



Artist

Odilon Redon (*22.4.1840 Bordeaux, +6.7.1916 Paris)

Title

L'Araignée qui pleure

Date

c. 1880

Description

Arachnophobes beware: Our spider by Odilon Redon, which came to the Kunsthaus seven years ago through a bequest, has gained company. The first addition from 2013 shows a spider whose facial features are by no means anthropomorphic that one would necessarily think of a crossover between a human being and a spider. Our current drawing, however, is clearly such a hybrid creature and thus corresponds to the characterisation that Joris-Karl Huysmans gave of Redon's pictorial invention in his novel 'Against the Grain': a spider 'that harbours a human face in the middle of its body'.^[1]

The mischievous face of our first variant has now given way to a deeply saddened countenance. It does not even seem clear that the head is firmly part of the spider's body; rather, it 'floats' in the centre of the picture and is framed by nine legs (instead of the usual eight on spiders). Since the skull is also surrounded by a discreet aureole with black rays - or is it hair? Redon leaves his audience guessing - associations with Redon's pictures of the severed head of John the Baptist arise. It is no coincidence that depictions of his severed skull sometimes bear simple, generalising titles such as 'Tête de martyr' (see, for example, Redon's charcoal drawing from the Kröller-Müller Museum, inv. no. KM 107.499): The body part violently severed from the human organism and then carefully laid out becomes a universal symbol for loneliness, persecution and sacrifice.

Redon's basic idea of a human spider appears several times in his oeuvre and was widely circulated, not least in the lithograph of 1887. Time and again, this pictorial idea has been seen as a metaphor for the artist as such, who, through the tantalising terror his presence evokes, simultaneously triggers attraction and repulsion in his immediate environment. A few decades earlier, Jules Michelet drew a pitiful picture of the spider in his book 'L'insecte', saying that it was caught in a vicious circle and would only eat so that it could spin its web, while in turn it would only have to spin its web to be able to eat: 'Elle est constamment serrée dans ce cercle vicieux: pour filer, il faut manger; pour manger, il faut filer.'^[2] And a little later, Michelet even describes the spider in his book as an artist who would be completely lost without its web (= toile, which in French also means canvas): 'L'araignée est si nerveuse, que la peur qui la rend artiste peut aussi la paralyser et lui faire perdre la tête. Sa toile seule lui donne courage.'^[3]

Redon's presumed equation of being a spider and being an artist certainly gains some plausibility against this background. If we add that in Redon's work the head of John the Baptist also stands for an elevated position removed from society, then Redon's coupling of two pictorial themes confronts us with the recurring narrative in art history of the artist as an outsider, if not a martyr of society. Henri Matisse will have been aware of such

cross-references in the drawing. He once owned this very drawing [4], which - after changing hands several times and finally being part of the Hamburg collection of Klaus and Erika Hegewisch - is now one of the treasures of the Kunsthaus.

[1] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Gegen den Strich*, Zürich 1981, p. 142.

[2] Jules Michelet, *L'insecte. L'infini vivant*, 6. ed. Paris 1867, p. 210.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 219.

[4] Alec Wildenstein, Odilon Redon. *Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint et dessiné*, vol. 2: *Mythes et légendes*, Paris 1994, p. 172, no. 1086.

Also known as	Die weinende Spinne The Weeping Spider
Medium	Charcoal, graphite pencil and ink on paper collé, mounted on paper
Dimensions	sheet: 30.5 x 23 cm
Inventory number	ZKG.2020/0035
Credit line	Kunsthaus Zürich, Collection of Prints and Drawings, 2020
Signature	inscr. b. r. with graphite pencil: ODILON REDON
Inscription	no inscriptions
Edition / number	-
Edition	-
Accession year	2020
Catalogue raisonné	Wildenstein 1992 II.172.1086
Object type	drawing
Classification	C 2[1] drawings and prints 19th century
Literature (general)	- Jahresbericht 2020, hrsg. von Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, Zürich, 2021. - Jonas Beyer: «Odilon Redon. L'Araignée qui pleure, um 1880», in: Jahresbericht 2020, hrsg. von Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, 2021, S. 16 f..
Provenance	1. Odilon Redon (*1840 Bordeaux, +1916 Paris) [artist] 2. Camille Redon (*1852 La Possession, Réunion, +1923) Source [in German]: Werkverzeichnis Wildenstein 1992 II.172.1086; Auktion Galerie Georges Petit, 30.11.1920-2.12.1920, Lot. 369. 3. undated – 30.11.1920, Collection Alfred-Emmanuel Louis Beurdeley (collection), Paris Source [in German]: Wie oben Fussnote 2; Christie's. <i>Oeuvres Modernes sur papier</i> , Christie's, Paris 03.06.2020, Lot 135, https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6257346 (12.03.2025). 4. 30.11.1920 – 2.12.1920, Galerie Georges Petit (auction), Paris, Lot 369

Source (in German): Wie oben Fussnote 2.

5. [whereabouts unknown?]

6. undated – not later than 1954, Henri Matisse (*1869 Le Cateau-Cambrésis, +1954 Nizza) (collector)

Source (in German): Wie oben Fussnote 2.

7. at the latest from 1954 – undated, Pierre Matisse (*1900 Bohain-en-Vermandois, +1989 Monaco), New York, NY, estate

Source (in German): Wie oben Fussnote 2.

8. Morton R. Goldsmith (*1882 Cleveland, OH, +1971 Scarsdale, NY) (collector), New York, NY

Source (in German): Wie oben Fussnote 2.

9. Enid Frank Goldsmith (*1888, +1983) (collector), USA, legacy

Source (in German): Wie oben Fussnote 2.

10. undated – 15.5.1985, unknown (collector), legacy

Source (in German): Auktion Christie's Paris 03.06.2020, wie oben Fussnote 3.

11. 15.5.1985, Sotheby's (auction), New York, NY, lot 151

Source (in German): Werkverzeichnis Wildenstein 1992, wie oben Fussnote 2; Auktion Christie's Paris 03.06.2020, wie oben Fussnote 3.

12. 15.5.1985 – 6.2020, Kunstsammlung Klaus und Erika Hegewisch gemeinnützige GmbH (collection), Hamburg, purchase

Source (in German): Jahresbericht 2020, hrsg. von Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft 2020, S. 17; Auktion Christie's Paris 03.06.2020, wie oben Fussnote 3.

13. 3.6.2020, Christie's Paris (auction), Paris, lot 135, return

Source (in German): Auktion Christie's Paris 03.06.2020, wie oben Fussnote 3.

Remarks: Schätzpreis 200'000-300'000 EUR

14. since 2020, Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft | Kunsthaus Zürich (museum), Zurich, purchase

Source (in German): E-Mail-Korrespondenz, Juni 2020, ZKG/KHZ, Werkdossier.

Provenance category -

Provenance category (BAK) -

About the provenance (State of research 04.03.2021)

Literature (Provenance) - Alec Wildenstein/Agnès Lacau St Guily/Marie-Christine Decroocq: Odilon Redon. Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint et dessiné. 1992-1998, Bd. 1 von 4, Paris: Wildenstein Institute, La Bibliothèque des arts, 1992, Bd. II, S. 172, Kat.-Nr. 1086.
- Catalogue des dessins, pastels, aquarelles modernes par Barye composant la collection de M. A. Beurdeley ... et dont la vente aux enchères publiques, après décès aura lieu Galerie Georges Petit, les mardi 30 novembre, mercredi 1er et jeudi 2 décembre

KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH

1920, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 30. November 1920 - 02. Dezember 1920, Lot. 369.