



Odilon Redon (Bordeaux 1840 - Paris 1916)

Landscape

Neighbors through time, white and gray boulders anchor this small landscape by Odilon Redon. Most likely painted in Brittany around 1880, it is one of a small group of romantically wild and rocky landscapes. By excluding narrative and human presence, the work focuses on the tactile sensations of a primordial site. Redon's fascination with geology coincides with his interest in the materiality of paint. Under a band of sky, a muddy field surges with the energy of a choppy river. The close-up treatment of the foreground rocks highlights rough textures and sharp silhouettes. Pushing forward, a flat plain of brilliant white hugs the surface.

Redon's technique and subject matter recalls Gustave Courbet's paintings of grottos in the Franche-Compté, Camille Corot's views in the forest of Fontainebleau and Paul Cézanne's paintings and watercolors of quarries near his home in Aix.

Redon is best known for his graphic work in charcoal, etchings, and lithographs. Influenced by Dürer and Goya, Redon's *noirs* feature monsters and hybrid creatures that include smiling spiders, free-floating eyes and teeth, and amoebic forms. Beginning in 1886, he exhibited with French and Belgian Symbolists at Les XX in Brussels. His portfolios, inspired by Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, and Gustave Flaubert, were published by Ambroise Vollard and others. In turn, his charcoals were described hanging on the walls of Des Esseintes, a fictional aesthete in J.-K. Huysmans' novel *Against Nature*.

Redon briefly studied with Jean-Léon Gérôme in Paris before returning to Bordeaux in 1865. He entered the workshop of the print maker Rodolphe Bresdin, who was known for his descriptive details. Living on his family's estate, Peyrelebadé, in an isolated part of the Médoc, Redon made numerous pencil and oil studies of trees and empty streets. His observations from the natural world supported his imagination.

From 1900, Redon abandoned black and white to embrace lush color in paintings and pastels of flowers. Our landscape was one stop on a visual journey that continues to alter our perceptions. Painted with surefire brio, it is a portal into an age before man.

Literature:

Alec Wildenstein, Odilon Redon, *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné, Fleurs et paysages*, Paris 1996, vol.III, no. 1881, illustrated p. 308.