

PRESS INFORMATION

# SELF. DETERMINED: THE PAINTER OTTILIE W. ROEDERSTEIN

20 JULY TO 16 OCTOBER 2022

Exhibition annex

**Frankfurt am Main, 19 July 2022.** The German-Swiss painter Otilie W. Roederstein (1859–1937) was one of the outstanding women artists of the period around 1900. This summer the Städel Museum will present a comprehensive retrospective featuring 75 paintings and drawings that will provide an overview of the artistic development of a painter distinguished by her stylistic versatility. From 1891 onwards, after training in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris, Roederstein lived in Frankfurt am Main. In 1909, she and her partner, the gynaecologist Elisabeth H. Winterhalter, settled in the neighbouring town of Hofheim am Taunus. As a free-lance portraitist, Roederstein was firmly established in the male-dominated art world and self-confidently disregarded the prevailing social norms of her time. Her works were shown in numerous exhibitions in Germany and abroad—from Frankfurt, Zurich, and Paris to London and Chicago—, gaining her wide recognition among her contemporaries. Yet despite her extensive exhibition activities and onetime renown, the painter has all but fallen into oblivion.

Roederstein's work is closely intertwined with the history of the Städel Museum and the city of Frankfurt. Her studio in the Städel School was just a few steps away from the museum, which she visited regularly, its collection being an important source of inspiration for her art. Her own works already entered the Städel holdings during her lifetime. In 1902, the museum acquired its first work ever by a contemporary female artist: Roederstein's painting *Old Woman Reading*. The exhibition accordingly builds on the Städel Museum collection which, meanwhile comprising 28 works by the artist, represents one of the most important Roederstein holdings apart from those of the Stadtmuseum Hofheim am Taunus and the Kunsthaus Zürich.

The exhibition is being carried out with the sponsorship of the Gemeinnützige Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain GmbH and additional support from the Friede Springer Stiftung, the Ernst Max von Grunelius-Stiftung, and the Damengesellschaft des Städtischen Museums-Verein e.V.

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“For years we have devoted ourselves to broadening the canon of art history with exhibitions on trailblazing women artists. With the retrospective on the great portrait painter Otilie Roederstein, we are now adding yet another new chapter to the history of art. Roederstein was an important figure in art and culture in Frankfurt. Yet the fame she enjoyed here during her lifetime has faded for the most part. She thus shares the fate of many other women artists who sank ever deeper into oblivion after World War II. It is a matter of very special concern to us to reacquire a broader public with her work,” comments Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum.

“In her early years, Otilie Roederstein’s style was influenced largely by French academic painting. She kept an alert eye on the art market and, by painting portraits and still lifes, catered to the wishes of her clientele. In her non-commissioned works, however, she produced religious paintings and even depictions of nudes, deliberately exceeding the thematic bounds to which women painters were generally confined. She devoted herself to old-masterly tempera painting and experimented with stylistic devices of Impressionism, Symbolism, and New Objectivity. At the same time, she never abandoned her own individual painterly idiom. With our exhibition, we have thus undertaken to pay due homage to her impressive career and present her in the context of her time”, the show’s curators, Alexander Eiling and Eva-Maria Höllerer, explained.

The exhibition focusses primarily on Roederstein’s specific painting style, but also sheds light on her role as a networker and teacher. Her close ties to Frankfurt and the region are moreover strikingly mirrored in an abundance of historical documents, photographs, and letters from the artist’s estate, which passed into the possession of the Städel Museum in 2019 from the heirs of her biographer Hermann Jughenn. Jughenn lived in Hofheim am Taunus and was a friend of Roederstein and Winterhalter’s for many years. After the artist’s death in 1938, Elisabeth Winterhalter initiated the work on a catalogue raisonné of the artist’s oeuvre as well as a biography. To that end, she entrusted Jughenn with Roederstein’s correspondence as well as numerous historical photographs and reviews of her works. He devoted himself to this material over a period of more than twenty years, supplementing Roederstein’s documents with his own correspondence, photos of her works, and notes. After his death in 1967, Jughenn’s Roederstein archive became the property of his family and remained in his house in Hofheim. At the Städel Museum, the Roederstein-Jughenn Archive is now being systematized and indexed according to scientific standards. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue incorporate the initial results of this work.

## A Tour of the Exhibition

The exhibition begins with the artist's self-portraits. The self-likeness played an important role for Roederstein in her experimentation with new painting styles and techniques. A genre she pursued in various mediums throughout her career, it served her as a form of self-interrogation and offered her a means of staking out her personal artistic position. The exhibition unites, among others, the *Self-Portrait with Red Cap* (1894), the *Self-Portrait with Hat* (1904), and the *Self-Portrait with Brushes* (1917). She usually staged herself with folded arms, an aloof gaze, and a downright masculine pose, thus conveying the impression of an experienced artist who had earned respect and success for herself and demanded to be taken seriously. Already during her lifetime, she was publicly perceived as a creative artist—a characterization to which previously only her male colleagues could lay claim. Around 1900, women who painted were accepted as dilettantes and copyists, but not as 'free'-lance artists with ingenuity of their own. With her work, however, Roederstein attained a freedom many of her female contemporaries hardly dared to dream of.

Like most of her fellow women painters, Otilie W. Roederstein could not plan her artistic training strategically. Women were not yet admitted to art academies and the occupation of painter was still considered socially unacceptable for women. Roederstein studied in so-called ladies' classes and ladies' studios in Zurich, Berlin, and finally Paris. In the French capital, she showed her work regularly in the Salons over a period of five years. She attained her first major success at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1889, where she was awarded a silver medal. There she showed the portraits *Miss Mosher* or *End of Summer* (ca. 1887), *Helene Roederstein with Umbrella* (1888), and *Ishmael* (1880)— and thus, for the first time, a depiction of a nude and a Biblical history painting, two genres both still reserved exclusively for male artists at the time.

Roederstein and Elisabeth H. Winterhalter moved to Frankfurt in 1891. Having obtained her license to practice medicine in Switzerland, Winterhalter had the opportunity to open a gynaecological office in the city on the Main. Roederstein documented her partner as a medical professional in the representative *Portrait of Dr. Elisabeth Winterhalter* (1887). A town with a reputation for a liberal attitude and openness to the women's emancipation movement, Frankfurt thus offered favourable conditions for Winterhalter's development, both personally and professionally. For Roederstein, it was by way of her first exhibition at the Frankfurter Kunstverein in 1891 that she soon established a firm reputation for herself as a free-lance portraitist among the city's upper-class circles. In many cases, her friendships with her portrait subjects and their families lasted for decades. The exhibition

presents, among others, Roederstein's portraits of *Auguste Andreas, née Walluf* (1892), *Hanna Bekker vom Rath* (1923), and *Lilly von Schnitzler* (1929).

In Frankfurt, Roederstein's painting underwent decisive stylistic transformation within just a few years. She took up occupancy of a studio at the Städelschule in 1892. From the middle of that decade onwards, she looked extensively to works of the German and Italian Renaissance for orientation, as seen, for example, in the *Engaged Couple* (1897) and *Mila von Guaita* (1896). Now she no longer painted in oil on canvas, but in tempera on wood, and she expanded her subject matter to include allegorical-heroic themes and religious motifs. In the late nineteenth century, these genres were still reserved primarily for her male colleagues.

Roederstein's partner Elisabeth Winterhalter was one of Germany's first women surgeons; she moreover carried out research at the Dr. Senckenbergisches Institut from 1895 onwards. She was actively involved in the Frankfurt women's movement and a co-founder of the society Frauenbildung—Frauenstudium (Women's Education—Women's University Study), whose purpose was to pave the way for girls to qualify for higher education and, in turn, study at university. Roederstein was a member of the main board of the Frauenkunstverband (women artists' association), which advocated professional training and exhibition opportunities for women artists. In her studio at the Städelschule she offered painting and drawing courses for women, who would not be admitted to German art academies until 1919. With private lessons, Roederstein supported and encouraged the women around her and also expanded her clientele.

Throughout her career, the painter kept a close eye on the art market and was well informed about successful compositions and trends. As a freelance artist with little financial backing from her family, she was dependent on selling her works and therefore took her orientation from popular themes and styles. For example, she joined the Frankfurt-Cronberger Künstlerbund, a secessionist artists' association that sought to emulate French impressionist plein-air painting and establish that approach in Germany by way of exhibitions. In Roederstein's oeuvre, this stylistic orientation is evident, for instance, in her *Portrait of the Painter Jakob Nussbaum* (1909).

Roederstein and Winterhalter's move to Hofheim in 1909 was followed by extremely productive years in which the artist once again experimented with different styles. In Hofheim the artist moreover came in contact with numerous exponents of Expressionism. She was nevertheless relatively impervious to the Expressionist influence in her work. For the most part she remained loyal to her own style, which was distinguished by linearity and a decorative two-dimensionality—a mode of painting that had become fashionable

again in the twenties owing to the emergence of New Objectivity. In 1929, the Frankfurter Kunstverein mounted a special exhibition in honour of the artist's seventieth birthday and she received the badge of honour of the city of Frankfurt. She moreover became an honorary citizen of Hofheim. The final phase of Roederstein's career took place under National Socialism. Now she could only continue exhibiting and selling her works by agreeing to subject herself to state control through the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts.

In 1938, after Roederstein's death, the Frankfurter Kunstverein staged a major commemorative exhibition which was subsequently presented at the Kunsthaus Zürich and the Kunsthalle Bern. Until the end of the war, her work was still on view in her studio, where Winterhalter and Hermann Jughenn had set up a memorial to the artist. Then followed a long period in which it was not on view to the public on any significant scale. Not until the 1980s did the art of Otilie Roederstein become accessible to a broader public again through exhibitions at the Stadtmuseum Hofheim. It never regained the international renown it had once enjoyed.

The exhibition at the Städel Museum was realized in collaboration with the Kunsthaus Zürich.

**SELF. DETERMINED.  
THE PAINTER OTILIE W. ROEDERSTEIN**

**Curators:** Dr Alexander Eiling (Head of Modern Art, Städel Museum), Eva-Maria Höllerer (Research Assistant, Modern Art, Städel Museum)

**Archive:** Dr Iris Schmeisser (Head of Provenance Research and the Historical Archive, Städel Museum)

**Exhibition dates:** 20 July to 16 October 2022

**Venue:** Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

**Information:** [www.staedelmuseum.de/en](http://www.staedelmuseum.de/en)

**Visitor services:** +49(0)69-605098-200, [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de)

**Opening hours:** Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays 10 am–6 pm, Thu 10 am–9 pm

**Special opening hours:** For up-to-date information on special opening hours on holidays, see [www.staedelmuseum.de](http://www.staedelmuseum.de)

**Tickets and admission:** Tickets can be booked online at [shop.staedelmuseum.de](http://shop.staedelmuseum.de). Special price in summer 2022: 10€. The special price is a discounted admission valid during the redesign of the Modern Art Collection area starting 28 June. The special price applies to all visitors, including school pupils, students, vocational trainees, unemployed persons, and visitors with a 50-per-cent or higher degree of disability. Admission includes the current special exhibitions as well as the Old Masters, Contemporary Art, and Prints and Drawings Collections. Free admission for children under the age of 12.

**Art Talks:** A program of guided tours in English language providing a relaxed atmosphere; the prerequisite is good command of English; specialized knowledge is not required; "Feminine Ingenuity? Roederstein and the sense of self, in the exhibition 'Self. Determined. The Painter Otilie W. Roederstein' on Thu, 8 September, 7 pm; "Roederstein: An artist's life in Frankfurt, in the exhibition 'Self. Determined. The Painter Otilie W. Roederstein', on Thu 13 October, 7 pm. Tickets are available at [shop.staedelmuseum.de](http://shop.staedelmuseum.de).

**Exhibition app:** In German. With the app, the exhibition is a multimedia experience. In eight atmospheric audio panoramas and picture galleries it offers striking insights into key themes and the important stages of Otilie W. Roederstein's life and career. The classical audio guide, providing in-depth reflections on individual works, is supplemented by an extensive biography, informative texts, and remarkable historical photographs. The narrator is the famed actress Katharina Thalbach. The app is available for the iOS and

Android operating systems free of charge. Download to your smartphone in the comfort of your own home or at the museum with Städel WiFi.

**Catalogue:** An exhibition catalogue is available. Edited by Alexander Eiling, Eva-Maria Höllerer, and Sandra Gianfreda. With forewords by the Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain gGmbH and Philipp Demandt. German and English edition, 207 pages, 39.90€ (museum edition).

**Digital Collection:** The works by the artist Otilie W. Roederstein in the Städel Museum are freely accessible in the Digital Collection.

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