

5 Egon Schiele

Tulln 1890 – 1918 Vienna

“Mother and Child (Mutter und Kind)”. 1918

Chalk on paper. 29,9 × 37 cm (11 ¾ × 14 ½ in.). Signed and dated lower right, one below the other: EGON SCHIELE 1918. On the reverse lower right the stamp in black (Kallir 1990, Appendix A, p. 653, ill. A-3): Nachlass EGON SCHIELE. Catalogue raisonné: Kallir 2200. [3084] Framed.

Provenance

Estate of the artist / Serge and Vally Sabarsky, New York / Maren Otto, Hamburg (acquired in 2009 at Galerie Rieder, Munich)

EUR 180,000–240,000

USD 175,000–233,000

Egon Schiele, an artist of the caliber seen only once in a century: The products of his imagination are celebrated all over the world; exhibits of his works thrill millions of visitors. For the Austrian art historian Otto Behnisch, Schiele was “one of the most brilliant artists of all time.” Indeed, though created over a century ago, Schiele’s art has lost none of its expressiveness and power and is of impressive relevance even today.

Schiele’s eloquent vocabulary of forms draws its vigor from a virtuosic use of line – his first and most personal means of expression. With line, he creates a rich symbolism and body language all his own from contorted, inwardly turned limbs, sweeping gestures, and a sense of tension heightened to the maximum possible limit. Schiele’s line is austere, nervous, brittle, yet also subtle, supple and sensuous. We need only trace the contours of the female nude seen from the back in *Mutter und Kind* to feel the delicacy of the artist’s hand movements. The isolated outline makes the mother’s naked form appear vulnerable while simultaneously emphasizing her protective posture as the epitome of an all-encompassing embrace. This is juxtaposed with the individualistically rendered and not very childlike face, which sinks into that embrace or – depending on the point of view – yearns to tear loose from it.

At the subjective level, the key to understanding this image may well lie in Schiele’s ambivalent relationship with his mother, which the artist described in the following terms: “I can hardly fathom why and wherefore it could be that Mother treats me so differently from what I think I ought to be able to expect – yes, even demand! If it were someone else, then all right! But one’s own mother of all people! [...] You would think that a mother would perceive her child, which came to be in her, grew in her, lived in her, breathed, ate and drank through her [...] as a ‘piece of herself’ and treat her child as such.” (quoted from Christian Bauer (editor) in *Egon Schiele, Fast ein ganzes Leben*, Munich, 2015, p. 61). It is this conflicted feeling of deep bonding coupled with alienation, of comfort with sorrow, of beginning with ending that comes across so eloquently in this unusual composition.

With his portrayal of emotional extremes and his incisive exploration of human existence in all its contradictions, Egon Schiele set himself apart from the Art Nouveau aesthetic that held sway in the Vienna of his day. His greatest public success would come in the spring of 1918, when an exhibit of his work was held in the main hall of the Vienna Secession. Just a few months later, as World War I was drawing to a close, the deadly Spanish Flu pandemic broke out. Among its victims was Schiele’s wife Edith, then expecting her first child. Egon Schiele survived Edith by only three days, dying on October 31st, 1918 at the age of 28. sch

