

11 Edvard Munch

Løiten/Hedmark 1863 – 1944 Ekely near Oslo

"Der Kuss". 1895

Drypoint and etching on wove paper. 34,6 × 27,6 cm (42,2 × 35,1 cm) (13 5/8 × 10 7/8 in. (16 5/8 × 13 3/8 in.)).

Signed. Catalogue raisonné: Woll 23. [3122]

Provenance

Private Collection, Germany (acquired 1979 at Sotheby Parke Bernet, London)

EUR 70,000–90,000

USD 82,400–105,900

Literature and illustration

Auction: Important Nineteenth Century and modern Prints. London, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 17.5.1979, cat. no. 167, ill. p. 100

Edvard Munch created the etching "Der Kuss" in 1895. The composition has its origins in the sketch "Adieu" from the late 1880s, which depicts a realistic farewell scene in a studio. Over the years, Munch developed this into a veritable series of motifs in oil paintings and prints, increasingly focusing on the kiss.

In doing so, he increasingly reduced the depiction to its essence: the naked, entwined couple. While the window-sill and curtain are still visible in this etching, the later woodcuts from 1897 and 1902 ultimately leave only the two figures nestled together.

Our etching was created during Munch's stay in Berlin, where the first, early prints were also produced. Shortly thereafter, authorities in Kristiania (now Oslo) declared the work immoral and even banned a public exhibition. Indeed, there had scarcely been such an overtly erotic fusion of man and woman in a kiss in Western art since the Renaissance. Rodin's slightly earlier sculpture "Der Kuss" may have served as inspiration for Munch's highly sensual depiction.

By no means does Munch depict a vulgar or even obscene scene: full of tenderness, the man holds the woman in his arms as she surrenders herself completely to him in the kiss. The artist depicts the intimate moment of union when the lovers forget the entire world around them. Munch deliberately and centrally stages the tension between the highly intimate moment within and the outside world, which looms behind the window in the building's facade. For him and his contemporaries, there should be "no more pictures of people reading and women knitting."

Munch's friend and critic Stanisław Przybyszewski describes "Der Kuss" as follows: "One sees two human figures whose faces have merged into one another. There is not a single recognizable feature [...]; but the full passion of the kiss, the terrible power of sexual, painful, yearning desire, the disappearance of self-awareness, the merging of two naked individualities, is so honestly felt" (Stanisław Przybyszewski: The Work of Edvard Munch. Berlin, Fischer Verlag, 1894, p. 18).
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