

# LE CLAIRE

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MAX KLINGER

1857 Leipzig - Großjena 1920

*Im Park* [*The Amorous Couple*]

Pen, black chalk and ink heightened with white on paper. Signed *M.K.* and dated lower left (18)87.  
416 x 251 mm

PROVENANCE: Gustav Kirstein, Leipzig (1870-1934) – Cläre Therese Stein Kirstein, Leipzig (1889-1939, wife of Gustav Kirstein, inherited from the above in 1934; remained in her possession until her death) – ‘Purchased’ by the City of Leipzig for the Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig (1939) – Restituted to the heirs of Gustav and Cläre Therese Stein Kirstein in 2000 (sold, London, Sotheby’s, auction sale 29 March 2001, lot 47, repr., correct cataloguing listed under lot 48 in the printed catalogue) – Private collection, USA

LITERATURE: E. A. Seemann Verlag, *Max Klinger. Bestandskatalog der Bilderwerke, Gemälde und Zeichnungen im Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig*, Leipzig 1995, p. 210, no. C427, repr.

EXHIBITION: *Ausstellung anlässlich des 60. Geburtstages von Max Klinger*, P. H. Beyer & Sohn, Leipzig 1917, no. 60 – *Max Klinger 1857-1920*, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main and Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal 1992, no. 140

Max Klinger’s very diverse *oeuvre* has long been seen as playing a leading, if not unique role to the Symbolist movement and to the development of twentieth-century art. Before Klinger emerged on the European stage as a major sculptor and painter he was chiefly active as a draughtsman and printmaker. Between 1879 and 1910 he published no less than fourteen print series. Their subject matter rarely draws on literary sources but displays an autonomous pictorial vocabulary rich in symbols. While the themes of love and death are central to these series, themes of abandon and the dark side of desire are given equal significance in his portrayal of relationships between the sexes.<sup>1</sup>

The present sheet, titled *Im Park*, is a preliminary drawing for an etching of the same title [Fig. 1] from the print series *Eine Liebe: Opus X* (A Love). The series was published by Klinger in 1887 and the title page bears a dedication to Arnold Böcklin.<sup>2</sup> The ten plates of the series address female sexuality and deal with a relationship outside marriage, subjects deemed beyond the pale in the prudish moral climate of Wilhelmine Germany. The relationship may have been based on an episode in Klinger’s own life.<sup>3</sup> Seen in sequence, the sheets follow the development of a love affair – the see-saw of desire

<sup>1</sup> Hubertus Fritze, *Romantische Blicke – Deutsche Zeichnungen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, exhib. cat., Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hanover in conjunction with the Kunstgeschichtliches Seminar at Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen 2018, no. 26.

<sup>2</sup> See Hannelore Fischer and Gudrun Schmidt (eds.), *Max Klinger – Alle Register des Lebens. Graphische Zyklen und Zeichnungen*, exhib. cat., Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Cologne and Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen 2007-8. – *Max Klinger. Die druckgraphischen Folgen*, exhib. cat., Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See Sylvia Heinje, ‘Zwischen Sinnlichkeit und Moral. Die Darstellung von Mann und Frau in Klingers graphischen Zyklen’, II, in *Max Klinger*, exhib. cat., Kunsthalle Bielefeld and Kunstsammlung der Universität Göttingen 1977, Kunsthalle Tübingen, 1976, pp. 277-9.

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as it jumps from passion to tragedy and unhappiness for the young woman who sees herself publicly humiliated and ostracized before dying during the birth or abortion of her illegitimate child.<sup>4</sup> The present drawing depicts a pair of lovers locked in passionate embrace, their intimacy apparently disturbed by nothing and nobody – a secret encounter with no hint of salaciousness. The intensity with which the bodies of the two figures merge and melt into each other recalls Edvard Munch's etching of 1895, *The Kiss* [Fig. 2].<sup>5</sup>

Klinger laboured over the series for almost ten years. The earliest preparatory drawings and proof impressions are dateable to the year 1879. Remarkably, the majority of these preparatory sheets are cohesive, highly finished compositions. Nearly all are executed in pen and ink, some of them with additional touches of wash. Encouraged by the Berlin art dealer Hermann Sagert, Klinger recognized that the higher the degree of finish, the easier the process of transferring the composition to the medium of etching would be, as a number of the plates demonstrate. In addition to the present drawing there are four further sheets displaying slight thematic variations – two of these are drawings and two are etchings which were later discarded [Figs. 2-4]. All five works are an impressive testimony to Klinger's constant striving to find conceptual solutions. The variations prompted formal modifications within the image but also ensured that new associative links are evoked in the perception of the viewer. The number of different preparatory states Klinger executed for the series is larger than for any other series.<sup>6</sup> In this, *Opus X: Eine Liebe* is exceptional.

Klinger's own writings provide insights into the multifaceted stages of his artistic development. In 1883, he noted: 'Long months had passed until this moment, drafting and selecting, making sketches and studies, tearing up and constructing, permeated more with moral defeat than with a creator's pleasure'.<sup>7</sup> To him, 'moral defeats' were stages on the road to achievement. A tireless draughtsman, he created a reservoir of ideas reflecting the entire span of his intellectual and artistic conception of the world.

The first owner of the present work was the Leipzig publisher Gustav Kirstein, who had a sizeable collection of Klinger's works. He supported Klinger in the publication of his graphic works. On Kirstein's death in 1934, the collection was bequeathed to his wife, Cläre Therese Stein Kirstein. Along with the rest of Kirstein's noted collection, the present work was seized by the Nazis in 1939. It then entered the collection of the Museum der Bildenden Künste in Leipzig. It remained in the Museum until 2000, when the collection was restituted to its rightful owners, the heirs of Gustav and Cläre Therese Stein Kirstein, through the efforts of the Commission for Art Recovery of the World Jewish Congress.

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<sup>4</sup> See Sylvia Heinje, op. cit., 1977, pp. 275-87.

<sup>5</sup> *Eine Liebe, Max Klinger und die Folgen*, exhib. cat., Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2007, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup> Karl-Heinz Mehnert, *Max Klinger 1857 – 1920*, exhib. cat., Städtische Galerie im Städelischen Kunstinstitut Frankfurt am Main 1992, pp. 160-3 and 314-5.

<sup>7</sup> Hildegard Heyne (ed.), *Max Klinger: Gedanken und Bilder aus der Werkstatt des werdenden Meisters*, Leipzig 1925, p 21.



Fig. 1: *Im Park* (plate from *Eine Liebe, Opus X*), 1887, etching, 457 x 279 mm.



Fig. 3: *Im Park* (preliminary study for a discarded etching for *Eine Liebe: Opus X*), c.1883, pen and black ink, grey wash, 617 x 464mm.

Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig [inv. I.81126]



Fig. 2: Edvard Munch (1863-1944), *The Kiss*, 1895, etching, aquatint and drypoint.



Fig. 4: *Im Park* (preliminary study for a discarded etching for *Opus X: Eine Liebe*), c.1883, pencil and grey wash, 461 x 300 mm.

Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig [inv. I.7773]

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Fig. 5: *Im Park* (discarded plate for *Eine Liebe: Opus X*),  
dated 18.2.1883, etching, 457 x 321 mm.  
Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig [inv. I.7784]