

Alexander ROTHAUG (Vienna 1870 - Vienna 1946)

Moonlit Seascape with a Nymph Observed by a Man; A Gladiator Fighting a Bull in an Arena [verso]

Gouache and watercolour, with pen and black ink, within a painted yellow-brown border, on card.

Signed *Alexander Rothaug* in pencil at the lower left on both sides.

270 x 192 mm. (10 5/8 x 7 5/8 in.)

The recto of the present sheet is dominated by the effect of bright moonlight on the dark waters, which illuminate a mermaid or nymph in the water, observed by a man perched on the rock at the left. In contrast, the composition of the gladiatorial combat depicted on the verso is dominated by harsh accents of red, as the warrior struggles to overcome the bull to which a nude woman has been bound. In technical and stylistic terms, the verso is particularly comparable to a series of watercolour studies, all in a private collection, for Rothaug's *Nibelungen* paintings in the Grand Hotel de l'Europe in Bad Gastein, on which the artist worked in the 1920s.

The blank areas underneath both compositions may have been intended as spaces for text, if these images were intended as illustrations, or perhaps for wall panels below mural paintings, such as those in Bad Gastein.

The present sheet was part of an extensive collection of works by Alexander Rothaug assembled by the idiosyncratic 20th century Austrian painter and draughtsman Ernst Fuchs (1930-2015), who was also

active as a printmaker, sculptor, architect and stage designer. In 1972 Fuchs acquired a villa outside the city that had been designed by the architect Otto Wagner as his own home. He turned the villa into a studio and showcase for his work, although his bedroom on the first floor was hung exclusively with his extensive collection of works by Alexander Rothaug, an artist he admired greatly. (Fuchs is thought to have acquired much of his collection directly from Rothaug's estate and from the artist's descendants.) Since 1988 the villa has been open to the public as the Ernst Fuchs Museum.

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.