

# KUNKEL FINE ART

Zeichnungen, Gemälde und Skulpturen  
des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts



## FERDINAND VON KELLER

(1842 Karlsruhe - 1922 Baden-Baden)

Selene, 1886

Oil on canvas

76 : 110.5 cm

Signed, dated and inscribed lower right: „Ferdinand Keller. 1886. Karlsruhe“

### Literature:

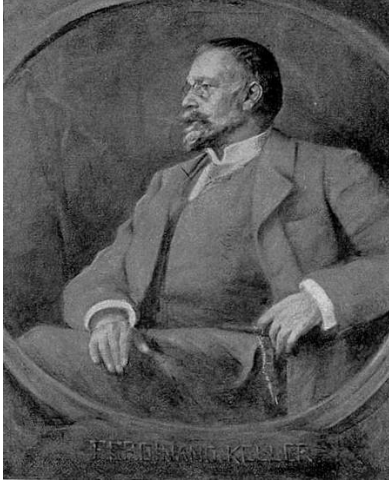
Georg Ebers: *Der Kaiser*, Stuttgart und Leipzig 1880, Vol. I, chapter 13

*Ebersgalerie. Gestalten aus den Romanen von Georg Ebers*, Stuttgart and Leipzig 1885

Michael Koch: *Ferdinand von Keller (1842 - 1922). Leben und Werk*, Karlsruhe 1978, no. 160, p. 85.

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Otto Propheter: *Ferdinand von Keller*, c. 1898

A woman, depicted in profile at the viewer's eye level, lies motionless on the top step of a stone staircase. The torsion of her body and the cascading robe emphasise the drama of the situation, for which an antique-looking palace architecture forms the background. The viewer's gaze wanders from the protagonist to the mastiff with the magnificent golden collar standing close to her. Snarling, the mighty dog fixes its gaze on the third figure in the picture, who is watching the action from the background through a crack in the door. The mysteriousness of the scene is heightened by the broken vessel to which the hand of the prostrate woman is pointing.

The effectively composed painting *Selene* is characteristic of the work of the history painter Ferdinand von Keller. As a professor and long-time director of the Karlsruhe Art School, he was one of the most respected personalities in the Wilhelmine art scene and achieved international renown through his participation in the World Exhibitions in Paris, Vienna and Chicago. In addition to themes from the classical canon, Keller, whom art critics called the "Baden Makart" due to his virtuoso painting style, also treated literary subjects.

*Selene* refers to a scene in Georg Ebers' novel *Der Kaiser (The Emperor)*, published in 1880, which is set in the time of the Roman Emperor Hadrian in the 2nd century AD. Due to its success, the book was translated into English shortly afterwards and, like other novels by the author, excerpts were printed in the American magazine Harper's Magazine. In order to increase the interest of the readership and thus the circulation, Keller and other internationally renowned artists were commissioned to create illustrations. In 1885, a selection was published in the special publication "Ebersgalerie. Figures from the novels of Georg Ebers". The drawing *Selene* contained therein impressed an American collector so much that he approached Keller a year later via the Parisian art dealership Goupil & Cie. to order a painted version of the composition.

Keller's painting refers to an incident described in the 13th chapter of the novel. At the centre is the beautiful Selene, daughter of the Egyptian palace ruler Keraunus, who sets out at night through the corridors of the palace to bring her father fresh water. Only a few hours earlier, Emperor Hadrian and his entourage had entered the palace, but the unsuspecting woman had missed this, which is why she suddenly encounters his guard dog Argus, who attacks her and throws her to the ground. The barking awakens Hadrian's favourite Antinous, who immediately rises from his bed to help the defenceless woman. In his theatrically staged bravura play, Keller captures the very moment that precedes the saviour's encounter with the beast ready to attack.