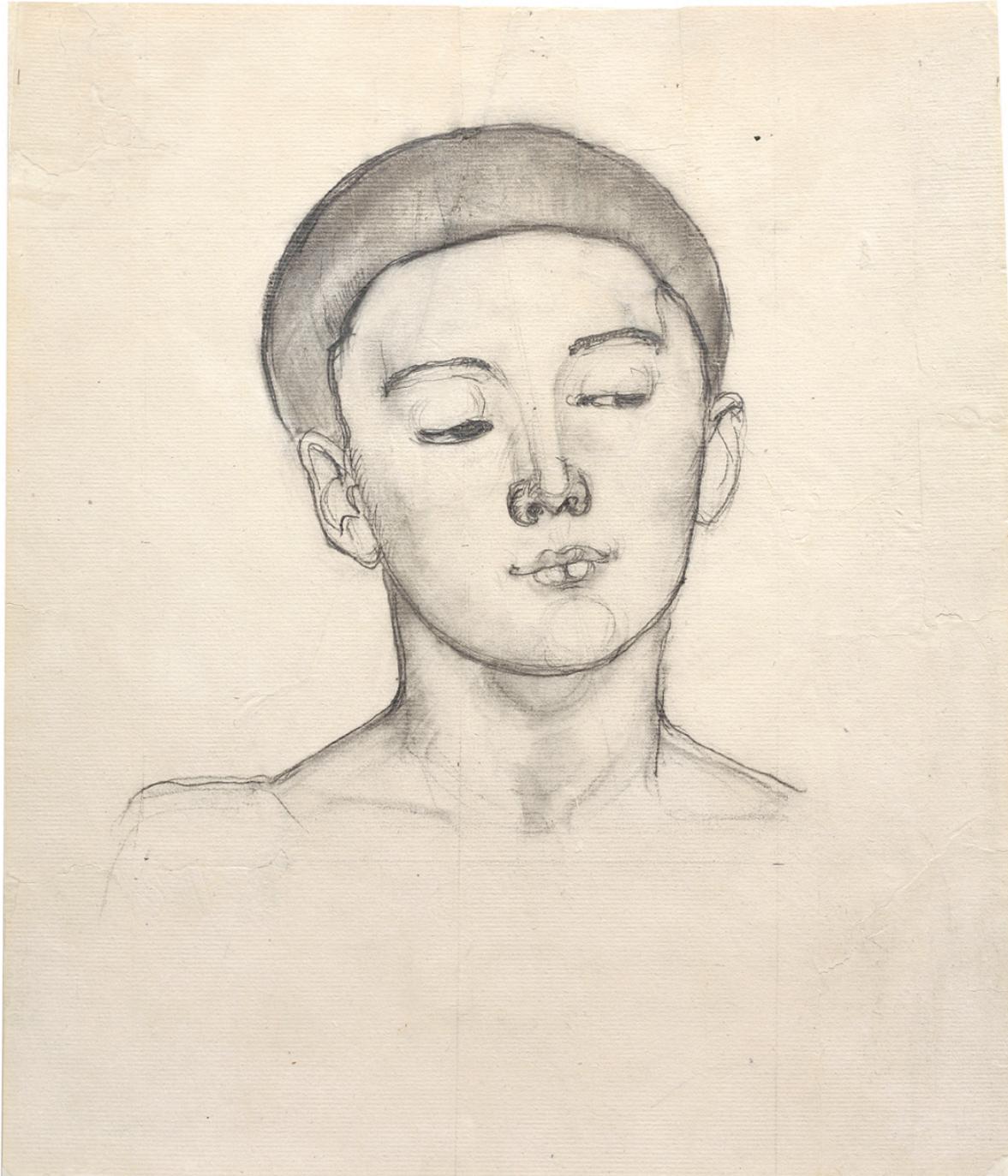


LE CLAIRE

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FERDINAND HODLER

1853 Bern – Geneva 1918

Enraptured (Head of a Boy)

Pencil, with stumping, on laid paper watermarked: *PL BAS*; 1893/94.
298 x 252 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Switzerland

LITERATURE (REFERS TO THE PAINTING *Enraptured*): Oskar Bätschmann and Paul Müller (eds.), *Ferdinand Hodler. Catalogue raisonné der Gemälde*, vol. III, part 1: *Die Figurenbilder*, with contributions by Oskar Bätschmann, Regula Bolleter, Monika Brunner, Sabine Hügli-Vass, Paul Müller and Milena Oehy, in the series *Œvrekataloge Schweizer Künstler 23/3-1*, p. 227, no. 1227 [SIK 79248] published by the Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, Zurich.

The present pencil drawing is a detailed preliminary study for the first, largest version of Hodler's painting *Enraptured (Boy in Spring)*. Now owned by the Gottfried Keller Foundation, the painting is on permanent loan to the Kunsthaus Zürich [Fig. 1]. Completed in 1894, it depicts Hodler's son Hector at the age of five. He stands in a lush green meadow studded with blue wild chicory flowers. He fixes one of the long-stemmed flowers he is holding with a rapt, intent gaze.

Hodler describes the painting in his notes to the art critic and poet Louis Duchosal: 'The third [painting depicts] a child standing, holding a long-stemmed sprig of blue blossom in each hand, around him a profusion of flowers on a background of green.'¹

Monika Brunner writes in the catalogue raisonné: 'The slender figure of the boy, whose lowered gaze and slightly inclined head express deep absorption, together with the lush green of the ground, represent the harmonious accord of child and nature.'²

Compositions on the theme *The Chosen One* were central to the work Hodler produced in the early 1890s. The painting *Enraptured (Boy in Spring)* also belongs to this body of work. The most important painting in the group is the large-format tempera and oil titled *The Chosen One* and now housed in the Kunstmuseum Bern [Fig. 2]. It depicts six winged female figures forming a semi-circle around a naked boy. He is shown in profile in the foreground and kneels in front of a freshly planted sapling. The six female figures hover above the ground, bearing flowers – perhaps to symbolize the arrival of spring. The freshly planted sapling symbolizes youth and the process of growth. The nakedness of the kneeling boy represents the bond between child and nature.

¹ *Notizen von Hodler für Louis Duchosal*, 1891/92, Bibliothèque de Genève, Departments des manuscrits, Ms. 2984/369. Cited after Monika Brunner in *Ferdinand Hodler. Catalogue raisonné der Gemälde*, vol. III, part 1, op. cit., no. 1227, p. 227.

² Brunner, in *Ferdinand Hodler. Catalogue raisonné der Gemälde*, loc cit.

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Enraptured is one of several motifs depicting Symbolist figures and emerged out of Hodler's preoccupation with the theme of *The Chosen One*. A related compositional sketch depicts the same boy, standing holding flowers and surrounded by female figures.³

Two other paintings – *Seated Boy with Branches* [Fig. 3] and *Worship* [Fig. 4] – belong to the same series. Here too, Hodler's son Hector served as his model. The child is depicted in different poses – alone, seated or kneeling, in short trousers and sleeveless shirt, in a meadow, in a garden or surrounded by nature. All these works illustrate Hodler's Pantheistic view of nature.

The present drawing is almost certainly a study from life. Nonetheless, Hodler invests the portrait of his son with an element of mystery and a universal quality. The slightly inclined head and half-closed eyes provide a compelling image of an intense emotional experience. As Hodler himself wrote in *Mission de l'artiste*: 'Emotion is one of the primary reasons driving an artist to create a work of art. He wishes to retell the charm of what has so deeply moved him – a particular landscape, a human being, an excerpt of nature.'⁴ The emotion captured here so uniquely and trenchantly is what transforms this drawing into a Symbolist work of art.

The concisely explored contours describing the boy's head, the attentive use of fine lines and delicate hatched strokes to capture his likeness and the nuanced handling of stumping to suggest volume are hallmarks of Hodler's virtuoso draughtsmanship.

³ Sketch for *Enraptured (Boy in Spring)*, pencil on paper, Cabinet d'arts graphiques du Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva, Carnet [inv. 1958-0176/030.05]. Repr. in *Ferdinand Hodler. Catalogue raisonné der Gemälde*, vol. III, part 1, op. cit., no. 1227, p. 227.

⁴ Cited after Paul Müller in *Ferdinand Hodler. Catalogue raisonné der Gemälde*, vol. III, part 1, op. cit., no. 1229, p. 228.

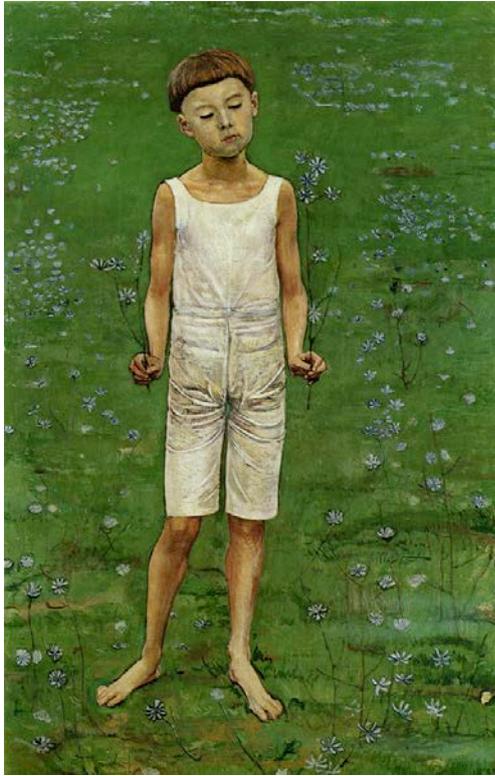


Fig. 1: *Enraptured (Boy in Spring)* 1893-4,
Oil on canvas, 106 x 70 cm.
Kunsthhaus Zürich [inv. 1042], permanent loan
from the Gottfried Keller Foundation



Fig. 2: *The Chosen One*, 1893-4,
Tempera and oil on canvas, 219 x 296 cm.
Kunstmuseum Bern [inv. G 952], permanent loan from the
Gottfried Keller Foundation

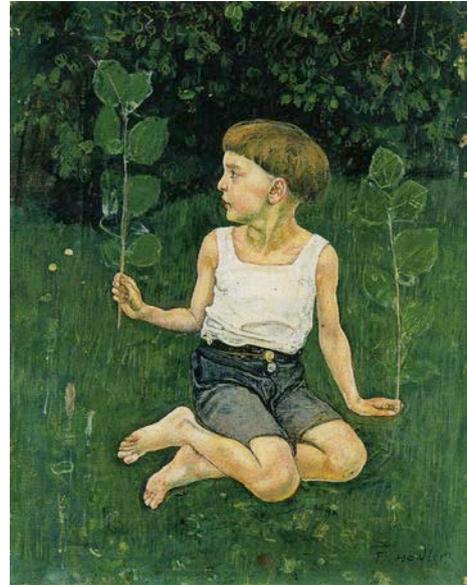


Fig. 3: *Seated Boy with Branches*,
1893-4, oil on canvas, 35 x 27 cm.
Kunsthhaus Zürich [inv. 1044], permanent
loan from the Gottfried Keller Foundation

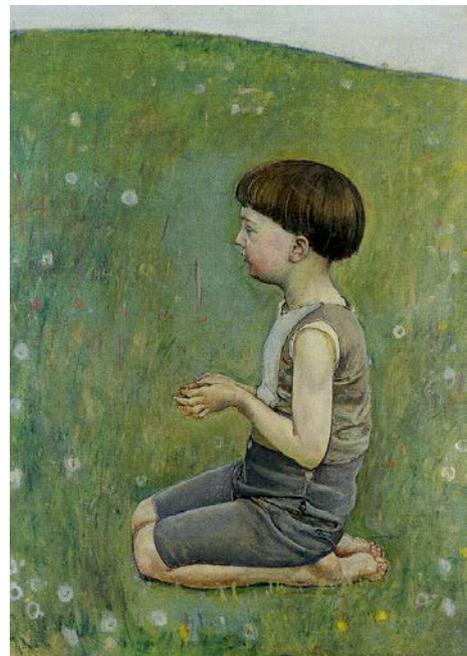


Fig. 4: *Worship*, 1893-4,
Oil on canvas, 62 x 44.5 cm.
Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne,
permanent loan from Kunsthhaus Zürich