

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



ODILON REDON

1840 Bordeaux – Paris 1916

L'Arbre

Oil on paper, laid down on cardboard; c.1883-4

Signed lower left: *Odilon Redon*.

31,9 x 25,3 cm

PROVENANCE: Galerie Eugène Druet, Paris (1923) – Huinck & Scherjon N.V., Amsterdam (no. 1102) – Private collection, Cologne

EXHIBITED: *Exposition d'œuvres d'Odilon Redon (1840-1916), peintures, pastels, aquarelles, dessins, lithographies, eaux-fortes, art décoratif*, Galerie Eugène Druet, Paris 1923, no. 183

LITERATURE: Alec Wildenstein, *Odilon Redon, Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné, Fleurs et paysages*, Paris 1996, vol. III, p. 235, no. 1758, repr. – Pierre Sanchez, *Les expositions de la Galerie Druet (1903 – 1938), Répertoire des artistes et liste de leurs œuvres*, Dijon 2009, p. 436, no. 183

Odilon Redon was fascinated by the landscapes of Brittany - *la douce et mélancolique Bretagne*¹. He first stayed in Brittany in 1870 during a period of convalescent leave from military service and he spent the summer of 1875 in the village of Quimper. Five years later, he and Camille Falte spent their honeymoon in Brittany and he returned in 1883 and 1884.

Redon mentions these visits both in letters and in his diary, *À soi-même*. He describes the impression of striking desolation that the Breton landscape evokes: “*C'est là le Nord qui tombe, c'est le ciel qui s'abaisse obstinément, pesant et dur, sur les hommes qu'il accable. Il pleut, il tombe lentement le brouillard ferme. Tout est triste et comme opprimé. La nature entière, homme et paysage, semble sentir le poids du fonds des temps*”². Nine years later, staying in the little fishing villages of Morgat and Douarnenez, he writes to his friend Émile Hennequin encouraging him to come to Brittany: “*Vannes est beau, Presque sublime ... Jamais la nature n'a marqué comme là et sur des murs si tristes la chétivité de la condition humaine. ... Pour avoir de la Bretagne une idée sombre et pour s'exercer à se travailler l'âme dans la mélancolie, c'est là qu'il faut aller dans le Morbihan.*”³

¹ Odilon Redon, in a letter of June 1894 to Edmond Picard. See: André Mellerio, *Odilon Redon*, Paris 1913, p. 82.

² Odilon Redon, *À soi-même, Journal (1867-1915). Notes sur la vie, l'art et les artistes*, Paris 1922, (new edition) Paris 1979, p. 49 (noted in 1875 in Quimper: ‘It is where the North falls, where the sky weighs hard and heavily on the people that it oppresses. It is raining and a thick fog is slowly descending. Everything is gloomy, almost oppressive. The whole of nature, man and countryside, seems to feel the weight of the burden of time.’).

³ Auriant, ‘Redon et E. Hennequin. Lettres inédites’, in: *Beaux-Arts*, 14 June 1935, no. 128, p.2 (*Vannes is beautiful, almost sublime Never has nature left the impression of the misery of the human condition as in that place and on such sad walls... It's to Morbihan one must go to have an idea of the sombreness of Brittany and to work one's soul into a state of melancholy.*).

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Redon's output in Brittany chiefly consisted of pencil sketches and landscape paintings. The present work belongs to a small series of images depicting single or groups of trees set in desolate landscapes⁴. Given his characteristic visionary imagery, these tree studies display a subtle naturalism. In later life, recalling these early years, the artist wrote (1910): *Yes, an ancient wall, an old tree, a certain horizon can be nourishment and a vital element for an artist – a place, where he has his roots*⁵. The influence of Corot is still apparent, but there is an emphasis on compositional structure in which forms are simplified. Even if Redon painted landscapes more for pleasurable than for professional reasons, his treatment of the genre reflects his central concern with the reinterpretation of nature in terms of dreamlike, visionary images. And it was his landscapes that contributed to the development of his remarkable powers as a colourist.

Before 1890 Redon's reputation rested almost exclusively on his work in black and white. He had produced a large number of charcoal drawings which he called his *noirs*, and numerous lithographs. Both the charcoal drawings and the lithographs evoke a subjective fantasy world of often melancholic imagery. Up to that point he had used colour only in his landscape studies and they had not been publicly exhibited. In the early 1890s he began to extend his use of colour in developing the subject matter of the *noirs*. Colour only became dominant in his oils and pastels after 1900.

⁴ Alec Wildenstein, op. cit., vol. III, pp. 267-70, nos. 1814-24.

⁵ See, exh. cat., *Redon, Moreau, Bresdin*, New York and Chicago, 1961-2, p. 11.