

Alexander Rothaug, *Flora*
1870 - Vienna - 1946

mixed media on cardboard laid to board
32 ½ by 30 ¾ inches (82.5 by 78.5 cm.)
signed lower left: 'Alexander Rothaug'

provenance: Private collection, Vienna

note: Alexander Rothaug was born in Vienna in 1870, and received his first painting lessons from his father. In 1884 he began an apprenticeship as a sculptor with Johann Schindler. Between 1885 and 1892 Rothaug studied at the Vienna Academy under Franz Rumpler, Christian Griepenkerl, and the Orientalist painter Leopold Carl Müller, under whom he studied until Müller's death in 1892. He was awarded the Lampi Prize in 1888 and the Golden Fügen Medal in 1889. With Müller he studied in the special school for history painting, and received the 1890 Special School Award.

In 1892 Rothaug moved to Munich, attending the Academy there. In 1900, he started to exhibit, and was also employed for several years as an illustrator for the humorous German Journal *Fliegende Blätter*. In 1896 he married Otilie Lauterkorn and traveled to Dalmatia, Bosnia, Spain, Italy and Germany. Around 1910 Rothaug moved back to Vienna and became a member of the Vienna Künstlerhaus. In 1911 there was an extensive article about the artist in the journal *Art Revue*. In 1913 he received the Drasche Prize. Rothaug died in Vienna in 1946.

Inspired by Classical mythology and German Legends, Alexander Rothaug was greatly influenced by the German Symbolist painter and sculptor Franz von Stuck. Rather than a precisely defined movement, Symbolism was an artistic current that found outlets in literature, painting and music. It is customary to attribute its birth to the year 1886, when the French poet Jean Moréas published his *Manifeste*, which contained a key phrase that described symbolism's aims: 'To clothe the Ideal in a form perceptible to the senses.' In Brussels the same year *L'Art modern* spread awareness of his premise and explained, 'Nature seen through temperament is the famous formula of naturalism. Temperament seen through nature, and even without nature, must, it seems, be the formula of innovators.' In answer to the question of whether the Real or the Subjective should be given precedence, the article added, 'Symbolism replies: Nature should only serve as an accessory to convey the dreams of the brain.' The placing of greater importance on the Ideal rather than the material is at the very core of Symbolism.

The present work, once called "Aphrodite", seems rather to depict Flora. In Greek and Roman mythology Flora is the goddess of flowers and springtime. One morning the goddess came upon the lifeless body of a woodland nymph. Saddened by the innocent creature's fate, Flora transformed the nymph's body into a flower. She called out to Zephyrus, her husband and keeper of the West Wind, to blow away the clouds so that Apollo might allow the sun to cast down

its warming rays. To this, Aphrodite would add beauty, and Dionysus a nectar of intoxicating aroma, while the three Graces further bestowed upon the blossom the gifts of charm, joy, and splendor. All agreed that this new bloom was “The Queen of Flowers.” Aphrodite named the flower *Rose*, dedicating it to her son, Eros, the god of love.

Based on the format, the composition may have been a preparatory sketch for a decorative program featuring the four winds. A number of Rothaug’s decorative cycles employ panels, most notably that in the Nibelungenlounge at the Grand Hotel de l’Europe in Bad Gastein. Completed in the 1920s, it features 12 large nearly square painted panels. Recently, a smaller panel *Boreas and Oreithyia* appeared on the art market (fig. 1). It is of a similar proportion to our drawing and the female figure, Oreithyia, the object of Boreas’ unwelcome advances, also has red, windswept hair and is partly enveloped in billowing drapes. The two designs could, conceivably, have been part of the same decorative program.



Fig. 1 *Boreas and Oreithyia*