

# KUNKEL FINE ART

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

## Alexander von Salzmann

1874 Tbilisi (Georgia) – 1934 Leysin (Switzerland)

A native of Tbilisi, Alexander von Salzmann was born into a cultivated family and received a thorough upbringing and early training in art, music and drama. Fluent in four languages – Russian, German, English and French – he was often described as sensitive and amiable but at the same time reputed to be unreliable and indolent. He trained as a painter in Moscow, later moving to Munich where he enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1898 to study under Franz Stuck. Two years later, Wassily Kandinsky joined the same painting class.

A large number of Russian artists were living and working in Munich around the turn of the twentieth century. Kandinsky, who had a strong network of contacts within Schwabing's vibrant art world, introduced Salzmann to one of his many Russian contacts – the painter Alexej von Jawlensky. Jawlensky was romantically involved with Marianne von Werefkin, a Russian aristocrat and painter who had made the decision to interrupt her own artistic career to further Jawlensky's painting. In her elegant Munich apartment Werefkin hosted a Salon which grew to be a hub of literary and artistic exchange. Salzmann soon became a regular visitor and before long was making advances to his hostess. Despite a significant age difference, they became lovers but the affair ended abruptly in 1905. Six years later Kandinsky, Jawlensky and Werefkin formed *The Blue Rider*, one of the leading artists' groups of the twentieth century.

Like many other Munich-based, emerging artists of the period Salzmann earned his living as an illustrator for the magazine *Jugend*. Between 1900 and 1933 the magazine was to publish over one hundred of his ink drawings and gouaches, the majority of which were made before 1910 but not published until after that date. Salzmann's preferred theme was the battle of the sexes and in his depictions it was the woman who would usually emerge the victor. His figures are characterised by their Rococo and Biedermeier costumes. His themes revolve around upper-class leisure activities and humorous scenes from the world of theatre and the arts. From time to time he would cast a critical glance at his Russian homeland, producing caricatures of Imperial Russia's domestic and foreign



Alexander von Salzmann, *Self-portrait*,  
1905

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policy disputes or the social arrogance of the aristocracy and the simple-mindedness of peasants and day labourers.

The artistic stimuli Salzmänn received from Carl Strathmann and Adelbert Niemeyer, two artists with whom he shared a studio, far eclipsed the influence of contacts made at Werefkin's Salon or his regular activity as a contributor to *Jugend*. Strathmann introduced him to the painter Fritz Erler, a founder member of the Munich artists' association *Die Scholle*. At Erler's request, Salzmänn assisted in the completion of a fresco cycle titled *Die vier Jahreszeiten* [The Four Seasons], for the *Muschelsaal* of the Wiesbaden Casino in 1906-7. Shortly before that, Salzmänn had collaborated with Niemeyer and a number of other artists on a decorative scheme for the popular *Marionetten-Theater Münchner Künstler* in Munich. The project had brought him into direct contact with the theatre world.

A short time later, a turning point came in Salzmänn's life and artistic career. In 1910, he moved to Hellerau (now a district of Dresden), a garden settlement based on the ideas of the *Lebensreform* [Life Reform] movement. The idea was to have a community which combined working and living with culture and education. Salzmänn designed a spectacular indirect lighting system and movable stage sets for Hellerau's Festspielhaus. At Hellerau, Salzmänn met his future wife. She introduced him to Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, the Swiss composer and dance pedagogue. Salzmänn supported Jacques-Dalcroze in setting up his *Institute of Education for Rhythmic Gymnastics* in 1911. In 1917, Salzmänn and his wife moved to Tbilisi. In 1921, they relocated to Paris, where Salzmänn worked as a theatre director. He died of tuberculosis in Switzerland in 1934.