



Susanne Schmid "Joy over a sunny day already is where invisible ideas quietly materialize"

Sunday leisure and recreation in nature were themes August Macke encountered early on in the work of the Impressionists. Starting around 1912, he, too, began to explore this topic in a large number of motivic variations: flaneurs on the pavement, women passing by fashion stores, visitors to the zoo. With their coming and going, moving on and lingering, Macke was working out his vision of how human beings and their lives coalesce harmoniously with art. This is something he achieved with a particularly light touch in his painting *Mann auf Bank*, in which a gentleman in a suit and stiff hat has just interrupted his stroll to sit on a bench in a forest clearing. The sun is shining in his face; there is nothing to disturb him. He holds a book in his left hand, while his right arm droops languidly over the backrest. Lush vegetation rises up around the reading figure. Subtle circles and hatch lines suggest thick shrubbery, while majestic tree trunks structure the composition into upwardly undulating lines.

A pencil drawing in one of August Macke's sketch books suggests that the work was created in Hilterfingen on Lake Thunersee, where the painter, looking for repose, took up lodgings with his family in September of 1913. This eight-month sojourn in Switzerland followed a hectic period during which Macke not only had edited the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter* and had exhibited widely, but also had acted as a mediator between artists, critics, gallery owners, museum directors, and the fine arts audience. In 1912, he had served on the jury of the now legendary *Sonderbund* exhibition in Cologne, where works by the likes of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, and Edvard Munch were on display. In the following year, Macke played a key role, together with Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, in organizing the First German Autumn Salon, which opened on September 20th, 1913, at *Der Sturm*, the Berlin gallery run by Herwarth Walden. Thus, August Macke became one of the salient pioneers of Modernism in Germany, not just through his artistic works but also by his contribution to the arts scene at the political and organizational levels. This commitment to the avant-garde also meant standing firm against intense pushback, such as the withering criticism that greeted the *Herbstsalon* and derided the participating artists as a "horde of paint-spattering howler monkeys." In a letter to the Berlin-based art collector and patron Bernhard Koehler, Macke wrote, "Once the exhibition is over, one will definitely recall the whole thing with joy and will no longer think back on all the Berliners who did not go see it. Instead, one will remember the fact that it meant something to one in this short life. The deeply unpleasant thing that annoys me the most is that one can lose so much of the optimism that is so beautiful and justified." (quoted from: *August Macke. Biographie*. Verein August Macke Macke Haus, Bonn, 1992, p. 68).

It was in the idyllic Swiss hamlet of Hilterfingen, surrounded by the Alps and lodged in a cozy house with a large lakefront garden, that August Macke would be able to regain his optimism and to make a new start. Focusing on the pure visual

excitement the village and its environs offered, he was able to create some of his most important works. A decisive catalyst for this new burst of creativity was Macke's encounter with Robert Delaunay and his "window paintings." The Frenchman's light-animated colour spaces were liberating to August Macke, who freed himself from the compulsive quest for spiritual meaning which he had shared with his friends in the *Blaue Reiter* circle, and on October 16th, 1913, he confided to Bernhard Koehler, "My views on art are different from those of Kandinsky and Marc. I now feel responsible for myself alone." (quoted from: Elisabeth Erdmann-Macke: *Erinnerung an August Macke*, Frankfurt am Main, 1987, p. 281).

Inspired by the "window paintings," Macke gives his colours a greater intrinsic weight, imbuing them with a new quality and brilliance. Much like Delaunay would have done, he composes the entire visual plane of *Mann auf Bank* using coloured shapes. But instead of cubically split prisms, he uses elements that are corporeal and plastic, while adding a more strongly perceptible handwriting of his own, to give vibrancy to the image. Applying the paint in broad brushstrokes, Macke creates voluminous contours and alternates light with shade so as to create the impression of space without resorting to the illusion of a central perspective line. His painterly use of light enables him to coax extraordinary diversity out of the pared-down colour palette: cool greens and deep blues juxtaposed with warm yellow accents and interspersed with white dapples of sunlight, with the base material shining through everywhere with its very own hue. Our eye is drawn over the image in synch with this rhythm of colour and form, thereby fulfilling August Macke's most fundamental intent: To express the unique quality of human perception in painting. "The life-like quality of a painted surface arises from the movement aroused within the viewer through the simultaneous resonance of red and blue, of lengths and curves, etc. For the way in which an artist [...] organizes all this tension is that highest form of mathematics which cannot possibly be expressed in words." (quoted from: *August Macke. Biographie*. Verein August Macke Haus, Bonn, 1992, S. 72).

This liberated use of colour also allows August Macke to convey his own spiritual experience by opening a window onto an interior world that reflects the serenity he felt at the time: "Hilterfingen – what a carefree, happy, and fulfilling time was to be granted to the two of us in that place, as well as to our darling children; heavenly beautiful, almost unreal – before the horrific global catastrophe erupted upon the world." (quoted from: Elisabeth Erdmann-Macke: *Erinnerung an August Macke*, Frankfurt am Main, 1987, p. 275). The reader in *Mann auf Bank* seems to dissolve completely into his surroundings and to resonate in harmony with nature and its panoply of colours. August Macke has attained his goal of making a new reality come alive in the image through vibrant colour.



Lot 17



August Macke. Spaziergänger unter Bäumen, Hilterfingen. 1913. Charcoal on paper

17 August Macke

Meschede 1887 – 1914 Perthes-lès-Hurlus

“Mann auf Bank”. 1913

Oil on cardboard. 56.1 × 51.1 cm (22 1/8 × 20 1/8 in.).

Signed and dated with brush in black on the reverse:

A. Macke 1913. There too labels of the exhibitions

Berlin 1934, Hanover 1935 and Amsterdam 1964 (see

below) as well as labels of the Kunsthalle Basel and of

Galerie Emil Richter, Dresden. Catalogue raisonné:

Heiderich 525 / Vriesen 404. [3071] Frame: Spain, 17th

Century. Loan Degg Rahmen, Berlin.

Provenance

Estate of the artist (1914–1957) / Private Collection,

Southern Germany (1957 acquired, thence by descent

to the present owner)

EUR 900,000–1,200,000

USD 978,000–1,300,000

Exhibition

August Macke. Bonn, Gesellschaft für Literatur und

Kunst, Städtisches Museum Villa Obernier, 1918 /

Gedächtnis-Ausstellung August Macke. Frankfurt

a. M., Kunstverein; Wiesbaden, Neues Museum Wies-

baden, Nassauischer Kunstverein, Wiesbadener

Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, 1920, cat. no. 44 /

Frühjahrsausstellung 1928. Berlin, Galerie Ferdinand

Möller, 1928, cat. no. 25 / August Macke. Zur 20. Wie-

derkehr seines Todestages. Berlin, Galerie von der

Heyde, 1934, cat. no. 23 / August Macke. Hamburg,

Kunstverein, 1935 / August Macke. Hannover, Kestner

Gesellschaft, 1935, cat. no. 37 / Der Blaue Reiter.

Köln, Galerie Dr. Rusche, 1947, cat. no. 6 / August

Macke Gedächtnisausstellung des Museumsvereins.

Aachen, Suermondt-Museum, 1948, cat. no. 49 /

August Macke. Duisburg, Städtisches Kunstmuseum,

1949, cat. no. 34 / August Macke Gedächtnisausstel-

lung. Meschede, Landratsamt, 1951, cat. no. 21 / Het

Expressionisme van van Gogh tot Picasso. Amster-

dam, Stedelijkmuseum, 1964, cat. no. 80, w. ill.

There is a pencil study relating to the painting in the sketch-
book 45 on p. 28. (Ursula Heiderich: August Macke. Die Skiz-
zenbücher. Volume II Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1987,
p. 900/901)



Reverse

