 3/4 in.)

The dramatic effect of waves crashing against the rocks on the recto, achieved with a bold use of watercolour and white gouache, is further heightened by the tiny, solitary standing figure standing at the right of the composition. In the somewhat calmer seascape on the verso, Rothaug's sophisticated technique treats the reflection in the water in such a way that one can see far into the depths.

The artist's pencil inscriptions on the verso appear to be notes on the structuring of the picture planes: '*Water: I the ground / II the surface of the water / III the play of light*' and '*Air: I. the misty clouds / II [?] the air*', and are accompanied by a quick pencil sketch of the gouache composition also on the verso.

Artist description:

Alexander Rothaug was, along with his elder brother Leopold, trained by his painter father Theodor and was initially apprenticed to a sculptor. He soon began to devote himself to painting, however, and in 1885 entered the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where he was taught by the Orientalist and genre painter Leopold Carl Müller. Rothaug spent the early part of his career working as an illustrator for the satirical magazine Fliegende Blätter in Munich, where he came under the influence of the Symbolist painter Franz von Stuck, but was back in Vienna by 1896. He undertook study trips to Dalmatia and Italy, as well as the German island of Rügen in the Baltic Sea, and made his exhibition debut at the Künstlerhaus in Vienna in 1909. In 1910 he became a member of the cooperative association of Viennese artists, the Genossenschaft der bildenden Künstler Wiens, and the following year his work was the subject of an article in the magazine Kunst-Revue. At this time he was known in particular as a stage designer, painting stage curtains for theatres in Graz, Frankfurt and Nuremberg, as well as working as a book illustrator and continuing to exhibit at the Künstlerhaus. Another early source of inspiration were the landscape paintings of the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin, evident in Rothaug's own Symbolist landscapes. In 1914 Rothaug collaborated with the painter Rudolf Jettmar on the decoration of the elaborate interior of the Kurhaus in the spa town of Merano, in the South Tyrol region of Northern Italy.

Rothaug produced a number of other large-scale works as public commissions. Arguably his masterpiece as a decorator is the series of twelve large paintings depicting scenes from Richard Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen in the Nibelungenlounge of the recently-built Grand Hotel de l'Europe in Bad Gastein, south of Salzburg, on which the artist worked in the 1920s and which is still in situ. Much of Rothaug's painted work takes its inspiration from Greek, Roman, Germanic and Norse mythology, and a strong Symbolist element is found throughout his oeuvre, with fauns, centaurs and nymphs appearing often. In 1938 eight of his paintings were included in the Große Deutsche Kunstaustellung at the Haus der Kunst in Munich1. Three years later, in 1941, an exhibition of Rothaug's work was mounted at the Künstlerhaus in Vienna to celebrate the artist's seventieth birthday, although by this time his style was seen as somewhat dated and out of fashion.

Rothaug was a gifted and prolific draughtsman. At his death in 1946, a substantial number of paintings, sketches, sketchbooks and portfolios of loose drawings were found among the contents of his studio. A large group of drawings by the artist, including the contents of a number of sketchbooks, is today in the collection of the Graphische Sammlung Albertina in Vienna.