



EDMOND REDON

ODILON REDON (French: 1840-1916)*Flowers*

Pastel on beige paper: 14 ½ x 10 ½ inches
36.2 x 26.7 cm.

Signed lower right: *ODILON REDON*

Odilon Redon was born at Bordeaux, the son of a Frenchman and a Creole woman from Louisiana. He spent a lonely, alienated childhood in the flat, marshy expanses of the Landes in Nouvelle-Aquitaine. As a result, he developed into an intensely introspective and melancholic man. Trained in the studio of the Romantic engraver Rodolphe Bresdin, for a great part of his career he worked mostly in the black-and-white media of charcoal drawing, etching and lithography. His graphic work, filled with the eerie, often monstrous, phantasmagoria of his fevered imagination, reflects the somber cast of his mind and marks him as one of the prime French practitioners of Symbolism.

In 1898, following a particularly traumatic bout with depression, Redon managed to liberate himself from his gloomy past and awoke to the more serene charms of nature. Closely observing the beauty of flowers, which became for him a favorite subject matter, he learned to record them in their profusion and radiance of color. However, in contradistinction to the Impressionist aesthetic, he did not exploit his floral arrangements for their mere surface brilliance; rather he infused them with a dreamlike, mystical quality that conveys a light emanating from their very essence. Redon himself best summarized his concept of flower painting when, in a page of his journal, he wrote of "...flowers that have arrived at the confluence of two streams, that of representation and that of memory. It is the ground of art itself, the good ground of reality, harrowed and ploughed by the mind." (O. Redon, *A soi-même: Journal, 1867-1915*, Paris, 1961, p. 120).

This work, as is the case of many of Redon's pastel flower pieces, brings to mind Charles Sterling's brilliant analysis of the artist as a painter of botanical subjects:

In Redon's work, the rhythm created by colored spots and linear abbreviations results in a mysterious and persuasive cohesiveness. Because of this, he is able to renew one of the oldest subjects of still-life painting.... He appears to recapture the secular tradition of the language of flowers, either retaining their emblematic meaning or conferring upon them his own private symbolism. Thus the poppy—the flower of dreams—often blooms in the midst of his bouquets, while the cornflower crowns them, its azure color testimony to the pure contact of the soul with the celestial region.... But when he only paints *Vases* filled with simple wildflowers, through the repeated or varying arabesque of the contours, through the unusual rhythm of colors, and especially through the unreal quality of the tones—those great, floating, and uncertain splotches which seem about to dissolve into the backgrounds—the artist manages to create a sort of musical malaise. He conjures up a decanted and spellbinding image of nature, which almost parallels reality but from which man will always feel excluded. (Translated from C. Sterling, *La nature morte, de l'antiquité au XX^e siècle*, Paris, 1985, pp. 112-113.)

The first owner of this pastel was the industrialist and art collector Marcel Kapferer, who was born in Paris on December 30, 1872 in an apartment situated at 124 rue de Rivoli, near the corner of the rue des Déchargeurs. He went into the oil business and eventually became director of the French branch of Royal Dutch Shell. He and his slightly older brother Henri (1870-1958), a distinguished pioneering aeronautics engineer who founded the Compagnie Générale Transaérienne, a firm that ultimately became Air France, were both aficionados of contemporary art and actively patronized Redon and the Post-Impressionists Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard.

PROVENANCE

Acquired from the artist in 1906 by
Marcel Kapferer (1872-1966); by descent to his daughter
Martine Kapferer (1920-2018), until 1979
Private collection

REFERENCES

R. Bacou, *Odilon Redon*, Geneva, 1956, p. 165, note 2

Utica, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, and New York, Armory of the Sixty-ninth Regiment, *1913 Armory Show 50th Anniversary Exhibition*, 1963, p. 202, no. 305

M. W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, New York, 1988, p. 307, no. 305

A. Wildenstein, *Odilon Redon: catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné*, IV (Études et grandes décorations; Supplément), Paris, 1998, pp. 336-337, under "1913"

New York, The New York Historical Society, *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution* (cat. by M. S. Kushner and K. Orcutt), 2013-2014, p. 456

EXHIBITIONS

New York, 69th Regiment Armory, *International Exhibition of Modern Art*, February 17-March 15, 1913, no. 305. Exhibition traveled to Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, March 24-April 15, 1913, no. 334; and Boston, Copley Society of Boston, April 28-May 18, 1913, no. 185

Paris, Galerie de l'Élysee, *Maîtres impressionnistes et contemporains dans un cadre ancien*, April 22-May 3, 1952

Paris, Orangerie des Tuileries, *Odilon Redon*, October 1956-January 1957, p. 54, no. 101