

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

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GEORG KOLBE

Waldheim 1877 - 1947 Berlin

Kneeling Nude

Pen and brush and light brown sepia ink on firm wove; early 1920s.

Signed with the artist's monogram lower right in sepia: G K.

494 x 345 mm

This drawing, a study of a female nude in motion, is one of a group of sepia studies made by the sculptor Georg Kolbe in the early 1920s. A comparable study depicting a female nude in a similar pose (fig. 1) is reproduced in Wilhelm R. Valentiner's book, *Georg Kolbe, Plastik und Zeichnung*, Munich 1922. Kolbe executed a number of versions of the motif of a kneeling woman in the early 1920s. The most expressive sculptural version is almost certainly *Lamentation*, a bronze executed in 1921 (fig. 2). In terms of pose the present sepia study displays a number of parallels with two bronzes executed in 1924 and 1925. They are: *Study for the Figure of a Kneeling Woman* (fig. 3) and *Study of a Figure in Motion: Kneeling Woman Supported by her Right Arm* (fig. 4).

In an essay titled *Plastik und Zeichnung*¹ published in 1920 Kolbe suggested that *it would perhaps be better for a sculptor not to make drawings*. He went on to emphasize that a sculptor need not be a draughtsman to produce sculpture, arguing that drawing is not a component of the sculptural process. Kolbe was, however, a prolific draughtsman as well as a sculptor. In the same essay he described what the drawing process was for him – *a unique language*, one that could exist alongside his [sculptural] *oeuvre*.

Preliminary drawings for sculptures constitute something of an exception in Kolbe's *oeuvre*. Most of his drawings were produced in parallel with his sculptures and he used the same models for both. As a result, the figures depicted in the sculptures and the drawings are similar in terms of motion and proportion because they are marked by the distinctive characteristics of the model. But there are nevertheless genre-related differences. The art historian Wilhelm Pinder elaborates on this in his book on Kolbe's drawings: *His drawings [...] are all about motion – now bold, fast and sudden, now soft and calm, but always [...] an enigmatic, murmuring undercurrent, as it were seething with the furious energy of a life force*.

Kolbe produced his first master drawings – figures worked in in pen, brush and blue ink – in the years around 1918-20. He developed extraordinary skill in his use of washes, defining motion and plasticity in a rapid notational style that displays great sureness of line and economy of means. Contours are sketched in free, flowing strokes of the pen and washes are applied to create tonal shifts and plasticity. Volumes are subtly modelled, subordinating areas of shadow to passages of gleaming, untouched paper. Kolbe's draughtsmanship reached its peak in the reed pen and wash drawings of the early 1920s. The irregular contours, spatters of ink and energetically applied washes lend the sheets vibrancy and an extraordinary intensity. In the latter part of the 1920s the use of light brown sepia ink signalled a return to a more delicate, naturalistic approach in his observation of the model. He began

¹ 'Plastik und Zeichnung', in *Genius* 1921, pp. 13-16.

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to delineate the contours in chalk rather than pen and ink. By the end of the decade chalk was his preferred medium.

When a model sat for him for the first time Kolbe would not begin work on a new sculpture until he had completed a series of drawings. First, he would insist that the new model moved and posed as he or she wished. He would scrutinize their movement with his eyes and then begin to study it with the help of a pen or crayon until he found a pose with formal and expressive possibilities that particularly attracted him. He would then instruct the model to hold the pose. His aim was not to produce an outstanding portrayal of physical beauty but – as he himself said – to capture motion and to test its expressive potential. Models from the world of dance – Nijinsky, Gret Palucca and Ted Shawn – were a key source of inspiration for his work. He saw them as the embodiment of the art of physical movement.

Kolbe's success as a draughtsman closely parallels his success as a sculptor. The 1920s saw an important succession of special exhibitions in which both his sculptures and his drawings were represented. His master drawings were acquired by a large number of public institutions and private collectors. Kolbe reserved a wide range of his own drawings for his personal collection. These now form the core of the Georg Kolbe Museum's holdings.²

² With the exception of the first paragraph, the present text is an abbreviated version of Ursel Berger's essay titled *Die Bewegung einfangen* published on the website of the Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin. See <<http://www.georg-kolbe-museum.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Kolbe-Zeichnungen.pdf>>.



Fig. 1: *Kneeling Female Nude*, c.1922,
sepia pen and wash, 456 x 356 mm.
Private collection



Fig. 3: *Study for the Figure of a Kneeling Woman*, 1924,
bronze (cast date c.1935-7), height 29.2 cm.
Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin



Fig. 2: *Lamentation*, 1921, bronze, height 40 cm.
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie



Fig. 4: *Study of a Figure in Motion*, 1925,
bronze (cast date 1939?), height 24.5 cm.
Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin