

KUNKEL FINE ART

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



Max Klinger (1857 Leipzig – 1920 Großjena, Saxony-Anhalt)

***Venus in a Shell Chariot*, c.1912**

Oil on canvas

56 : 233 cm

Monogrammed lower right: "MK"

Provenance:

- Paul von Bleichert, Leipzig
- Auctioneer Hugo Helbing, Munich, April 23rd 1929, Lot 41 (entitled: "Meeresgötter")
- Wilhelm Hartmann, Berlin
- Gallery Franz Brutscher, Munich
- Kurt Liebermeister, Munich
- Private collection

Exhibitions:

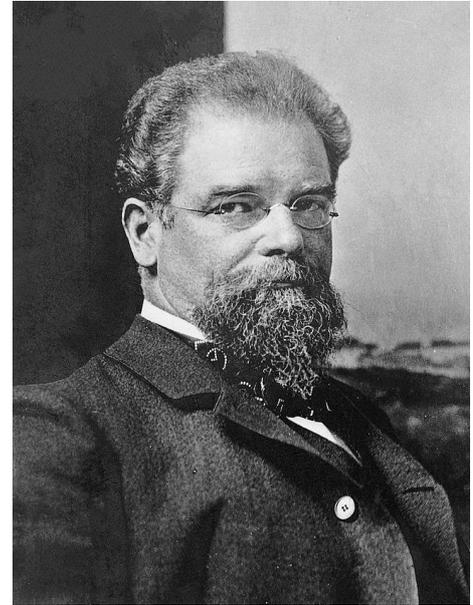
- Grosse Kunstausstellung (Great Art Exhibition) Dresden, 1912
- Secession. Europäische Kunst um die Jahrhundertwende, Haus der Kunst, München 1964, cat. No. 269

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Superstar of Symbolism

Groundbreaking discoveries in all areas of science shaped the last decades of the 19th century and radically changed the reality of people's lives. As a result, an unprecedented variety of artistic movements emerged, with Symbolism proving to be one of its most important. In Max Klinger this movement found one of its most prominent protagonists. Like hardly any other artist of the fin de siècle, the Leipzig-born graphic artist, draughtsman, painter and sculptor was able to satisfy the need of his contemporaries to escape from mundane everyday life by immersing themselves in his mysterious pictorial worlds. This brought him cult-like veneration and made him a significant initiator of early modernism.



Max Klinger, c.1900

Photography by von Nicola Perscheid

Off to Pastures New

One of Klinger's key works of the period is the iconographic programme for the vestibule of the Villa Albers in Berlin, which he designed at the beginning of the 1880s. Considered to be the first Gesamtkunstwerk on German soil, the ensemble was sold by the client's heirs to the Berlin National Gallery, the Hamburg Kunsthalle and the Museum der Bildenden Künste in Leipzig only a few years after its creation. One of the cycle's central paintings is *Venus in a Shell Chariot*.



Vestibule of Villa Albers in Berlin, 1884

In the course of the *Great Art Exhibition* in Dresden in 1912, almost three decades later, Klinger created a second version of the vestibule of Villa Albers. While the artist changed certain motifs of the landscape paintings in the lower section, he retained the conception of the paintings above. They form a circumferential sea frieze that illustrates the significance of water as the origin of all life and places it into a supratemporal context by means of mythological creatures. At the same time, it forms the conclusion of the solemn ensemble.

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The focal point of the sea frieze was the painting *Venus in a Shell Chariot* (first version in the possession of the Berlin National Gallery). The bold longitudinal composition shows the goddess of love together with her entourage on the open sea and iconographically ties in with Renaissance and Baroque traditions. However, Klinger's Impressionist painting style draws a bow to the present and turns the work into a shimmering feast of colour. Additional dynamism is added to the scene by the seagulls gliding in the breeze, the sail stretched by the wind and the hippocamps pulling the carriage. The life-affirming pleasure of the figures is immediately transmitted to the viewer, who feels as if he is setting off with the cheerful train ad infinitum and thus into boundless freedom.



Max Klinger, *Venus in a Shell Chariot*

Voyages of a Love Goddess

With his equally mysterious and allusive works, Klinger appealed above all to the educated middle classes. Among the wealthy representatives of this class in particular, it was good manners to create aestheticized counterworlds for themselves by building up exquisite art collections, which at the same time demonstrated their own social status to the outside world. In this context, it is not surprising that the Leipzig industrialist Paul von Bleichert, who had been elevated to the rank of nobility, was one of Klinger's most important collectors. Five years after the Great Art Exhibition in Dresden in 1912, he acquired from the artist en bloc the second version of the vestibule of the Villa Albers for the astronomically high sum of 145,000 Reichsmark. For the adequate installation of the ensemble, von Bleichert may have planned to erect



Exhibition Palace in Dresden, postcard 1911

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Villa Berthe in Leipzig and the Klinga manor of the Paul von Bleichert family



Haus der Kunst in Munich, photograph 1953

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his own pavilion on his estate in Klinga near Leipzig, as even his imposing villa in Leipzig did not offer enough space to house the cycle.

However, the economic turbulence of the 1920s following the loss of the First World War prevented the realisation of such plans. In 1929, Paul von Bleichert had to sell off his extensive and valuable art collection in order to avoid bankruptcy, and Klinger's paintings were scattered to the four winds.

From Berlin, *Venus in a Shell Chariot* made its way to Munich, where it was exhibited in 1964 as part of the epoch-making exhibition *Secession. Europäische Kunst um die Jahrhundertwende* (transl. *Secession. European Art at the Turn of the Century*) at the Haus der Kunst. Afterwards, it remained in the collection of the Art Nouveau collector Professor Kurt Liebermeister for decades. Where might the next journey of the beautiful goddess of love lead?