



Mario von Lüttichau A Kiss as Relief – Conrad Felixmüller's Declaration of Love to His Wife Londa

The career of Konrad Felix Müller, born in Dresden in 1897, got off to a breathtaking start. After completing his studies at the Dresden Academy, he secured a contract with the renowned art dealership Emil Richter; in the summer in Berlin, through Ludwig Meidner, he met the avant-garde gallerist Herwarth Walden and the artists of the "Sturm"; he became a contributor to the magazine "Der Sturm"; and he met the editor of the magazine "Die Aktion," Franz Pfemfert. In his Dresden studio, he regularly hosted "Expressionist Soirees" as evenings of reading and discussion, and he met his future wife, Londa Freiin von Berg (1896–1979), whom he married in June 1918.



Conrad Felixmüller. "Spätsommerabend". 1918. Pastel/paper. Private Collection, Rhineland

During the war, the artist – who began calling himself Conrad Felixmüller in 1924 – changes his style, particularly in his graphic work, which also influences his painting. He reduces heads and figures to angular, sometimes geometrically suggestive elements, without committing to a formal Cubism. Rather, he sought expressive forms with which he, as he himself wrote, wanted to shape "true space": "The dynamism of pure forms: cubes, prisms. Crystal-clear eternity" (Gerhard Söhn (ed.): Conrad Felixmüller von ihm – über ihn. Düsseldorf 1977, p. 12).

Inspired not least by his love for Londa, a series of woodcuts depicting couples emerged in 1918, expressing the intimate bond between the two young people: "Mann und Frau," "Verlobung," or "Offenes Haar." In early expressive works as well, such as the pastel "Spätsommerabend" (ill.) from 1918, Londa and he merge into a single, almost sculptural form. Felixmüller applies this

compositional principle to our wood relief. He carves himself, united in an intimate kiss with Londa, giving her the space for a slender, standing body and the long, full hair that frames her head. No other artist of this period explored the double portrait as a symbol of human affection as deeply as Felixmüller. He developed a pictorial form for which the techniques of woodcut and wood relief offered the best technical conditions.

"Authentic references to Conrad Felixmüller's sculptural work exist solely in the artist's meticulously maintained catalogue of panel paintings, which lists an additional seven sculptural works [...] for the year 1923. Beyond that, there is no commentary, no passage in a letter, no record by a contemporary, no exhibition catalogue, no oral tradition," reports Gerhard Söhn (Conrad Felixmüller on His 85th Birthday, Düsseldorf 1982, unpaginated). Söhn publishes a handwritten list by Felixmüller of seven works dated 1923. Number seven is our relief, titled: "Liebespaar, stehend. Eichenholz, braun gebeizt"; numbers one and two describe other reliefs. The other works are full-relief sculptures, which are classical, three-dimensional figures exhibiting a completely different, softer style that represents a departure from the cubic formal language and is more closely associated with the artistic style of the 1920s. This raises the question of whether the dating of the handwritten list might refer more to the time of its creation than to the origin of the sculptures. One might ask: Was our relief, as its formal language suggests, actually created as early as 1918/19?



Conrad Felixmüller. "Liebespaar". 1918. Oil/canvas. Private Collection, Berlin

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Dresden 1897 – 1977 Berlin

“Liebespaar” (Conrad and Londa Felixmüller). 1923

Oak. 87 × 25 × 3 cm (34 ¼ × 9 ⅞ × 1 ⅛ in.). On the reverse, with the estate stamp.

Catalogue raisonné: Sohn 7. [3128]

Provenance

Estate of the artist / Private Collection, Berlin

EUR 90,000–120,000

USD 105,900–141,000

Exhibition

Conrad Felixmüller. Gemälde, Aquarelle, Zeichnungen. Hamburg, Intersiva Gesellschaft für Beteiligungen mbH, 1981, cat. no. 65, w. ill. p. 32 / German Expressionist Sculpture/Skulptur des Expressionismus. Los Angeles, County Museum of Art; Washington, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, and Cologne, Josef Haubrich Kunsthalle am Neumarkt, 1983/84, cat. no. 34, w. ill. / Conrad Felixmüller. Gemälde. Aquarelle. Zeichnungen. Druckgraphik. Skulpturen. Schleswig, Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesmuseum Schloß Gottorf, 1990, cat. no. 162, ill. p. 231 (“Liebespaar stehend”)

Literature and illustration

Expressionismus und synthetischer Kubismus. In: Conrad Felixmüller. Werke und Dokumente. Nürnberg, Archiv für Bildende Kunst im Germanischen Nationalmuseum, 1984, cat. no. 45, ill. 66



Conrad Felixmüller. “Geliebte Frau”. 1921. Steel engraving.

