

Wilhelm Kotarbinski

(1849 - 1921)

Unknown mythological story

1890

signed with the initials EAP (Elena Adrianovna Prahova) in the left corner and WK in the right corner

Sepia, paper

65 x 32 cm

Sold



In addition to his painting, Kotarbinski is particularly celebrated for his phantasmagorical stories presented in the form of sepia on paper. These works, infused with symbols, wild dreams, and allegorical visions, seem to be created easily, spontaneously, and in abundance. When an extensive part of it was exhibited, these works have become admired by the public and earned such great popularity that they began to be printed in the form of reproductions on postcards and, subsequently, millions of copies were sold. What started as drawings for 'entertainment and joy' has turned into something significant in Kotarbinski's career, almost his artistic trademark, which has brought him the title of the leading Russian symbolist. Kotarbinski's unique style, which is distinctly manifested in his sepia drawings, can be attributed mostly to the modernised salon painting with highly emphasised elements of Art Nouveau, hints of decadence and utmost decorativeness. In his own version of Modernism, Kotarbinski often integrated references to the ancient world: elements of Egyptian, Greek and Roman culture, as, for example, in the 'Triumphant'. It makes one's think about the Vienna Secession and especially about its outstanding master, Gustav Klimt. Another incessant motif in Kotarbinski's works, as, for example, in 'Water Lilies', introduces the theme of the water element. Depicting the embodiment of the water source, metaphorically and literally at the same time, the artist has used organic, flowing, continuous lines, which is a clear demonstration of one of the main Art Nouveau principles. At a deeper level, if one is considering it metaphorically, the connection with water refers to a number of meanings: the idea of eternal life, the transition from the world of the living to the world of the dead (it is worth to remember the transition through the river Styx in Greek mythology), the question of the migration of souls passing through the giant streams, which was actively discussed at the turn of the century. The artistic reflections make Kotarbinski related to the pre-Raphaelites, a group of the English artists of the XIX century, who possessed quite unconventional imagination and original perspective on the world and art, based on literary sources and medieval motifs. The pre-Raphaelites depicted waterfalls, rivers, streams and lakes using it as an instrument of insight into the human soul, a symbol of vital energy, and a representation of the flow of life.



However, not only the water element but also nature in general, play an important role in pre-Raphaelites' as well as Kotarbinski's work. Water lilies, as well as Kotarbinski's whole natural world, are depicted subtly, delicately, with careful attention to detail, to the atmosphere. Kotarbinski's lakes and rivers, forests and meadows are inhabited by mermaids and spirits, ghosts and dryads, angels and demons. Beauty is at the forefront of everything that Kotarbinski has created. 'Unknown mythological story' once again shows to the viewer charming maidens, or spirits, with flowers woven into their hair and trembling silks on their fragile bodies. The drawing fascinates with its meandering, flowing, ghostly lines. Kotarbinski's sepias are reminiscent of beautiful dreams full of magical legends, mythological traditions, and bygone other worlds. Professor Adrian Prakhov, a renowned art critic and art historian, when discovering Kotarbinski's sepia drawings has highly appreciated them and enthusiastically marked their originality and beauty. Subsequently, reproduced as postcards, these sepia drawings were printed in Stockholm (typ. JSC "Granberg"), and in St. Petersburg and Warsaw (ed. Braci Rzepkowicz). The postcards show more than 200 of Kotarbinski's paintings and sepia drawings. Also, sepia drawings were shown with tremendous success at the exhibition of 1898 in St. Petersburg. The basis of this exhibition was formed by those drawings that were created for Adrian and Emilia Prakhov's daughter, Elena Prakhova. Some sources claim that Kotarbinski was in love with Elena, who was a great embroidery artist and often used Kotarbinski's sketches for her own works. The artist was giving watercolour painting lessons to Elena and devoted to her many of his exquisite sepia drawings which are marked with 'E. A. P.' - Elena Adrianovna Prakhova.



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