

# KUNKEL FINE ART

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



## OTTO DILL

(1884 Neustadt - 1957 Bad Dürkheim)

Lurking panthers, c. 1918

Oil on cardboard

31.5 : 42.5 cm

Signed lower right: "Otto Dill"

### Literature:

Hans-Jürgen Imiela: *Otto Dill*, Karlsruhe 1960, p. 19 f. (discussion of a second version of our work)

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Even as a child, Otto Dill drew animals of all kinds with great enthusiasm. Thanks to financial support from a patron, he attended the Munich Academy of Fine Arts from 1908, where he became a master student of the animal painter Heinrich von Zügel and was given his own studio. Together with his fellow students, Dill learned to paint in the open air in front of a live model, focusing on capturing anatomy and behaviour. Dill soon developed an impressionism based on realism, which was typical of Munich painting around 1900.

From 1912, Dill was represented in the exhibitions of the Munich Secession. He found the models for his tiger, lion and panther paintings in the zoo and in the ménagerie of the Krone circus. Dill favoured depicting the animals roaming the steppe, lying in wait or feeding. The close-up view and narrowing of the picture detail create a crackling tension, which is heightened by the dynamic brushwork and impasto application of colour.

A characteristic example of Dill's fully mature style is the painting *Lurking panthers*, which dates from around 1918 and exists in a further, almost identical version alongside the present one. This is honoured in detail in Hans-Jürgen Imiela's authoritative monograph on the artist's life and work. Dill's black animal bodies stand out as effective silhouettes against the petrol-coloured sky. Arranged behind and on top of each other, they describe a curve that begins in the tail of the panther in front, is picked up by the one behind and carried forwards. The filigree tree repeats the contour of the back line and emphasises, as it were, the crouching of the animals. Closely linked to the compositional structure is the steeply rising light grey rock, at the top of which the impulse to move is pushed furthest forward.

In his composition, reminiscent of the aesthetics of French Art Deco, Dill depicts the moment of lying in wait, which is characteristic of the hunting behaviour of big cats. The panthers' muscular bodies are tensed with the utmost concentration, ready to pounce and take down the prey outside the picture space. The artist uses individual glossy reflections to characterise the animals' physique as well as their silky-smooth fur, which shimmers in the sunlight. The blue background appears just as two-dimensional as the panthers and their surroundings. There is no intermediate zone between foreground and background, and the interplay of values is consequently abandoned. Dill thus determines the form solely through colour and style, showing the genre of animal painting a path that leads from academic tradition to modernity.