



Susanne Schmid A symphony of coloured light – Alexej Jawlensky's "Sommertag in Ascona"

Out into the open, into the light! This was the sentiment that turned the small village of Ascona in the Swiss canton of Ticino into a dream destination for many of the early 20th century utopian movements that rejected industrial modernity in favour of alternative lifestyles. The trend began in 1900 when, on a sunlit hill overlooking Lago Maggiore, the Monte Verità naturopathic sanatorium was established. Before long, a philosophically minded community of natural healers, esoteric teachers, Buddhist monks, and wandering preachers offering various paths to salvation had sprung up around it. By the time World War I broke out, these early non-conformists were rubbing shoulders with the intellectual avant-garde, artists, pacifists, and emigrants, for whom Ascona had become a gathering point and refuge.



Lot 19

As a Russian native, the painter Alexej von Jawlensky was given 48 hours to leave Germany when war broke out in 1914. Travelling by way of St. Prex on Lake Geneva, he made his way to Zurich in the company of Helene Nesnakomoff, their son Andreas, and Marianne von Werefkin. After Jawlensky fell seriously ill in 1917, the group relocated from Zurich to the more southerly climes of Ascona, taking up lodgings in the medieval castle of Bezzola, directly on the shore of Lago Maggiore. In Ascona, they encountered an international atmosphere and enjoyed stimulating interaction with

other artists and writers. The local colony included Hermann Hesse, who had settled permanently in the Ticino, as well as newer arrivals such as Hans Arp, Ernst Bloch, the Dadaists Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings, along with Ernst Toller, Paul Klee, and Else Lasker-Schüler.

In his memoir, Jawlensky described his first impressions: "The following three years in Ascona were the most interesting of my life, because nature there is so powerful and mysterious and forces you to live with it: the wonderful harmony during the day and then something quite eerie at night. We arrived in Ascona at the end of March and rented an Italian apartment right on the lake. It was the wet season, and the rain came down all day long, sometimes heavy, sometimes light. But it was enchanting, since it was warm and the buds were bursting open. The Lago Maggiore was most melancholy, often laden with mists passing over the water. I continued to paint my variations here, frequently inspired by this scenic nature. After a few months we moved to another house right on the lake. We had a very



View of Lago Maggiore near Ascona

nice apartment with a garden right on the lake. It was the last house on the edge of Ascona." (Quote from the exhibition catalogue for *Lebensmenschen – Alexej von Jawlensky und Marianne von Werefkin*. Munich, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus; Wiesbaden, Kunstmuseum, 2019/20, p. 257).

For his painting "Sommertag in Ascona," Jawlensky opted for an intimate format comparable to the one he had used for "Variationen über ein landschaftliches Thema", that famous series of works which he had begun working on while at St. Prex, the first station of his exile. The motif in question – the view from the window of his lodgings – continued to obsess the artist in his new environment even after he had varied it over a hundred times with differing nuances of colours. He was to continue painting the series until 1921. The panorama of "Sommertag" looks like a liberating breath of fresh air by comparison. The painter leaves the confines of his room behind and ventures outside into the sunny idyll which begins directly behind the houses. He captures the enchantment of the landscape in light and colour while using blue paint to trace a strong horizontal line that seems to carry the various scenic elements: the gently rolling hilltops, the forested cliffs, the view into the far distance between the peaks. Below, the shimmering waters of the lake beckon. Flecks of light in yellow, green, and pink glide weightlessly over the image surface, interspersed with a warm orange glow. With every visible brushstroke and every transparent application that allows the canvas structure to shine through, Jawlensky emphasizes each colour's own value and a painting process that has become elevated into something spiritual. The beauty of nature is a miracle for the eyes, and also leaves behind a lasting impression on the soul.

19 Alexej von Jawlensky

Torschok 1864 – 1941 Wiesbaden

“Sommertag in Ascona”. Circa 1918

Oil on linenstructured paper, laid down on panel.
27 × 36,4 cm (10 5/8 × 14 3/8 in.). Monogrammed
lower left: A. J. On the decorative frame labels of the
exhibitions Zurich and Lausanne 2000/01 (see below).
Catalogue raisonné: Jawlensky 1004. [3323] Framed.

Provenance

Rita Janett, Langwies (circa 1919/20) / Eberhard
Kornfeld, Bern / Private Collection / Leonard Hutton
Galleries, New York (1992) / Galerie Thomas, Munich /
Private Collection, Northern Germany

EUR 200,000–300,000

USD 238,000–357,000

Exhibition

Jawlensky in der Schweiz 1914–1921. Begegnungen mit
Arp, Hodler, Janco, Klee, Lehbruck, Richter,
Taeuber-Arp. Zürich, Kunsthaus; Lausanne, Fondation
de l’Hermitage, and Duisburg, Stiftung Wilhelm-
Lehmbruck-Museum, Zentrum Internationaler Skulp-
tur, 2000/01

- An abstracted landscape panorama with masterfully orchestrated colouration.
- A unique painting that stands outside the artist’s major groups of works.
- A stepping stone to the artist’s iconic late period.

