

# KUNKEL FINE ART

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



**Franz von Stuck (1863 Tettenweis - 1928 Munich)**

***Lovers at the Edge of a Forest, circa 1892***

Oil on canvas

42 x 62 cm

Signed lower right

**Provenance:**

- Private Collection, Baden-Württemberg
- Galerie Ritthaler
- Private Collection, Bavaria

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## Literature:

- Otto Julius Bierbaum, *Franz von Stuck*, Künstler-Monographien, XLII, (4th edn.) Bielefeld and Leipzig 1924
- Heinrich Voss, *Franz von Stuck 1863-1928. Werkkatalog der Gemälde mit einer Einführung in seinen Symbolismus*, Munich 1973, repr. p. 111, no. 63/240

## Exhibitions:

- '150 Jahre Franz von Stuck, 1863-1928', Landkreisgalerie Passau auf Schloss Neuburg, 2013
- 'Sünde und Secession, Franz von Stuck in Wien', Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere, Vienna 2016, fig. 195, p. 250

Franz Stuck was only twenty-nine when he completed *Lovers at the Edge of a Forest* (1892) but he was already on the point of achieving international recognition. Works such as *The Guardian of Paradise* (1889 – Museum Villa Stuck, Munich) and *Lucifer* (1890 – Nationalgalerie, Sofia) caused a stir when they were first publicly exhibited. The year 1893 was crucial for his career. Soon after its completion *Sin* was shown at the Munich Secession and immediately bought by the Neue Pinakothek in Munich, where it is still held. From then on, his reputation as a 'prince among painters' was sealed. All three paintings catapulted their author into the front ranks of the European avantgarde. Today they are seen as icons of European Symbolism.

Landscape, like classical mythology, was one of the central sources of inspiration in Stuck's early career and his sensitive treatment of the subject already shows artistic maturity. The present painting is more than a landscape motif. Its mood is poetic, melancholy, even slightly foreboding. But it also reveals an emotional affinity toward nature which derived from Stuck's rural upbringing as a miller's son. He regularly visited the artists' colony at Osternberg in the Innviertel in Lower Bavaria, where he made oil sketches directly before nature in the summers of 1887 to 1892. Back in his Munich studio he would work up his sketches in larger-format paintings depicting mythological and landscape subjects.

The painting depicts two figures seen from behind – a young man in a light-coloured suit and a young woman in fashionable dress. The young man has his right arm around his lover's waist and their heads meet as she leans against his shoulder. The figures seem almost diminutive in relation to the

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looming darkness of the forest before them and its massive, indistinctly outlined form dominates the composition. The fading blue of the evening sky and the twilight glow of the clouds create additional contrasts. A flurry of bird flight interrupts the stillness. Two trees stand side by side at the far left, their crowns gleaming in yellow and fiery red. A path, cropped abruptly by the lower edge of the image, leads towards them, perhaps symbolizing a way to happiness unnoticed or temporarily abandoned by the lovers. The dark, shapeless mass of forest that obstructs and encloses them breaks their romantic reverie. Whether the unseen dangers they seem to face are overcome and their shared hopes fulfilled remains unclear. Following the example of the German Romantic painters, Stuck sought to convey notions of mood and symbols of the spiritual and emotional experiences of life through landscape.

*Lovers at the Edge of a Forest* is one of the earliest versions of a theme Stuck returned to intermittently over a period of twenty years. Two related examples are the paintings *Sunset over Sea* (1900 – Private Collection) and *Evening Star* (before 1912 – Museum Villa Stuck, Munich). In both the imagery is striking - the first a semi-abstract sunset with dramatic colouristic effects and the second a poetic twilight landscape with a dark tree-filled horizon. These landscapes were Stuck's response to the contemporary longing to counter a life determined by technical advance with an utopian vision of primordial nature, in which harmony between man and nature is restored.

Commenting on Stuck's *Evening Landscape* (1891 – Folkwang Museum, Essen), the influential Austrian critic Ludwig Hevesi noted in 1894: '[Stuck] roams the landscape in search of strange effects. He is in thrall to the poetry of the indistinct. [...]. As a painter of twilight he is perhaps at his strangest. A meadow barely recognizable as green, groups of trees whose crowns resemble blackish balls of wool even before darkness has fallen, set in contrast to a rapidly fading, greenish evening sky. [...] His blending of day and night seems particularly real.' It is hardly surprising that prominent contemporaries were influenced by Stuck's landscapes. Klimt's Attersee painting, *A Morning by the Pond* (1899 – Leopold Museum, Vienna), is a notable example.

Stuck's *Lovers at the Edge of a Forest* testifies to the importance of his achievement as a landscape painter. The work is one of the few remaining landscapes by Stuck still in private ownership.