

# LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

ALFRED KUBIN

1877 Leitmeritz/Bohemia - Zwickledt/Upper Austria 1959

## *Mann mit abgeschnittener Nase*

Pen and black ink, wash and spray, watercolour and colour crayon on firm wove paper; c.1904-7.

Signed lower right: *Kubin*. Inscribed in pencil at the lower left: *Kopf mit abgeschnittener Nase*.

Annotated on the verso: *Mein Werk Abb. 30*

327 x 253 mm

LITERATURE: Alfred Kubin, *Dämonen und Nachtgesichte*, Dresden 1926, fig. 30

EXHIBITION: *Alfred Kubin*, Kunstmuseum Winterthur 1986, no. 115, repr. p.115

This early drawing immediately evokes a sinister vision of terrifying intensity – a characteristically Kubinesque depiction of the human face. The head appears to be mummified and a gaping void indicates where the nose once was. The sparse hair with its receding hairline accentuates the outline of the mask-like face which has the strange shimmer of a fleshless skull. The drawing is loaded with undertones of death.

Alfred Kubin makes frequent reference to his experience of death in his autobiography.<sup>1</sup> His mother died when he was a boy and her early death undoubtedly left an indelible psychological legacy. He made his first drawings at about that time. Thematically, these early sheets show the emergence of a tendency towards exaggeration and a liking for visionary fantasy.<sup>2</sup> A tremendous curiosity for eerie events guided his early art.<sup>3</sup> The origins of his artistic development and later literary career date from a very early age.<sup>4</sup>

Kubin regarded this densely worked autonomous drawing as so important that he reproduced it in his early publication *Dämonen und Nachtgesichte*. It is not inconceivable that he was inspired by Nikolai Gogol's short story, *The Nose*.<sup>5</sup> There are grounds for believing that he knew the story, particularly in view of his pronounced interest in the writings of authors like Wilhelm Hauff, E.T.A. Hoffmann and Edgar Allan Poe. He was later to produce illustrations for a wide range of literary works.

Gogol's grotesque satirical fantasy describes the disappearance of the said nose from the face of the self-styled 'Major' Kovalev, a collegiate assessor. The nose sets off on a farcical life of its own and experiences a train of nonsensical events until it suddenly reoccupies its proper place as though nothing at all had happened. The whys and hows of this mysterious occurrence are never explained.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Kubin, *Dämonen und Nachtgesichte*, Dresden 1926, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> [Ein] *Hang zur Übertreibung und zur Phantastik*, op. cit., p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., pp.9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Kubin, *Die andere Seite- ein phantastischer Roman*, Munich and Leipzig, 1909.

<sup>5</sup> First published in the magazine *Современник* [The Contemporary] in St. Petersburg in 1836. A collection of Gogol's short stories – *Nevsky Prospect, The Portrait, The Diary of a Madman, The Nose* and *The Overcoat* – was published under the title *St. Petersburg Stories* in 1843.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Jens (ed.), *Kindlers neues Literaturlexikon*, Munich 1989, VI, pp.551-2.

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST

The present drawing, it might be thought, represents the very moment when Kovalev sees himself in the mirror and realizes that his nose has absconded. It is entirely characteristic of Kubin's pictorial vocabulary that he should choose to focus on an immediate experience of sheer horror and fear. Considerably later, in 1949, Kubin was to produce illustrations for Gogol's classic short story, *The Overcoat*.<sup>7</sup>

We are grateful to Dr. Annegret Hoberg, Curator of the Kubin Archive in Munich, for her assistance in dating the drawing to the years between 1904 and 1907.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Marks, *Der Illustrator Alfred Kubin*, Munich 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Letter dated 18 June 2009.