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Expert opinion

Egon Schiele: Portrait of a Man, 1917

oil on canvas, 66x42 cm

Indicated in the bottom left section, seal in border: EGON

SCHIELE

1917

Description of the painting: half-length portrait of an elderly man. His face is in left three-quarter profile. His moustache, beard and hair are grey. He is wearing a white shirt, a brown tie, a grey vest and a brownish, dark grey coat.

Egon Schiele (Tulln an der Donau, 1890 - Vienna, 1918) began his studies in 1906 at the Akademie für Bildenden Künste in Vienna under the direction of Christian Griepenkerl. In 1909 he left the academy, and formed the Neokunstgruppe. This year he had his first exhibition at the Internationale Kunstschau. The human figure was at the centre of his art. A good amount of his depictions was sexually oriented, and he had to change his place of residence in 1911 due to his works classified as pornographic, and he was even imprisoned because of that for a short time.

His art was greatly influenced by Gustav Klimt, but he was also influenced by Hodler and East Asian art. His style related to Jugendstil was later replaced by a specific, ornamental-calligraphic style. He got married in 1915. After his marriage to Edith Harms, he turned to expressionism. He enlisted in the army in 1915, and he died 1918 as a victim of the influenza epidemic.

Despite the fact that Egon Schiele only painted for a dozen years, and only the last few years were devoted to expressionist works, together with Oskar Kokoschka, we consider him to be the most significant representative of Austrian expressionism. His works only cover a few subjects. He almost exclusively made portraits and self-portraits. The painting we examined is a significant piece of this series, not in size, but in quality, both in terms of expression and technical execution. It is enough to mention the face staring and full of character and the elaborately decorated outfit.

Of course, we can only find analogies in the material of the last years, and because of the military service, the number of them is not too large either. A **portrait of Bertha von Viktorin** (oil on canvas, 38.3x30 cm, item number 90, Annex 1) was included in the Dorotheum auction in Vienna in February 1949, typical of the previous experimental period. The small size is similar, so is the colour technique. It is typical that he portrays a definite character here, along with a little bit of a psychograph of the 19th century.

[stamp:

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[signed]

Technically, the many small brushstrokes seem to indicate a Van Gogh influence, as well as the fact that we can witness some stylistic changes here.

The collection of the Österreichische Galerie (Belvedere) holds a portrait of **Dr Franz Martin Haberditzl** of the artist, dated 1917 (oil on canvas, 140x110 cm, Belvedere inventory number: 9638, Annex 2), which is clearly dominated by expressionism. The large painting's decorativeness, active contouring, misdrawings and even "random" cutting are classic expressionist characteristics. So are the cut drawing block, the "decorated" chair and the background made of interesting dark spots. It is precisely this brownish background and the facial expression that make it related to our examined image. And the small square sheet at the bottom of the picture with the signature and the date "1917" are also characteristic, which I will also mention later.

The portrait that was created for the large picture can also be found in the Belvedere, **Dr Franz Martin Haberditzl**, also from 1917 (oil on canvas, 55.5x42 cm, Belvedere inventory number: 5300, Annex 3). It is interesting to us not only because it is the same year, but also because of the identity of various details. I mean the background with a brown overall effect, but coloured with interesting brush lines, or the way the coat is painted, but I can also mention the similar drawing technique and colour of the hair, moustache, eyes and ears.

In 1918, Schiele painted a large oil painting titled **Portrait of the Artist's Wife**, which can also be found in the Österreichische Galerie (oil on canvas, 139.8x109.8 cm, Belvedere inventory number: 1991, Annex 4). Its colourfulness surpasses our image, and obviously there may also be differences due to the large size. Nevertheless, the expressive brushwork and the colour of certain elements are similar. For example the technique for the background is the same, and the painting technique for the hair and partly the face is also the same. The same is true for the generously painted materials, despite the different colour technique.

Another large portrait, the **Portrait of Dr Hugo Koller**, from 1918 can also be found in the Belvedere (oil on canvas, 140.3x110 cm, Belvedere inventory number: 4296, Annex 5). The male figure densely surrounded by books clearly reflects expressiveness, while the decoratively placed mass of books is linked to the Art Nouveau, an earlier era. For us, it is important because of the character portrait that appears again and the similarity that is reflected on the head and clothes.

The artist's large oil painting **Mother with Two Children** from 1917 (oil on canvas, 150x158.7 cm, Belvedere inventory number: 2027, Annex 6) can also only be found at the permanent exhibition of the Belvedere. It is an interesting attempt to combine Art Nouveau and Expressionism. The facial expressions of the group of people appearing in a spot with Art Nouveau outlines from the same background as our picture (both in colour and brushwork) are reminiscent of the slightly distorted figures of the 1910s, and the painting of their clothes also moves towards a decorative plane transposition. However the orange signature in the middle of the bottom of the picture is similar to the one in our picture.

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The material of the painting is coarsely woven linen from the beginning of the 20th century. If we illuminate its surface with a UV lamp, it is intact, apart from minor scratches. The craquelure corresponds to the age of the picture, and it could also be the result of thickly applied oil paint containing more bonding agents. The signature and year appearing in the yellow rectangle is included in the material, it is of the same age (Annexes 1 and 7). Good examples of the signature are Annexes 2 and 3, but perhaps it can be seen even more clearly in the picture entitled **Reclining Woman with Green Stockings** from a private collection in Vienna, also from 1917 (gouache, crayon on paper, 294x461 mm, Annex 8).

Based on the above, I accept the work in the attached photograph as an oil painting by Egon Schiele signed and dated with his own hand and his characteristic signature.

*Annex: 1 photo,
8 photocopies.*

Budapest, 28 February 2024

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[signed]
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