

# LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

ALFRED KUBIN

1877 Leitmeritz/Bohemia – Zwickledt/Upper Austria 1959

## *Kataklysmus*

Distemper and body colour on sturdy wove paper, c.1906.

Signed lower left: *Kubin*. Inscribed on the verso: *Kataclysmus* and with a pencil drawing of a figure with a tiara.

Stamped with the collector's name and address: *Max Morgenstern Wien, XIII, Hietzinger Hauptstraße 34a.*  
255 x 364 mm

PROVENANCE: Max Morgenstern, Vienna

Kubin's autobiographical writings show that his early work was strongly influenced by frequent traumatic experiences in his childhood and youth. These writings also throw light on the literary sources he drew on, in particular the philosophical writings of Schopenhauer.<sup>1</sup> Schopenhauer's pessimistic world view closely parallels passages in Kubin's writings where he describes his extremely negative and largely despairing view of his own life. Psychological instability coupled with personal misfortunes led to episodes of mental disturbance but which were relieved by periods of intense and highly productive artistic activity.

The present drawing can be dated to circa 1906. The spatial organization of the image has something of a cavalike character. The drawing was executed in distemper, a technique for mixing watercolours with paste which Kubin had learnt from Koloman Moser on a visit to Vienna in 1905.<sup>2</sup> The technique produced particularly rich and glowing effects. Kubin's first works in the medium were predominantly in black and white and filled with tortured, nightmarish imagery. However, he went on to develop a more colourful palette exploiting the full potential of the technique. He developed a new vocabulary of images – many of them ornamental – depicting plants and animals. He briefly experimented with tempera and assimilated new colouristic and thematic influences largely acquired on his visits to Paris in 1905 and 1906. Here he had seen the paintings of the early Barbizon School and met the elderly Odilon Redon.

In this drawing Kubin depicts a vision of the world beyond the realm of human experience. In the Greek, cataclysm often referred to a deluge or natural disaster. Bizarre visions of these frequently appeared in the pictorial vocabulary of Kubin's early work. Here, the viewer's eye is drawn to the murky depths of a flooded subterranean landscape dominated by surreal weather effects. Torrential rain accompanied by flashes of lightning and a huge sun with a fiery aureole set the stage for the spectacle of nature's cycle of birth and death. The landscape is distinctly unreal. This lends the barely defined, huddled figure at the edge of the image something of a visionary character.

In 1906, Kubin began working on his famous 'underwater landscapes'.<sup>3</sup> In June of the same year he and his wife moved from Munich to their country house in Zwickledt, a village near Wernstein in

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Kubin, *Dämonen und Nachtgesichte*, Dresden 1926, p.12 and p.19.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p.26.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p.28.

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Upper Austria. He was to live here for the rest of his life. In the autumn of 1906 he completed his final underwater landscape and executed the last of his experimental works in distemper before returning to tempera.

Max Morgenstern, like Heinrich Stinnes, was a leading private collector of Alfred Kubin's work. Kubin met Morgenstern at some point between 1911 and 1914 and they remained in regular contact until Morgenstern's death in 1946.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Annegret Hoberg, Curator of the Kubin Archive in Munich, has confirmed the authenticity of the present sheet.

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<sup>4</sup> Sophie Lillie, *Was einmal war – Handbuch der enteigneten Kunstsammlungen Wien*, Vienna 2003, p.771.