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DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

Distraction / Abwechslung
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The German painter and printmaker Johann Christian Reinhart (1761–1847) left his homeland in 1789 for Rome and the sunshine of Italy—never to return. Together with Joseph Anton Koch (1768–1839), he became one of the most distinguished members of the colony of German artists in Rome during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Reinhart received his first artistic training in Leipzig with Adam Friedrich Oeser before moving to Dresden in 1783 to continue his studies with the landscape specialist Johann Christian Klengel. The small, meticulously executed drawing shown here dates from 1782 and is a rare example of the earliest period of Reinhart’s oeuvre.



The pose of the young woman kneeling before a crucifix evokes the iconography of the penitent Mary Magdalene. However, the woman’s dress is clearly contemporary, and the surrounding forest is not a wilderness, as the urn visible in the background makes clear. The scenery as a whole—a contemporary figure in a somewhat tamed nature—is a typical example of the “*Naturschwärmerei*,” the enchantment with pastoral or rural life that was prevalent at the time. The most prominent exponent of this “*idyll movement*” was the Swiss artist and writer Salomon Gessner (1730–1788), whose work Reinhart knew well and often referred to. Reinhart could also have seen an example of such cultured nature not far from Leipzig in Machern, where Reichsgraf Carl Heinrich August von Lindenau had the Baroque gardens surrounding his palace transformed into a “modern” landscape garden in the English manner the very year our drawing was made.

Lastly, the poem by Ludwig Hölty (1748–1776) for which Reinhart made the little watercolor is itself a typical product of the period’s sentimentalism. Hölty’s “*Song of a Girl on the Death of Her Friend*” was written in 1775 but published only posthumously in 1783, accompanied by an etching by Christian Gottlieb Geyser (1742–1803) that faithfully copies Reinhart’s composition.

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