



19th & 20th Century Paintings and Works on Paper, including Portrait Miniatures (30 Mar 2021 B)

Tue, 30th Mar 2021

Lot 322

Estimate: £6000 - £8000 + Fees

LOUIS CHRISTIAN HESS (AUSTRIAN 1895-1944)

Property from the Estate of Louis Christian Hess

LOUIS CHRISTIAN HESS (AUSTRIAN 1895-1944)

Friend I

signed and dated C.Hess 1931 (upper right)

oil on canvas

94 x 55.3 cm (37 x 21 3/4 in)

EXHIBITED:

Palermo, Palazzo del Turismo; Rome, Deutsche Bibliothek; Padova, Associazione Italo-Tedesca; Genova, Biblioteca Germanica, Galleria Carmagnola; Trieste, Istituto Germanico di Cultura; Bolzano, Goethe Gallery; Milan, Galleria Pietra; Florence, Palazzo Vecchio; Turin, Teatro Gobetti; Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseum; Passau, Goethe Institut; and Munich, Kunstverein, *Christian Hess, Retrospective Exhibition* (travelling exhib.), 1974-77

Rome, Goethe Institut, *Retrospektiva Christian Hess - Oli, acquerelli, disegni dal 1922 al 1938*, 1983

Bruneck, Stadtmuseum, *Christian Hess, Back to the Origins a century later*, 2011

Vienna, Schütz Kunst & Antiquitäten, *Christian Hess*, 2014

Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni - Fondazione banca del Monte di Lucca, *Louis Christian Hess e l'Italia alla ricerca del Paradiso*, 2016

Painted in Munich in 1931, the present work depicts the right hand figure in the central panel of Hess's much acclaimed large scale triptych *Am Wasser* painted in 1930 (fig. 1). First shown at the *Glaspalast* in 1931, the central panel of *Am Wasser* was illustrated in *Jugend* the same year (fig. 2). Much to Hess's immense distress, however, *Am Wasser* together with a significant portion of his other work was destroyed in a catastrophic fire at the *Glaspalast* two years later.

Friend I echoes many tendencies found in Beckmann's works: the plasticity of the figure, the powerful use of light and dark, the black outlines that brilliantly carve out the form of the sitter and the use of the deliberately vibrant rich, almost garish yellow. There are also similarities with Christian Schad's cool dispassionate *Neue Sachlichkeit* style: the figure glances away from the viewer, preoccupied in her thoughts, creating a haunting sense of mystery within the painting.

Another artist and friend who influenced Hess was the German Expressionist Karl Hofer. In the present work Hess explores Hofer's interest in non-representational colours to provoke emotional responses, notably in the sitter's vibrant yellow *gilet* contrasting with the black background. Karl Hofer

was also a skilled master of form and Hess has demonstrated this in his adept rendering of the shadowed folds of the sitter's clothing.

Friend I was painted two years after Hess joined the progressive *Juryfreie* artist group in Munich. He soon became one of the group's leaders, and during the 1930s he began to receive wider recognition with his work featured in a number of magazines.

See introduction to lot 321.