

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



KER-XAVIER ROUSSEL

1867 Lorry-lès-Metz – L'Étang-la-Ville 1944

Self-Portrait

Pencil on Japan paper; c.1920.

Signed with the artist's monogram lower right: *K. X. R.*

254 x 178 cm

PROVENANCE: J.P.L. Fine Arts, London – Sheridan Wood Nicholson Revocable Trust – Sold by the Trust to benefit environmental charitable causes.

Ker-Xavier Roussel trained at the Académie Julian in Paris from 1880 to 1890, where he met Édouard Vuillard. It was while studying there that the two friends helped to form Les Nabis, an avant-garde artists' collective. The first gallery to host their work was Le Barc de Boutteville.¹ In 1913, Roussel completed his first public commission – the front curtain for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. He moved to Lausanne and in 1916 was commissioned by Hans and Werner Reinhardt to paint a pair of murals for the stairway of the recently completed Kunstmuseum Winterthur. In the 1920s and 1930s further commissions for decorative schemes followed in Paris. In 1937, Roussel worked with fellow Nabis Vuillard and Bonnard on a project for the entrance hall of the Théâtre de Chaillot.²

Roussel enjoyed a special position among the Nabis, since his style of painting was decidedly modern while at the same time he firmly embraced pastoral, classical and biblical themes. Unconventional in his approach, he remained something of an outsider. His entire oeuvre is complex, suggesting a man who refused to give up his part of the mystery.³ Critics and aficionados were unanimous in praising the delicacy of his touch, the exquisite texture of his pastels and the vitality of his large-format compositions. They lauded his exuberant visual language and the light-heartedness of his imaginative approach. Many columnists complained that Roussel's sole desire was to revive an erudite, long-forgotten culture. He was widely seen as an artist born out of his time who constantly strove to free himself from a world tainted by progress and industrialization. He is without doubt one of the most original and enigmatic artists of the highly fertile generation of painters who emerged alongside Post-Impressionism.

Roussel produced self-portraits at various stages of his life. In many of them he portrays himself with a pensive expression [Figs. 1, 2 and 3]. In this fine, extremely sensitive drawing he depicts himself in the process of sketching. By placing his own image off-centre, a common feature of his work, he adds emphasis while leaving space at the left of the sheet, where he lightly sketches the context.

¹ After the death of Theo van Gogh in 1891, *Le Barc de Boutteville* was one of the few art galleries in Paris where young artists could exhibit their work. Ambroise Vollard (1865-1939) did not open a gallery space until September 1893.

² Gisela Götte, 'Ker-Xavier Roussel', in Ursula Perucchi, *Nabis und Fauves*, exhib. cat., Kunsthhaus Zürich, 29 October 1982 – 16 January 1983; travelling to Kunsthalle Bremen, 27 February – 10 April 1983 and Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 8 May – 3 July 1983, p.130-1.

³ Sébastien Lecornu in *Ker-Xavier Roussel. Jardin privé, jardin rêvé*, exhib. cat., Musée des impressionismes, Giverny, 27 July – 11 November 2019, p. 15 ff.

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This drawing will be included in the forthcoming Roussel Catalogue Raisonné currently being prepared by Jacques Roussel, Mathias Chivot and Nicolas Langlois.



Fig. 1: *Self-Portrait*, 1915, chalk and body colour, 241 x 175 mm.
Kunstmuseum Winterthur

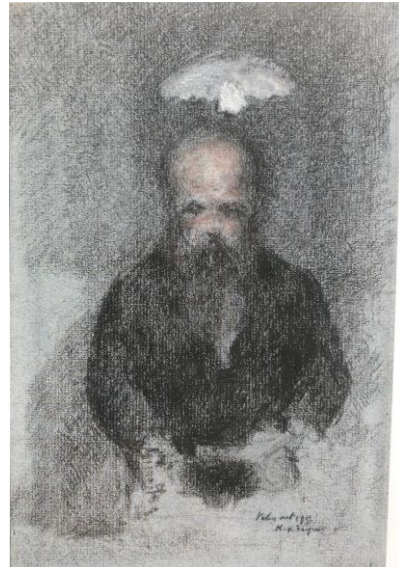


Fig. 2: *Self-Portrait under a Lamp*, 1915, pastel, 238 x 167 mm.
Private collection, France



Fig. 3: *Self-Portrait*, c.1940-43, conté crayon, 220 x 170 mm.
Private collection, France