

# JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM

## FINE ARTS

### ODILON REDON

Bordeaux 1840 - Paris 1916

French School

### ORPHEUS

Oil on card

H. 0,53 m; W. 0,68 m

Signed lower left: *ODILON REDON*

DATE: 1900-1905

#### PROVENANCE:

Gustave Fayet collection, Béziers

Bernheim Jeune & Cie, Paris

Private collection, France

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Roseline Bacou, *Odilon Redon*, Geneva, 1956, t. I, p. 160, note; p. 257, text and note 1.

Klaus Berger, *Odilon Redon, Phantasie und Farbe*, Cologne, 1964, p. 191, no. 126.

Alec Wildenstein, *Odilon Redon. Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné*, Paris, 1994, vol. II (*Mythes et légendes*), p. 70, no. 886.

#### EXHIBITIONS:

*Odilon Redon. As in a Dream*, exh. cat. Frankfurt, Schirn Kunsthalle, 28 January - 29 April 2007, p. 231, no. 131 (ill.).

*Odilon Redon. Prince du rêve*, exh. cat. Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 23 March - 20 June 2011, exh. cat. Montpellier, Musée Fabre, 6 July - 16 October 2011, p. 316-317, no. 115 (ill.).

*Paysages d'Odilon Redon: la nature silencieuse*, exh. cat. Bordeaux - Musée des Beaux-Arts, 9 December 2016 - 26 March 2017; Quimper - Musée des Beaux-Arts, 18 May - 11 September 2017, p. 203, no. 128 (ill.).

**The myth of Orpheus, a major figure of Greek mythology, inspired many artists, painters and musicians from Monteverdi to Delacroix, from Gluck to Gustave Moreau. The latter renewed the iconographic tradition and certainly influenced Redon. In fact, Moreau's depiction shows a young woman holding a lyre and Orpheus's head in her arms, which she contemplates seriously.**

Redon, who had been handed over to the care of an uncle, spent his childhood in the isolated demesne of Peyrelebadé in the Landes, where he suffered from anxiety and a feeling of having been abandoned. At the age of twenty he went to Paris, but did not find much satisfaction in studying architecture, nor in the teaching of the academic painter Jean-Léon Gérôme. In Bordeaux, he met Rodolphe Bresdin who encouraged him and taught him printmaking.

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## FINE ARTS

### **From his tenebrous vision...**

During the 1870s and 1880s, Redon produced a series of charcoal drawings and lithographs he called “my black paintings”. These sombre images, most of which were created in his property of Peyrelebade, would subsequently disappear gradually from his work. In 1880, he married a young Creole woman, Camille Falte and their only child, a son Ari was born nine years later. In 1897, Redon lost his property Peyrelebade and his tenebrous vision ended shortly afterwards.

### **...to his love for colour**

Around 1900, when he was sixty, a new creative period began for Redon. He turned then to painting and pastel and adopted an admirable feeling for chromatic orchestration. In common with the new generation of artists, Redon loved intimacy and colour – perceived as a constructive element, not just for imitation – as well as a new feeling for space. His visual space was gradually stripped of its various planes to form only one single plane. In this way, the unified surface that resulted no longer referred to the tactile aspect of our everyday experience, but revealed the magical traces of his immaterial visions.

### **The myth of Orpheus**

Our painting is part of a series of images that Redon developed on the theme of Orpheus. The son of the river god, Oeagrus and the Muse Calliope, he was a great musician. He invented the 9 string zither and had the power to charm ferocious beasts and wild men with his songs. His wife, the nymph Eurydice, died from a snake bite but Hades, the god of the Underworld allowed him to bring his wife back to Earth on condition that Orpheus not turn towards her during the journey home. But, no longer able to resist the desire to see Eurydice again, Orpheus turned his gaze towards her, and she disappeared forever into the darkness of death. Full of despair and disconsolate, Orpheus was consumed by the memory of his lost love, and remained deaf to the advances of the Thracian women, who tore him apart in spite. His remains flowed into the waters of the river Nestos and, while the current carried him away, his head continued to call Eurydice.

In our painting, Orpheus’s head resting on the lyre floats in space, above an imaginary shore. The landscape below, with its trees and purple and green blooms, is shown allusively. The background is occupied by a cliff evoking that of the *Day* in the décor of the library of Gustave Fayet at the abbey of Fontfroide (completed in 1911), the style of which is close to this work. A painter friend and major collector of Gauguin and Redon, Fayet also owned our painting.



Gustave Moreau (1826-1898), *Orpheus*, 1865, oil on panel, H. 1,55 m; L. 1 m, Paris, Musée d'Orsay