

LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

FERDINAND HODLER

1853 Berne – Geneva 1918

Standing Male Nude on a Rock

Pen and black ink with grey wash over pencil, traces of blue crayon on white paper; c.1902

Signed in pencil at the bottom centre: *FHodler*.

617 x 467 mm

Ferdinand Hodler ranks alongside Félix Vallotton as the outstanding Swiss painter of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like Vallotton, Hodler spent considerable periods of time in Paris. Yet unlike his fellow countryman, Hodler wished to remain a Swiss artist. He was not alone in his objective to introduce new artistic stimuli to his native Switzerland drawing on contemporary aesthetic impulses from France. Today, Hodler is regarded as one of the greatest European artists of the early modernist movement.

The present drawing is related to the important allegorical composition *Blick ins Unendliche* [View into Infinity] of which four versions are known.¹ Art-historical research has not yet established whether the drawing is a preparatory study for one of the four known versions of the painting, or whether the sheet is an autonomous work. It can be dated with some degree of certainty to the period 1902-3.

After 1893, Hodler directed his attention to the theme of 'communion with nature'. Key paintings of the period are *Ergriffenheit*² [Emotion] and *Bezauberter Knabe*³ [Enchanted Youth]. He visited Vienna in 1903, where his experience of Jugendstil was to have a formative influence on his work. The invitation to participate at the 19th Secessionist Exhibition in Vienna in 1904⁴ led to his artistic breakthrough. It was a period marked by a particularly prolific output of images depicting the nude figure of a youth. He frequently used his young son Hector (b.1887) as his model. Speaking to his biographer many years later Hodler described the motif as second only to the female figure in terms of sheer power of expression.⁵

But a more decisive influence on Hodler's preoccupation with the theme of youth was undoubtedly the heroic cult of youth promoted by Jugendstil. In the figure of the late-adolescent ephebic type the movement found a perfect symbol of youth and spring. Nevertheless both in the present drawing and in the related paintings Hodler handles the figure with a greater degree of idealization. He has dispensed with any expression of absorption and emotionality in favour of a severely structured, symmetrical representation of the body.⁶

¹ Kunsthalle, Hamburg – Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne – Private collections. Email from Dr. Paul Müller, SIK-ISEA, Zurich. One version was shown at the 19th Secessionist Exhibition in Vienna in 1904 (listed under no. 28). See exhib. cat., *Ferdinand Hodler und Wien*, Vienna 1992-3, p.26.

² 1894, oil on canvas, 45 x 26 cm, Kunstmuseum Bern.

³ 1894, oil on canvas, 106 x 70 cm, Kunsthaus Zürich.

⁴ The Vienna Secession staged a solo exhibition of George Minne's work in 1901. In the same year the magazine *Ver Sacrum* published a special issue on Minne which Hodler is likely to have seen. Katharina Schmidt in *Ferdinand Hodler – Eine symbolische Vision*, Berne and Budapest, 2008, p.190. Hodler's artistic breakthrough owes much to the Vienna Secession.

⁵ Carl Albert Loosli, *Ferdinand Hodler, Leben, Werk und Nachlaß*, II, Berne 1921-4, p.27.

⁶ Gabriela Christen, *Die weibliche und die männliche Pose*, in *Ferdinand Hodler – Die Forschung – Die Anfänge – Die Arbeit – Der Erfolg – Der Kontext*, SIK ISEA, Zurich 2009, pp.142-3.

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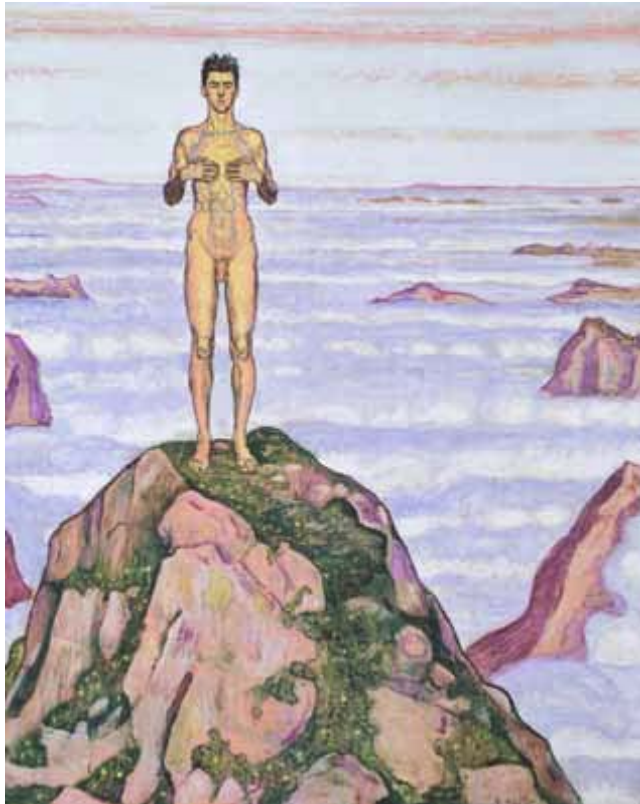


Fig. 1: *Blick ins Unendliche* [View into Infinity], oil on canvas. 1903-4, 100 x 80 cm, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne