

Chris Rockley

Shown
before
Ariana's
Tenure

CHRISTIAN ROHLFS

Out of Ascona

Watercolors and Watertemperas 1927 to 1938

presented by

Museum Folkwang of Essen
and the Helene Rohlf's Foundation of Essen

*an
out
painter!*

In Collaboration with

The Ruhr Cultural Foundation of Essen
and
Goethe House New York - German Cultural Center

at the
Swiss Institute, New York
December 7, 1989 through January 11, 1990

as part of
Ruhrworks: The arts of a German region

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INTRODUCTION

Late works by important artists have a quality of their own. This may range from the tragic gradual fading of creative forces, still discernible even in the stage of decline, to the highest glory of new creations, in a new style developed on the basis of a synthesis of preceding works. In the maturing process as a person and as an artist, this late bloom is a rare blessing. Not many artists have been able to accomplish this and experience at a biblical age a crowning conclusion of their life's work. However, one aspect shared by all artists at this stage is a detachment from the scene of actualities, to be replaced by a contemplation of and concentration on matters of essential importance unimpaired by the needs and demands of everyday life.

The final creative period of Christian Rohlf's just about coincided with the last decade of his life, when the artist was in his eighties. It was rooted in his first encounter with the southern landscape and southern light in the Swiss resort town of Ascona on Lake Maggiore. As early as 1910, when Rohlf's was 61 years old, he and Carl Arp, a friend from his years as a student in Weimar, had planned to travel to Italy. As it turned out, Arp travelled alone. But the pictures he brought back from this trip to Italy had a shock effect on Rohlf's. He saw in them a "sweetness" too detrimental for his own path. The seductive power of Italy's beauty presented a peril to his work, Rohlf's was unwilling to face.

A severe case of pneumonia in the winter of 1926 caused Rohlf's to overcome his artistic reservations. Aware of the artist's antipathy, his physician recommended southern Switzerland instead of Italy. The small fishermen's village of Ascona in the canton of Tessin became the destination and the focal point of his life during the following years.

A house located above the village, on the road to Monte Verita was the artist's first home. In 1929, following a recommendation made by the Swiss singer Meili, Rohlf's rented the upper floor of Casa Margot, a villa located right on the lake. On the terrace of this house he created many of his late pictures. Until the end of his life, he spend nine months of each year in Ascona, three no less creative months remained for his studio in Hagen in the Ruhr area.

The last decade of his life can be divided into three phases: the first, 1927 to 1929, was a period of acclimatization and thus an adjustment to a different landscape, a different light and a magnificent nature.

The second phase, 1930 to 1938, was almost totally devoted to the studies of the optical effects of light and its influence on color.

The third and last phase, 1934 to 1938, brings a comprehensive synthesis of the two preceding periods. Moreover, it is considered the ultimate fulfillment of this rich artistic life.

Although all earlier changes of location had been difficult, the artist adjusted faster than he had expected. Retrospectively it is not difficult to point out what attractions the Tessin had to offer that captivated the artist. Although located in an Alpine area, it lacks the austere and forbiddingly bleak character of a mountainous landscape, a landscape the artist could not get accustomed to earlier in his life in Bavaria. Here, gentle mountains with their sweeping contours surrounded

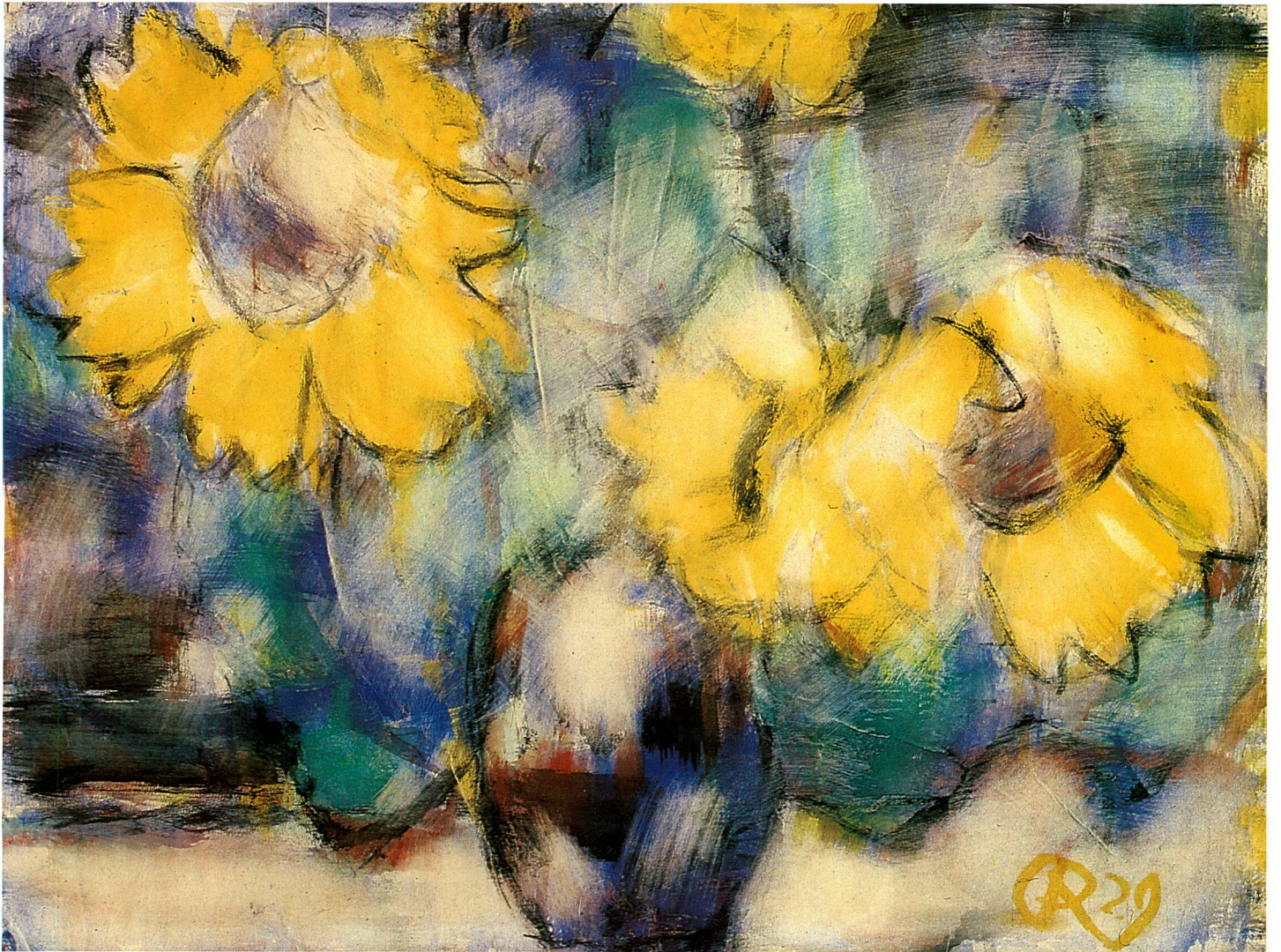
a lake that was a delight to the painter's eyes with its continuously changing moods, colors and light. The Saleggi and the meadows at the mouth of the Maggia River with their tender green and bright birch trees had an ambience more closely related to the meadows bordering a river in northern Germany than of an Italian landscape. Under the power of a southern light the flowers unfolded in an unusual size and color. In this blessed landscape their blooming seemed to be boundless. Houses and churches did not seem alien. The grey, weatherworn rock formations spoke a language all along familiar to the artist. Nevertheless, the fact that the painter needed three years to arrive at a style he considered suitable for capturing his experiences and his perception indicates the significance of this last change in the artist's oeuvre.

The special quality of the southern light made everything glow. Its shimmer absorbed contours, dissolved the object to a gossamer structure of colors. Yet these aspects did not play a decisive role in the first works executed in Ascona. And light was yet to play the dominant role in the picture. The artist was still searching for the new motif, for a vision that could be hidden somewhere inside him. Moreover, he had to adapt his handwriting and his technique to this new observations. But the results soon became discernible.

Prior to the Ascona period, Rohlf used tempera on canvas as his preferred medium. Nevertheless, during the 1920's the water/tempera works on paper gradually gained ground and it became quite obvious that this technique had an increasingly strong impact on his paintings. So long as a feeling for the sensual value of color remained a dominating factor in this artist's work, there would be no major change, although the lively interaction of heightened color occasionally approached the border of abstractness already during that decade. Only the idea, that paint could be elevated to assume an imaginary value of color, the thought of a conceivable harmony between color and a vision of the existing image, that cannot be achieved in any other way, eventually paved the way toward the ultimate switch to painting on paper. Painting on paper in the specific manner envisioned by Rohlf, could be done – and this he realized early – only with the use of tempera diluted with water. The artist had developed this extremely versatile technique in long series of experiments. A number of canvasses dating primarily from the late twenties and early thirties are indicative of similar experiments. Among them are nocturnal landscapes beneath a moon draped in clouds, architecture painted with an ethereal, highly variegated, colorless palette, and people who become increasingly disembodied. Notably absent are paintings of flowers. This technique, however, did not enable Rohlf to accomplish what he really had in mind, the triumph over the material value of color to attain an identity of color and light.

During the first phase, also his works on paper, for which Rohlf preferred to use a heavy Italian vellum, are marked by an increased color intensity. Although this trend was typical for the twenties in general, it was heightened in Rohlf's work under the influence of his new surroundings. His preference for using a basic, dominant color tone enhanced by other, contrasting or complementing colors, becomes increasingly apparent. Red and blue – madder and ultramarine – dominate, in addition a warm brown used in many nuances, is of continued pictorial value in the artist's oeuvre.

His "Poinsettias," of 1929 illustrate this beautifully. A resounding tone is created by a dominating red and a contrasting blue before a vibrating background of yellows and greens. That and the stroke of the brush with its dynamic effect on the picture create an atmosphere of vitality with a glow of such intensity, that outshines the color effect of all previous sheets done during this



Sunflowers in Blue Vase 1929

decade. At this point Rohlfs focuses less on the detail and more on the overall picture. The motif as such is reduced to an activating element. And the depth effect of the two contrasting colors is the decisive factor in the spatial arrangement of the picture. This factor remains undefinable to the same degree as the realistic portrayal of the object loses importance in favor of the representation of a superior reality.

Many but not all pictures Rohlfs created at his old age are based on the direct encounter with the object, in other words, they are painted after nature. Others were executed from memory. The fact that they are studio paintings does not reduce their quality. They, too, are a perfect demonstration of the author's sublime talent for converting his visual impression into a picture symbolic of a whole world concept. Nevertheless, the two categories are all but impossible to tell apart, neither in the work he did during his years in Weimar, nor in the pieces dating from his years in Hagen, neither from the late twenties, nor later. In both cases observation and memory become a new metamorphosis of objectivity.

To classify a part of the works created by an artist in his eighties as the actual “late oeuvre” may seem preposterous at first sight. And yet, a turning point in terms of technique as well as perception of color and object is clearly discernible in Rohlf’s work around 1930. While various paintings dating from the first years in Ascona, that is between 1927 and 1929, appear to be a conclusion of his artistic endeavors of the twenties, there is a definite transformation around 1930. Light and nature are unfolding their inherent energies. With all his senses Christian Rohlf is responding to those visual stimuli. And to realize them in his paintings, he searched for and found a new technique.

The works of the second Ascona phase are distinguishable by their specific technique and interpretation. Although neither color pigment nor palette are changed, all tones are heightened to take on a stronger light intensity and thus a different flavor. Most of the paintings from this period are executed with short strokes of the brush in bright colors, placed closely together and generally emphasizing one major direction. They transform the area into a mosaic of radiant colors. All parts of the picture area seemed to be filled with a vibrant activity. This is particularly so, as the artist applies his tempera/watercolor at times with the same density as oil paint. Any undesired effects are at least partially cancelled by accentuating the light.

The works of this period may be best described as very personal handling of Neo-Impressionism. Early parallels can be found in the colorful and vigorous paintings of 1906 and 1907. In terms of the flexibility of color application, brilliance, as well as color strength and density, these late sheets by far eclipse the earlier works. Color now becomes the determining factor, and at times it all but obliterates the motif. Rohlf did not endeavor to present the picture object from an Impressionist vantage point, as a dialogue between atmosphere and light. The dominating role and the intrinsic value of color are primarily determined by the choice of “pure” tones, such as ultramarine, madder, cadmium yellow and orange, and chromium oxide green, colors of which Rohlf preferred to use the warmer and deeper nuances. The strong dynamic quality of the pictures from that period is based solely on the tension between the colors and the vigor of their application. Nevertheless, there are some sheets that deviate from the above description, in as much as the handwriting remains unchanged, but a more subtle color palette is used to achieve a harmony of the color tones. Yet another group of pictures present “pure”, that is unbroken, motifs with a concentrated color intensity. The latter refers particularly to some nocturnal landscapes with moon.

When the term abstraction process has been used in connection with the works of the first phase, one should keep in mind that, in this case, the abstraction is a purely visual process. While sunflowers turn into radiant, wheels of exuberant colors, the landscapes, particularly those depicting bridges in the Centovalli and the Onsernone Valley are now painted with pure flows of color. Viewers, who have seen the elegant, weightless arches of the Roman viaducts boldly spanning the deep green waters in the ravines of those valleys, will realize how accurately Rohlf has captured the characteristics of architecture and landscape without ever being realistic.

Among the most important works of this period are the 21 sheets and a series of chalk drawings of the “Tatjana-Zyklus” of 1931 featuring his friend, the dancer Tatjana Barbakoff.



Poinsettias
1929

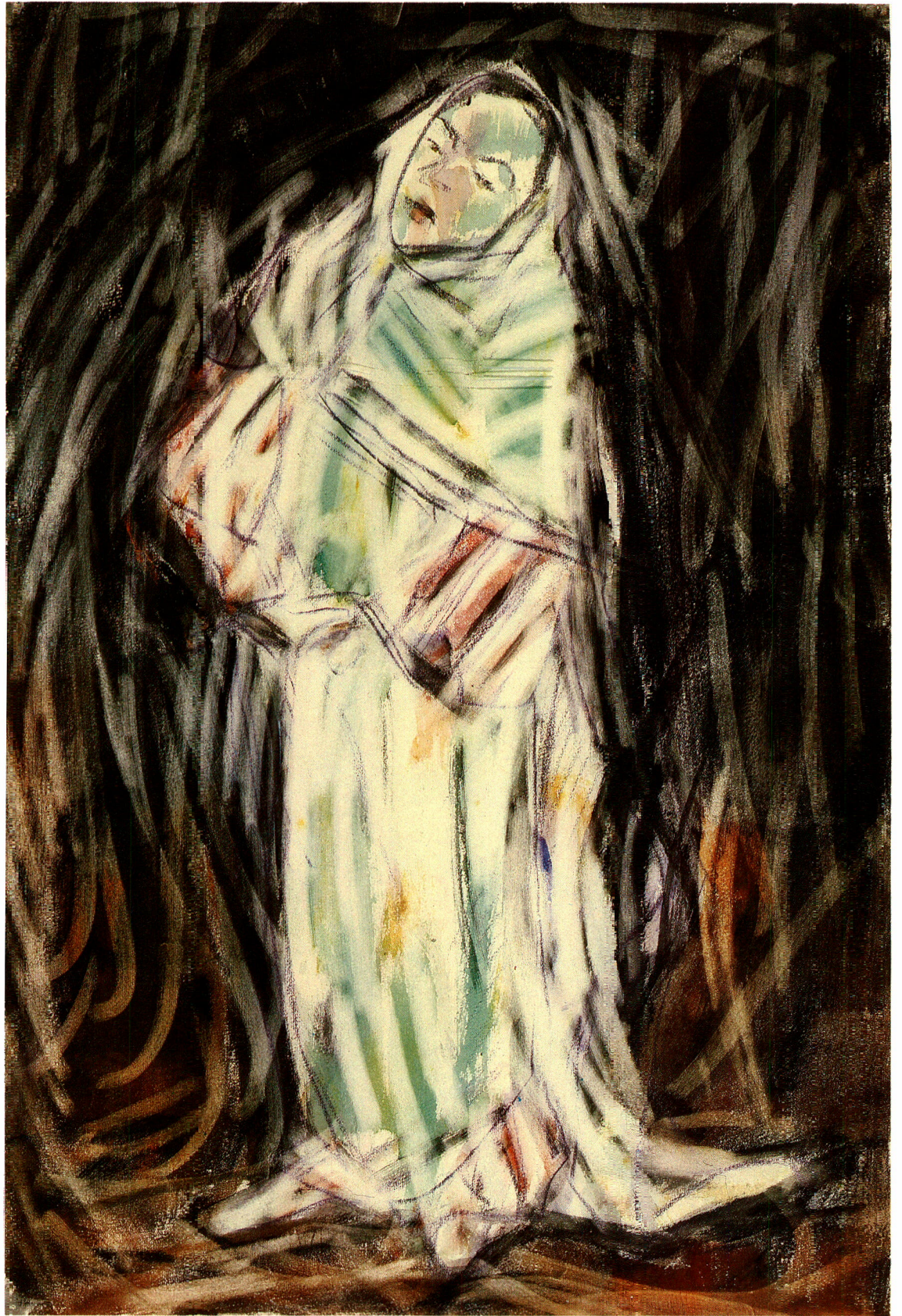
„Elegy” in particular makes it abundantly clear how strongly Rohlfs responded to the expressive aspects of her dancing. His focus was concentrated on the essence of her presentation and he searched for the underlying psychological, fateful elements of the dancer’s performance, and portrayed these in pictorial equivalents.

Each sheet describes a certain mood, contains a human fate. A dark premonition seems to lie over scenes like “Mongolian Flag Dance” or “Russian Folk Song,” as if the painter foresaw the tragic death of this talented dancer in a concentration camp. Even if only few people today are familiar with the name of Tatjana Barbakoff, whom a critic once described as “. . . a dancer who paints pictures. In the air, using the white of her hands, the green of her dreams, the red of her blood, the blue of birds . . .”, her art survives in this cycle that tells us more about the true essence of her art than portraits or descriptions could possibly relate. In terms of the artist’s historical development, this sequence belongs clearly to the period defined above with its characteristic lively brush work and colorful palette. Yet these works distinguish themselves within this group, because they delve into fatefulness and the search for an intensive form of expression, an expression that has little to do with emotion and Expressionism.

The thinking in color and the prime role color plays in a composition are the foremost achievements of those years. The vision of being emerges from the variations of incorporeal color tones. But neither at this nor at any later time, during the final years of his life, is Rohlfs devoted to this approach alone. Despite his inner involvement, he keeps it at a distance by emphasizing a form that is emblematic for each sheet. The increasingly noticeable dematerialization of the material world is not solely aimed at producing an aesthetic appeal. It embraces those lyrical undertones that express the artist’s receptiveness for the quintessence of existence, a goal he had pursued from the very beginning of his artistic career.

Those light-filled years between 1930 and 1933/34 lead to the crowning culmination of the late work which followed during the final, very productive years before his death in 1938. During the relatively short period from 1935 to 1938, he painted more than 300 water/tempera sheets. They represent the ultimate synthesis of all previous periods. All works dating from this period have the flavor of a parable. Regardless of their actual theme, they symbolize centers of tranquility in a confusing array of appearances, as parables of an existence of indestructible harmony like profound wisdom and transfigured bliss. This does not mean that Rohlfs turned away from reality, a reality that – as never before – presented itself in the glowing colors of the southern light, as a great joy to the eye created by the brilliance of the sight.

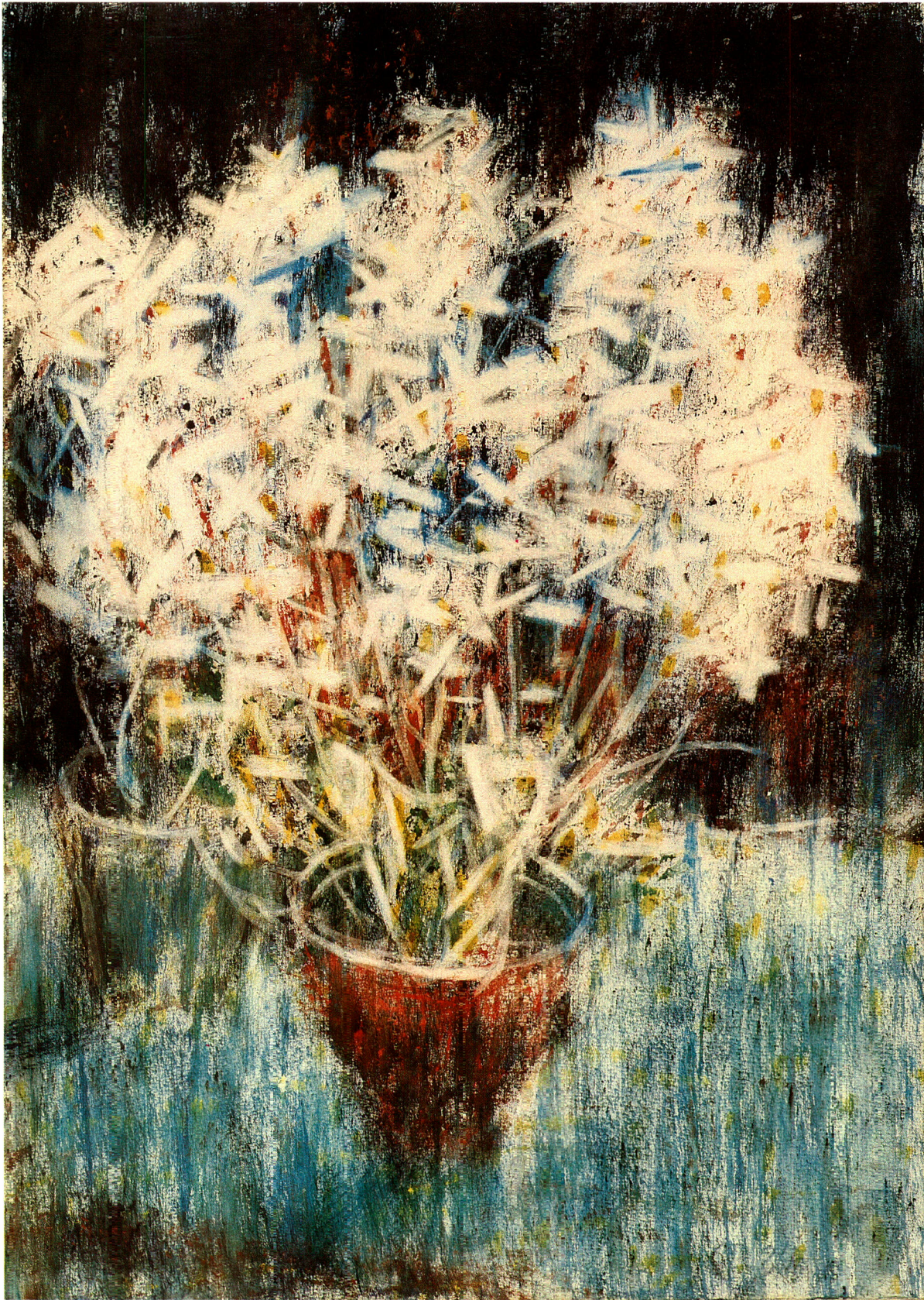
His motifs encompass the total world of visible phenomena. Nevertheless, the artist preferred motifs that came closest to his personal perception. By no means did this development limit the his spectrum of objects in comparison to earlier periods, it did, however, intensify and deepen the discernment of a heightened validity. Time and again he painted the lake and its surrounding mountains with their constantly changing moods between morning and night, between spring and fall, between sun and fog. As during his years in Weimar, he was attracted by the transitional moods, modifications in pastel colors that required the highest sensitivity of the eye for the most delicate nuances as well as a firm handwriting for the reproduction of the scene when the moon was dipping the lake into a silvery of brownish light, when fog covered the shore, or when lightning tore apart the grayish brown sky.



Elegy I 1931



Mountain
Cottage
in Tessin
1933



White
Escheverien
in Red Bowl
1934



Mountain with White Cloud 1935

With such paintings the landscapist Christian Rohlfs found his roots again. These works bring back to mind the words of the German romanticist C. G. Carus: “Landscapes of a superior beauty will be created, more meaningful than those painted by Claude and Ruysdael, and yet they will be straightforward images of nature. Nevertheless, perceived with a spiritual eye, nature will appear as a higher reality. And the constantly growing technical accomplishment will lend them a radiance earlier works could not have.”

Much has been written about the meaning of flowers in Rohlfs’s oeuvre. He painted all the flowers he could find in his garden on the lake or in the gardens of friends. He painted the canna and the calla, the anturium and the funkia, the sunflower and the gladioli, and the lotus blossom, the magnolia, and the amaryllis, the datura, hydrangea, camellia lily, rose, and many more – in the light of summer and in the demise of fall with a last crescendo of all colors. He painted them as individuals, perceived and interpreted them in a large scale for large formats – formats not



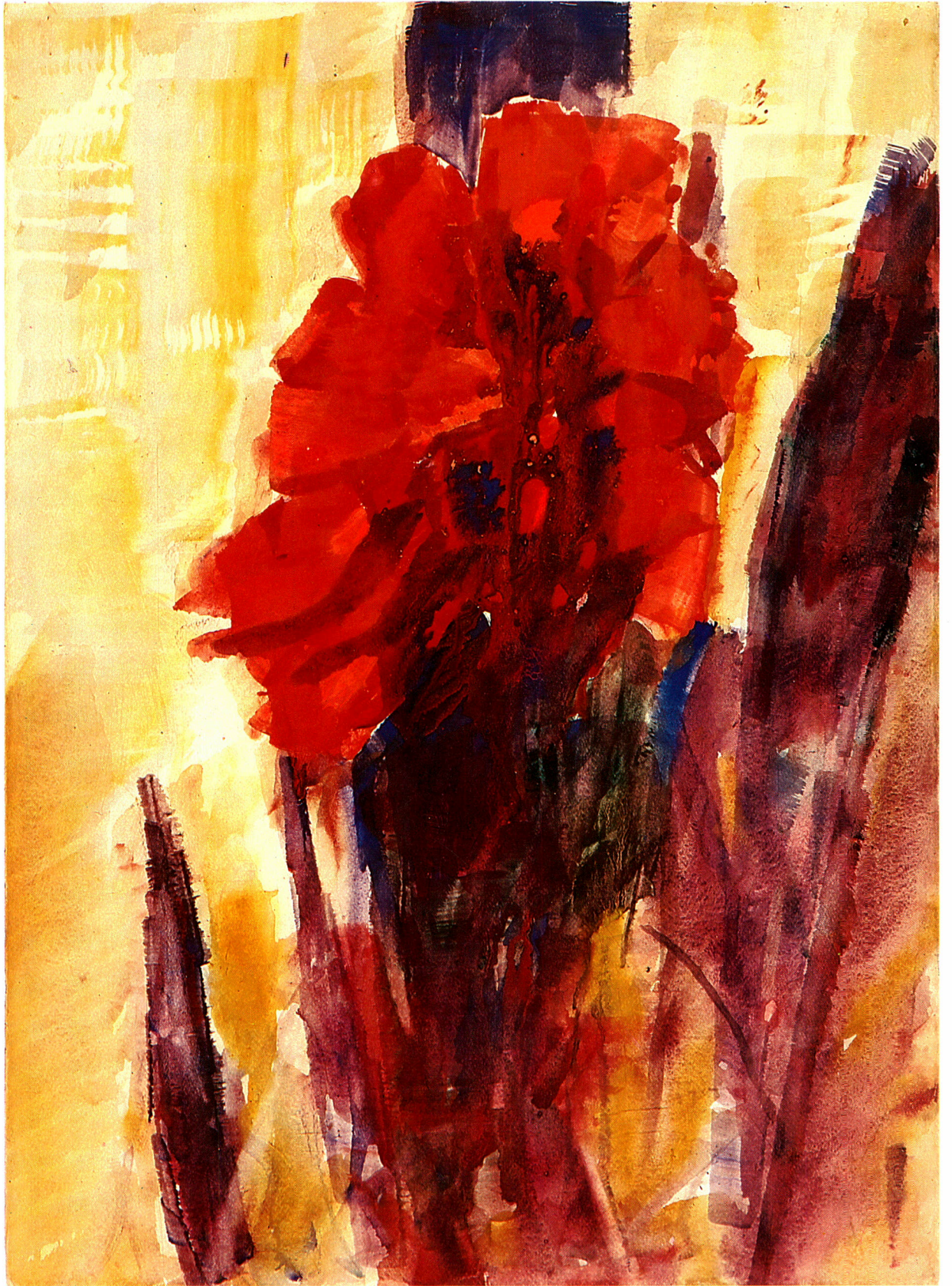
Lightening
1935

commonly used for works on paper. This does not mean that the large picture surface also meant an broadened object. To the contrary, the flowers in particular, demonstrate with great clarity the artist's concentration on what he considered essential. The theme of his work of his old age is "Variationen", manifold reflections of a natural existence perceived sensually as well as symbolically, an existence that does not express itself in a magnitude but rather in an individual being, say, a tree, a blossom, a house, or a mountain. Thus he never painted flowers as a still life, because he saw them as symbols of a philosophy of life, never as biological species. The fact that he also endeavored to give his motifs the highest aesthetic perfection by using his highly developed technique is merely a suggestion of the artist's standards.

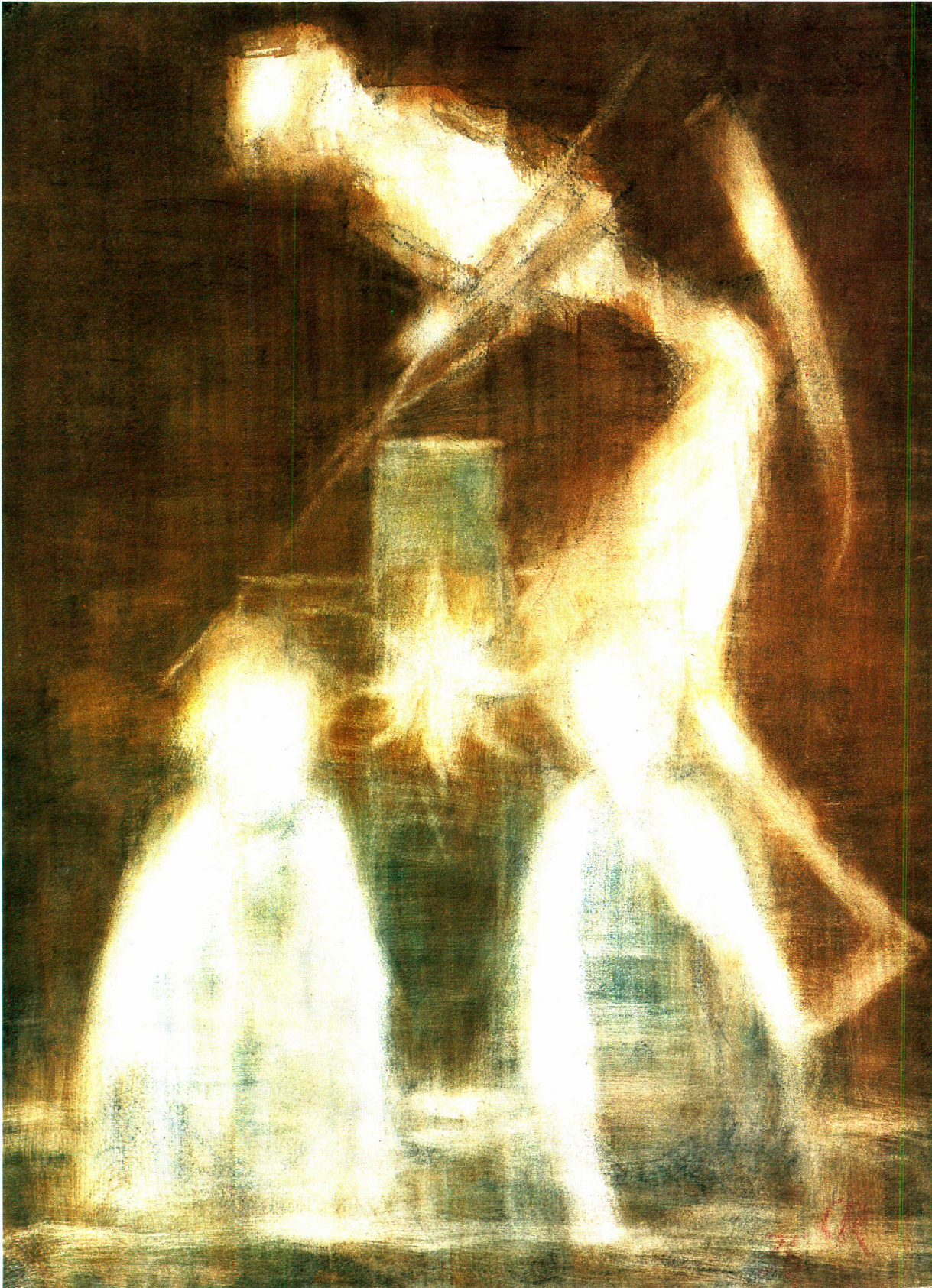
With his unfailing instinct Rohlf avoided the pitfall of making technique a purpose in itself. Whatever his motivation, technique was solely used to realize the picture concepts. Water/tempera was the only technique he found delicate enough to capture the finest nuances of a fleeting glow of color, to depict the most tender sensations of a surface texture. Water/tempera enabled him to make visible the nonobjective flavor of his motifs, and to bring light into his paintings. Like in the works of his previous period, space and perspective played no part in these late paintings. The picture surface turns into an illustrious interaction of forms, as the inherent spatial value of the colors alone suggests a feeling of depth.

By seeing the individual in a large scale, by making the image a picture – and this holds true particularly for the last landscape of the thirties – he disengaged it from the transient, organic model observed in nature. Unlike Klee, he did not paint "Dream Landscapes" or "Dream Flowers". Rohlf always felt a fundamentally sensual and – at his old age – he experienced an increasingly spiritual joy of colors and forms, of vegetative forces and of growing processes, which was probably part of his peasant heritage, a background he never denied in his paintings which reflected his close ties to nature. They are certainly manifestations of a subjective, exceptionally sensible perception that finds its highest and ultimate form of expression in color. Who of his generation could have perceived more strongly than Rohlf everything created with a spiritual eye and thus grasped its higher reality? Thus his late work with all their different themes are similar, they resemble a bouquet of small flowers, they suggest descriptions of landscapes of a cosmic order.

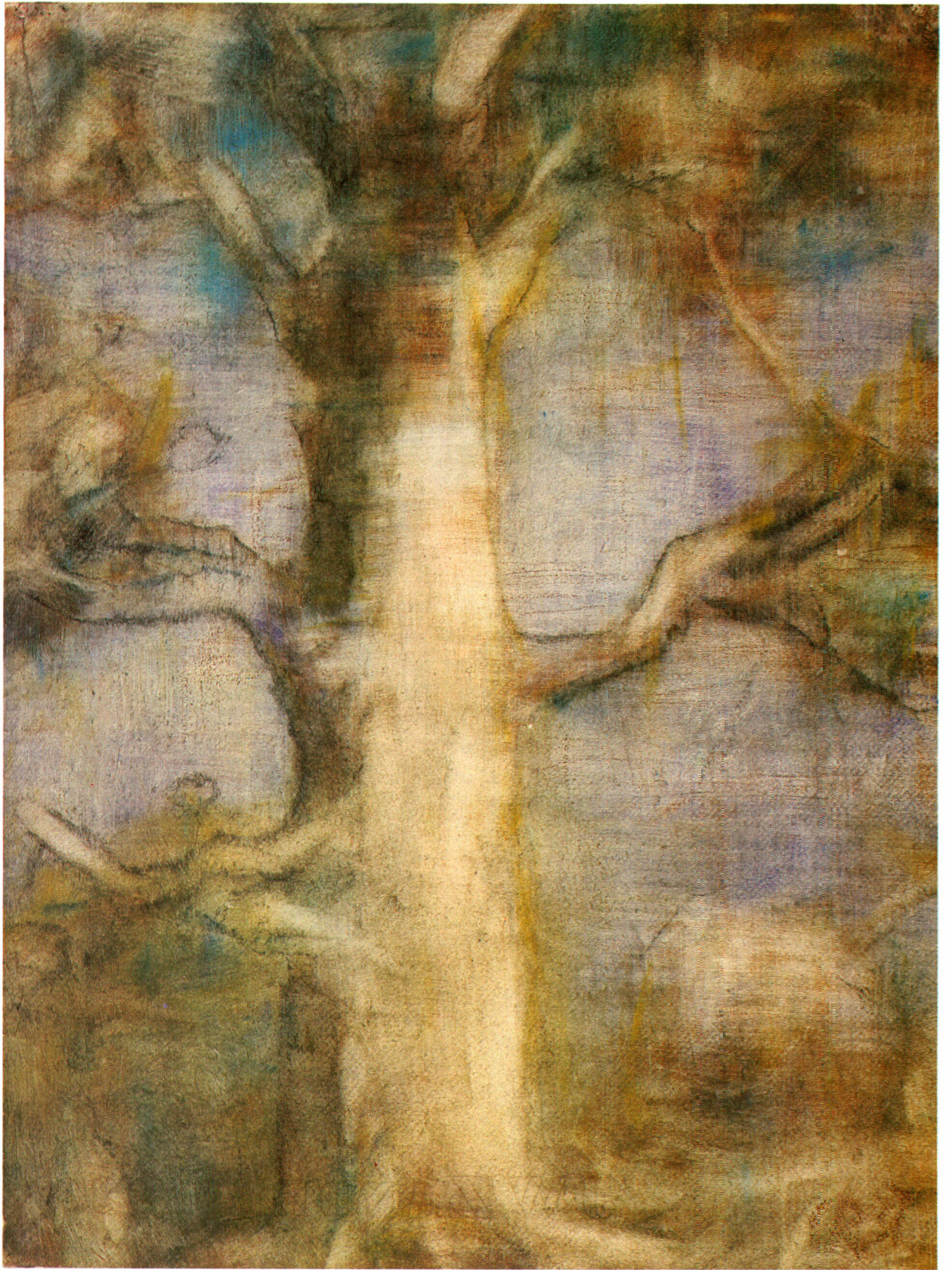
Never before did his colors with all their power possess that same degree of sensibility and, at such opulence, a similar quality of transparency. A composition based on primary color is one of the major characteristics of the water/tempera sheets of Rohlf's final years. They are easily subdivided into color groups. The great harmonic unity based on a deep luminescent blue, a satiated red, and a warm brown determine the flavor of the picture. Washed to the point of immateriality and in other parts left in a heavier applications, just as the picture concept required, the compositions appear like symbols of timelessness and permanence in a transitory world. A quintessence of experience based on impression and perception, they reveal some of nature's mystique, of her order, and of the deeper core of all being. In this oeuvre of his old age, an everyday actuality expands to a world of elevated reality. Its beauty grows out of measure and harmony. "Nature must renew itself within us, we experience her anew from childhood on. The piece of art is our experience, our awe of the measure of things." And this awe of the world, as August Macke called it, was something Christian Rohlf never lost. It was founded in the wisdom and fulfillment of old age, in an exhilarating contentment, and a profound humaneness.



Great
Canna
Indica
1935



Death, Where
is Thy
Sting
1936



Old Tree 1937

It remains a tragedy, that such a life's work had to be concluded faced with animosity and persecution. In 1934, his 85th birthday was already overshadowed by a foreboding of the cultural policy of Nazi dictatorship. Rohlf's was deeply upset. He was not concerned so much about his work, or fear for its survival. "Neither approval nor disapproval . . . can improve my work or make it worse," was his reply to the president of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, when he informed Rohlf's in 1937 that he was to be expelled. It was the recurring warning that he could lose the studio in his hometown that alarmed the old artist. His studio in Hagen, in the Ruhr region, was of great importance for his work. The three months of the year that he spent in Hagen instead of Ascona were used to execute works that had been on his mind for a long time.

One could assume that an artist who created such works out of "a certain immensity of contents" (Barlach) should feel at home anywhere. The Tessin offered him all prerequisites for unhindered work. He had found a circle of friends who shared common interests and respected different views. Other artists had left Germany, had emigrated because of a changed climate and continued threats. But not Rohlf's. Year after year, he returned from freedom to intimidation, from the light to a foggy, wintry landscape. Besmirched as "degenerated," he was never certain whether or not he would be allowed to leave Germany again to go to Switzerland, where he had left the work created between spring and fall in order to save it from confiscation.

Rohlf's was not spared any of the humiliations the Nazi "Reich" had in mind for the country's greatest artists: He was banned from exhibiting, his works were removed from museums and, as mentioned before, he was asked to resign from the Prussian Academy of Arts. The 87-year old artist gave the political potentates a reply that sounded like a confession of creed: "I was never in pursuit of accolades, have never attached much importance to such honors. As an artist, I have gone my own way for seventy years and have worked without asking how much approval or disapproval I was earning. Recognition or rejection, honor dishonor make my work neither better nor worse. I shall leave this for the future to decide. Should you dislike my work, you are free to remove my name from the list of members of the Academy. However I shall do nothing that could be interpreted as an admission of my own unworthiness."

There is no easy answer to the question about the "style" of his last works. Their measure and order can certainly be interpreted as a response to arbitrariness and despotism. In terms of technique and flavor these sheets are a far cry from watercolors in the traditional sense. Their distinct painterly quality places them closer to oil paintings, which is indicative of the value Christian Rohlf's himself attached to these works. They are certainly not a "lighter" rendering executed to complement the more meaningful oil painting. Had that been the case the artist would not have given up painting on canvas. Their special position of his works on paper – even among the paintings of our century is based on these characteristics, just as their quality places them in a class all by themselves, between the "styles."

Past and present, the radiance, lightness, and pleasure for the eye as found in Impressionist perception and technique, the inner engagement and the elevated symbolic significance of Expressionism are kept in a happy balance. The visible is given the power of a symbol, the perception remains related to the existing object and is thus saved from being a formless entity.

Christian Rohlf's has demonstrated with his work that, even in our time, an artist with the strength of a personal style can give themes painted thousands of times a fresh and contemporary



Three Chrysanthemums in a Jug 1937

meaning. He can demonstrate that art can be traditional and yet never epigonic, accomplished but not smooth, elegant and yet full of tension, and that such art need not rely on conspicuously formal and thematic effects to survive. His art reflects maturity and detachment, an understanding of the mysterious harmony between colors, his feeling for the expressiveness of the figure, for the harmony between man and world.

The joyfulness of these works grows out of seriousness, their perfection stems from a love of life. Color to Rohlfs was an elementary clue to a multifarious phenomenal world, a means to make materiality transparent, to make the transient permanent. Thus his pictures signify the measure of his world experience, they are an expression of his feeling for a source of tranquility shared by all things amid a turmoil of manifestations. In his pictures art and life are linked together inseparably.

Paul Vogt



Magnolia
of
San Materno
1937

CATALOGUE

- Sunflowers in Blue Vase 1929
485 x 660 mm
- Poinsettias 1929
700 x 550 mm
- Elegy I 1931
490 x 330 mm
- Russian Folk Song I 1931
395 x 565 mm
- Chinese Dance III 1931
570 x 400 mm
- Yellow Landscape with Lake 1933
570 x 790 mm
- Mountain Cottage in Tessin 1933
570 x 385 mm
- White Escheverien in Red Bowl 1934
670 x 480 mm
- Withered Poker Plants 1935
780 x 570 mm
- Monte Tamaro in Winter 1935
485 x 790 mm
- Mountain With Dark Cloud 1935
780 x 580 mm
- Lightening 1935
755 x 555 mm
- Brown Moonshine 1935
780 x 540 mm
- Mountain with White Cloud 1935
575 x 785 mm
- Snow-Covered Mountains at Night 1935
580 x 785 mm
- Fuchsia Blossoms in Brown 1935
530 x 388 mm
- Black House 1935
350 x 460 mm
- Great Canna Indica 1935
790 x 580 mm
- Houses in Bosco 1936
580 x 785 mm
- Death, Where is Thy Sting 1936
670 x 495 mm
- Hérons 1936
570 x 390 mm
- Three Chrysanthemums in a Jug 1937
580 x 790 mm
- Old Tree 1937
700 x 520 mm
- Gladiolus, Yellow and Purple 1937
760 x 570 mm
- Red Amaryllis on Blue 1937
780 x 570 mm
- Snow-Covered Chiridone 1937
570 x 780 mm
- Two Artichoke Blossoms 1937
500 x 650 mm
- Magnolia of San Materno 1937
790 x 575 mm
- Red Canna Indica 1937
650 x 495 mm

EXHIBITIONS – A SELECTION

One-Man Shows

- 1910 Karlsplatzmuseum (Grand Ducal Museum for Fine and Decorative Arts) in Weimar
Folkwang-Museum Hagen
- 1913 Kunstverein, Hamburg
- 1918 Kunstverein, Frankfurt
Graphisches Kabinett I.B.
Neumann, Berlin
- 1919 Nationalgalerie Berlin
Kestner-Gesellschaft Hanover
- 1920 P. Cassirer Gallery, Berlin
- 1924 Folkwang-Museum Hagen
- 1925 Nationalgalerie Berlin
Stadtmuseum Danzig
- 1928 Galerie F. Möller, Berlin
- 1929 Karl-Ernst-Osthaus-Bund Hagen
Museum Folkwang Essen
Kunstverein, Stuttgart – Frankfurt –
Ulm – Schaffhausen
Galerie Nierendorf, Berlin
Galerie B. Thommen, Basel
Galerie Aktuaryus, Zurich
- 1933 Galerie Vignon, Paris
- 1934 Christian-Rohlf's Museum Hagen
Museum Folkwang Essen
- 1936 Institute of Arts, Detroit
- 1938 Kunsthalle Bern
Kunstmuseum Basel
Kunsthalle Zurich
Galerie G. Franke, Munich
- 1939 Galerie F. Möller, Berlin
- 1944 Kunsthalle Basel
- 1946 Karl-Ernst-Osthaus-Museum, Hagen
Bouvier & Co., Hiddesen/Detmold and Bonn
Städtisches Museum Wuppertal-Elberfeld
Städtisches Kunstmuseum Duisburg
- 1947 Galerie W. Schüler, Berlin
- 1948 Museum Folkwang Essen
Galerie Hoffmann, Hamburg
Frankfurter Kunstkabinett H. Bekker vom Rath
Galerie Gauss, Munich
Kunstverein Wilhelmshaven
Galerie W. Rusche, Cologne
- 1949 State Museum for Art and Art History, Münster
Schleswig-Holsteinischer Kunstverein Kiel
Kunstverein Frankfurt
Karl-Ernst-Osthaus-Museum, Hagen
- 1950 Kunsthalle Hamburg
Kunsthalle Düsseldorf
- 1956 The Arts Council of Great Britain, London
Art Gallery, City of York
Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester
Leicester Museums and Art Gallery, Leicester
- 1957 Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York
- 1961 Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna
- 1963 Galerie Nierendorf, Berlin
National Gallery of the State Museums (East) Berlin
- 1964 Graphic Collections of the Institute
of Technology, Zurich
Museum Folkwang Essen
- 1965 British Legion Hall, Aldeburgh/Suffolk
- 1966 Museum of Art, San Francisco
Museum of Art, University of Oregon, Eugene, ORE
- 1967 Museum Folkwang Essen
- 1968 Travelling Exhibition curated and organized by the
Museum Folkwang Essen tours the United States
- 1970 Goethe Institute, Paris
- 1973 Goethe Institute Brussels
Provinciaal Hof, Bruges, Belgium
- 1974 Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome
- 1978 Museum Folkwang Essen
- 1979 Kunsthalle Kiel
- 1978/88 Museum am Ostwall Dortmund

EXHIBITIONS – A SELECTION

Group Shows

- 1877 Class of Professor Struys, Weimar
- 1879 Akademie der Künste, Berlin
- 1881 Permanente, Weimar (he participates also in 1882, 1887, 1888, 1889, 1892, 1893, 1896, 1899, 1900, 1902, and 1903)
- 1888 International Art Exhibition, Munich
- 1890 LXII at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin
- 1897 International Art Exhibition, Dresden
- 1901 International Art Exhibition, Dresden
- 1905 Antwerp
- 1911 International Art Exhibition, Building on Königsplatz, Munich
- 1912 Moderne Kunst, Folkwang-Museum Hagen
- 1920 Das junge Rheinland, Kunstmuseum Essen
- 1922 Paintings, Watercolors, Drawings (with Nauen, Feininger, Heckel, Nolde), Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach
First International Art Exhibition, Düsseldorf
- 1923 A Collection of Modern German Art, The Anderson Galleries (G. W. R. Valentiner), New York
- 1924 International Art Exhibition, Society for the Promotion of Modern Art, Sezession, Vienna
- 1926 Drawings and Design, No. 3, London
- 1929 Garden and Flower in the Fine Arts, Museum Folkwang Essen
German Contemporary Art, Warsaw
- 1931 Contemporary German Art and Architecture, Belgrade and Zagreb, Yugoslavia
- 1932 Nyere tysk kunst, Kunsternes Hus, Oslo
- 1934 German Painting, Kunsthaus Zurich
- 1938 Painters in the Tessin, Art Museum Lucerne, Switzerland
German Art of the 20th Century, Burlington Galleries, London
- 1949 Modern German Paintings, Prints and Drawings, The Arts Council of Great Britain, London
- 1953 German Graphic Arts of the 20th Century, Reykjavik
The Expressionists, Art Gallery, City of York
- 1954 German Graphic Arts of the 20th Century, Dublin
- 1955 documenta, Kassel
- 1956 German Watercolors, Drawings and Prints, 1905–55, Loan Exhibition . . . circulated by the American Federation of Arts
German Art of the 20th Century, Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 1957 Modern Art, Mills College, Oakland, California
Europa 1907, Stedelijk-Museum Amsterdam
- 1958 Nieuwe religieuze kunst, Delft
50 Years of Modern Art, Palais International des Beaux Arts, Brussels
Espressionismo e Arte Tedesca des 20 Secolo, Museo Civico, Turin
- 1960 A Salute to the Reopened Museum Folkwang Essen
- 1962 Expressionism, German Painting 1900 to 1915, Bergen, Stavanger, Trondheim, Oslo, Münster
- 1964 Expressionisme: van Gogh tot Picasso, Stedelijk-Museum Amsterdam
L'Espressionismo, Pittura, Scultura, Architettura, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence
- 1968 Fauves and Expressionists, L. Hutton Galleries, New York
- 1970 Grafica dell'Espressionismo Redesco, Palazzo Barberini, Rome
European Expressionism, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris
- 1971 The German Expressionism, National Museum for Western Art, Tokyo
- 1972 Masterpieces of the Expressionism, Art Museum Bucharest
- 1980 Expressionism, the Salomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, and the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco
- 1985 German Art in the 20th Century, Royal Academy of Arts, London
- 1987 Painting of the German Expressionism, Vienna

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

- 1849 December 22, born as the youngest son of a peasant in northern Germany
- 1864 Suffers severe leg injuries in a fall from a tree. Stays in bed for two years. Dr. Stolle, his physician, a brother-in-law of renowned poet and playwright Theodor Storm, supplies his patient with painting utensils
- 1866 Attends secondary school in Bad Segeberg
- 1870 With the help of connections made by Theodor Storm, Rohlf's enrolls at the Ducal Academy of Art in Weimar
- 1871 Condition of leg worsens, Rohlf's is hospitalized
- 1873 Leg is amputated
- 1874 Rohlf's returns to Weimar, studies under Ferdinand Schauss
- 1876 Studies under Alexander Struys
- 1877 First exhibition with fellow students
- 1880 His painting "Roman Construction Workers" (1879) is exhibited in Düsseldorf
- 1881 Altercations with Struys over artistic disagreements. Rohlf's is strongly influenced by art teacher Willem Linnig from Antwerp and shares studio with artist Edelbüttel
- 1882 Rohlf's becomes master student of Max Thedy, successor to Alexander Struys
- 1884 Rohlf's is declared "independent artist" and may retain his free studio
- 1888 First indications of Impressionist relaxation of style
- 1890 Exhibits at Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin. Black-and-white embroidery
In Weimar first encounter with works by French Impressionists (two Monets, "Spring in the Dunes" and "Pourville Beach")
- 1895 Spends one year in Berlin on invitation of a Weimar composer by the name of Bischof
- 1897 Renewed encounter in Weimar with French Impressionist paintings
- 1900 On a recommendation by Belgian architect and designer Henry van de Velde, Rohlf's meets with Karl-Ernst Osthaus who is working on plans for the Folkwang-Museum in Hagen in the Ruhr region
- 1901 Travels with his friend Karl Arp. Osthaus invites Rohlf's to visit Hagen
- 1902 Rohlf's moves to Hagen, accepts position at the Folkwang-Museum. Is bestowed retroactively the title of "professor"
- 1903 Paints first free watercolors
- 1904 Meets Edvard Munch. Gives up studio in Weimar
- 1905 Spends summer in Soest, friendship with Emil Nolde. Exhibition in Antwerp
- 1907 Summer months with Karl Arp in Hetschburg near Weimar. First exhibition of the "Brücke" group of Expressionists at the Folkwang-Museum in Hagen
- 1909 Rohlf's becomes a member of the "Deutsche Werkbund", an association of leading designers for the general cultivation of industrial design forms. Participates in the Sonderbund Exhibition in Düsseldorf and in the Black-and-White Exhibition of the Berliner Secession
- 1911 Becomes a member of the Neue Secession in Berlin
- 1914 Under the impact of the outbreak of World War I, Rohlf's suffers from depressions and cannot work for several months
Becomes a member of "Freie Secession" in Berlin and participates in that association's exhibition
- 1919 Marries Helene Vogt, a woman in her twenties. Exhibition in honor of his 70th birthday
- 1922 Receives honorary degree at the Aachen Institute of Technology
- 1924 In celebration of his 75th birthday he becomes an honorary citizen of Hagen and a member of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin
- 1925 Honorary degree from the University of Kiel, extraordinary member of the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Special exhibitions in honor of his 75th birthday in Berlin, Erfurt, Danzig, and Kiel
- 1926 Produces his last prints
- 1927 First journey to Ascona on Lake Maggiore in Switzerland
- 1929 For the rest of his life, Rohlf's takes up residence in Casa Margot in Ascona, spends Winters in Hagen. In honor of his 80th birthday, the Christian-Rohlf's-Museum is founded in Hagen, numerous special exhibitions
- 1933 Exhibits at the Galerie Vignion in Paris. The Louvre acquires a tempera painting
- 1936 Exhibits at the Detroit Institute of Arts
- 1937 Rohlf's is declared "degenerate", prohibited to exhibit, expelled from the Preussische Akademie der Künste in Berlin. Nazis have 412 works confiscated from museums. Last exhibition at the Galerie F. Möller in Cologne. Returns December 9 from Ascona to his studio in Hagen
- 1938 Rohlf's dies on January 8. His works are prohibited to be sold. Memorial exhibitions in Basel, Bern and Zürich