

ELLIOTT FINE ART

Nineteenth Century to Early Modern

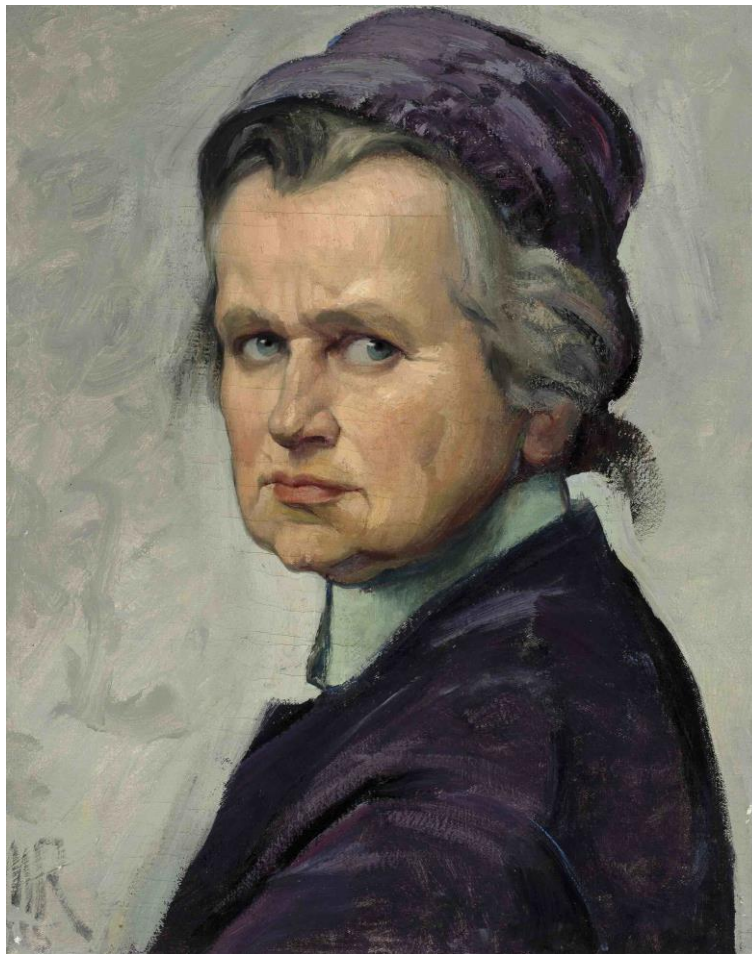
Ottilie W. Roederstein
(Zürich 1859 – 1937 Hofheim)

Self-portrait of the artist

Monogramed and dated lower left: *OWR / 1915*
Oil on canvas
46 x 38 cm. (18 x 15 in.)

Provenance:
Private Collection, Nogen-sur-Marne;
Pierre-Philippe Laget, France, until 2024.

Literature :
Rök, B., *Ottilie W. Roederstein (1859-1937). Eine Künstlerin zwischen Tradition und Moderne. Monographie und Werkverzeichnis*, Dissertation Philipps-Universität Marburg, 1997, no. 1033.



This recently rediscovered portrait from 1915 is an important addition to the œuvre of the Swiss-German painter Otilie W. Roederstein, one of the outstanding women artists of the early 20th century. Roederstein overcame numerous challenges and defied the prevailing norms of her time to leave her mark in a male-dominated art world, and understandably presents herself as a figure of assertiveness and determination.

Self-portraiture was central to Roederstein's creative expression throughout her career (figs. 1 and 2): 'she was exceptional by virtue of the sheer number of self-likenesses she produced – over eighty in all.'¹ Her self-portraits reflect the multi-faceted nature of her art: her stylistic versatility allowed her to stay attuned to modernist trends while maintaining a distinct, personal voice. Her paintings are unmistakably her own and are instantly recognisable.



Fig. 1, Otilie W. Roederstein, *Self-portrait with red beret*, 1894, tempera on panel, 36 x 24 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel



Fig. 2, Otilie W. Roederstein, *Self-portrait with folded arms*, 1926, oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm, Städel Museum

Roederstein differed from most other artists in that she eschewed the traditional motifs of the self-portrait, avoiding easels or any specific surroundings. Instead, she focussed solely on her own appearance, depicting herself bust- or half-length before consistently neutral backgrounds, and gazing out formidably. Here, her startling blue eyes confront the viewer, a characteristically no-nonsense expression etched on to Roederstein's features.

This painting marks an early instance of Roederstein's decision to adopt a masculine appearance in her self-portraiture, a trend which she increasingly embraced from 1914. With her hair pinned back, Roederstein's sharp facial features become even more

¹ *Self. Determined. The Painter Otilie W. Roederstein*, exhibition catalogue, Frankfurt, 2022, p. 51
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pronounced, and, with her tailored jacket, the artist cuts an androgynous figure. Roederstein likely viewed this androgynous presentation as the 'pictorial expression of non-conformity, independence and emancipation'.² The emphasis on masculine demeanour is also evident in the self-portraits of Kathe Kollowitz, with whom Roederstein retained a lifelong friendship after having met in Berlin.

This impression of 'aloofness and self-confidence seems to be the formulation of an ideal rather than a faithful portrayal of her character. After all, numerous contemporaries described her as a sensitive, obliging and open person, and her surviving correspondence frequently reveals her uncertainty and vulnerability.'³

Born in Zurich in 1859 to a German merchant family, Roederstein initially met with opposition from her parents to become a painter. At the age of 17 she was allowed to take painting lessons with Eduard Pfyffer in Zurich and later with the renowned portrait painter Karl Gussow in Berlin. In 1882 Roederstein settled in Paris where she refined her mastery of portraiture as well as nude painting— a field of activity still largely taboo for women artists — in the ladies' studio of Carolus-Duran and Jean-Jacques Henner.

She began showing her works at the Salon as early as 1883. At both the 1889 and 1900 Exposition Universelles in Paris she was awarded a silver medal for her *Portrait of Miss Mosher* (fig. 3). By around 1900 Roederstein's reputation had been made and she made her international breakthrough. In 1912 she was the only female artist to represent Switzerland at the seminal Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne – alongside her male colleagues including Ferdinand Hodler. She returned to Zurich in 1887 but kept her studio in Paris until 1914.



Fig. 3, Otilie W. Roederstein in her Parisian studio, the portrait of Miss Mosher on the easel, 1887-89, Roederstein-Jughenn-Archiv, Städel Museum

² *Ibid*, p. 55.

³ *Ibid*, p. 57.

In 1891 Roederstein settled in Frankfurt am Main with her partner Elisabeth H. Winterhalter (fig. 4), a gynaecologist from Munich, and quickly established herself quickly in the conservative metropolis on the Main as the pre-eminent artist. In 1909 she and Winterhalter settled in the rural town of Hofheim am Taunus. She described the years from 1910 onwards, when resumed the tempera technique that she had earlier practiced, as a search for her personal style.



Fig. 4, Otilie W. Roederstein and Elisabeth H. Winterhalter, 1904

Large solo exhibitions in Zurich and Frankfurt am Main in 1925, 1929 and 1934 brought Roederstein substantial recognition and she was also awarded several honours. In addition to her successful career as a painter, Roederstein was a patron of the arts and, together with her partner, also promoted education for women