

Lot 1371



Auction **Fine Art**

Date 16.05.2025, ca. 17:10

Preview 09.05.2025 - 10:00:00 bis
12.05.2025 - 18:00:00

STERL, ROBERT HERMANN
1867 Grossdobritz - 1932 Naundorf

Title: Volga Boatmen.
Date: 1910s.
Technique: Oil on canvas.
Measurement: 77,5 x 70cm.
Notation: Signed lower right: "Rob. Sterl".
Frame: Framed.

Provenance:
Private ownership, Germany, since three generations.

The painter Robert Sterl has long since ceased to be an insider tip, even if he still receives less general attention than his more prominent fellow painters. This is partly due to his own reserve towards the art market and partly - as with his contemporary Otto Altenkirch (from cat. 1382) - because Germany was divided for decades. Artists who were prominent in the first half of the 20th century, but whose work was primarily located in Eastern Germany, were only sparsely received in Western Europe.

Like his contemporaries Max Liebermann, Max Slevogt and Lovis Corinth, Robert Sterl was one of the artists who took Impressionism further in Germany. Robert Sterl combined the Impressionist style of painting with motifs from the realistic world of work. The son of a stonemason observed hard-working men in action in the glaring sunlight in the quarries on the Elbe. From the 1890s onwards, this timeless subject remained with him for decades. Of the works presented here, the almost square work dated 1926 (cat. 1373) is a typical example of this theme. Robert Sterl shows the workers close up, surrounded only by the rock face and the cuboid that needs to be moved. A comparable painting can be found in the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig.

Between 1908 and 1914, Robert Sterl undertook several trips to Russia, where he was particularly drawn to the Volga (cat. 1371). The flat, loaded ship, in which four men are clearing a bale as part of the cargo while others struggle with the current, also belongs to the world of work theme. Only here it is an almost exotic, Eastern European environment, which the painter locates through a few clues, such as the shape of the ship or the clothing, but also through his special colouring. A painting in the collection of the Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin (inv. AIII 731), which is quite similar in

motif and style, is dated 1920. This underlines the fact that Robert Sterl greatly appreciated this composition, which he could have last sketched on the Volga in 1914.

The earliest of Robert Sterl's three paintings presented here (cat. 1372) is of a completely different nature, depicting an interior of a special kind: the 1906/1907 New Year's Eve ball of the Saxon court. Robert Sterl was appointed professor at the Dresden Academy of Art in 1906. This position was accompanied by an official introduction to the court and to Dresden's distinguished society. Sterl, who was also much in demand as a portraitist, thus opened up important new circles of clients. The painter has clearly divided the background of the people in this painting into three colour fields, with a more indeterminate group of people in the middle and two couples standing in the foreground on the right. The men's uniforms are executed in a summary yet colourful manner, while the women's outfits are only outlined. This contrast and the supposed protagonists of the scene, who appear to still be in the making, lend the painting a very special allure.

Estimate: 10.000 € - 20.000 €; Hammer: 35.000 €

