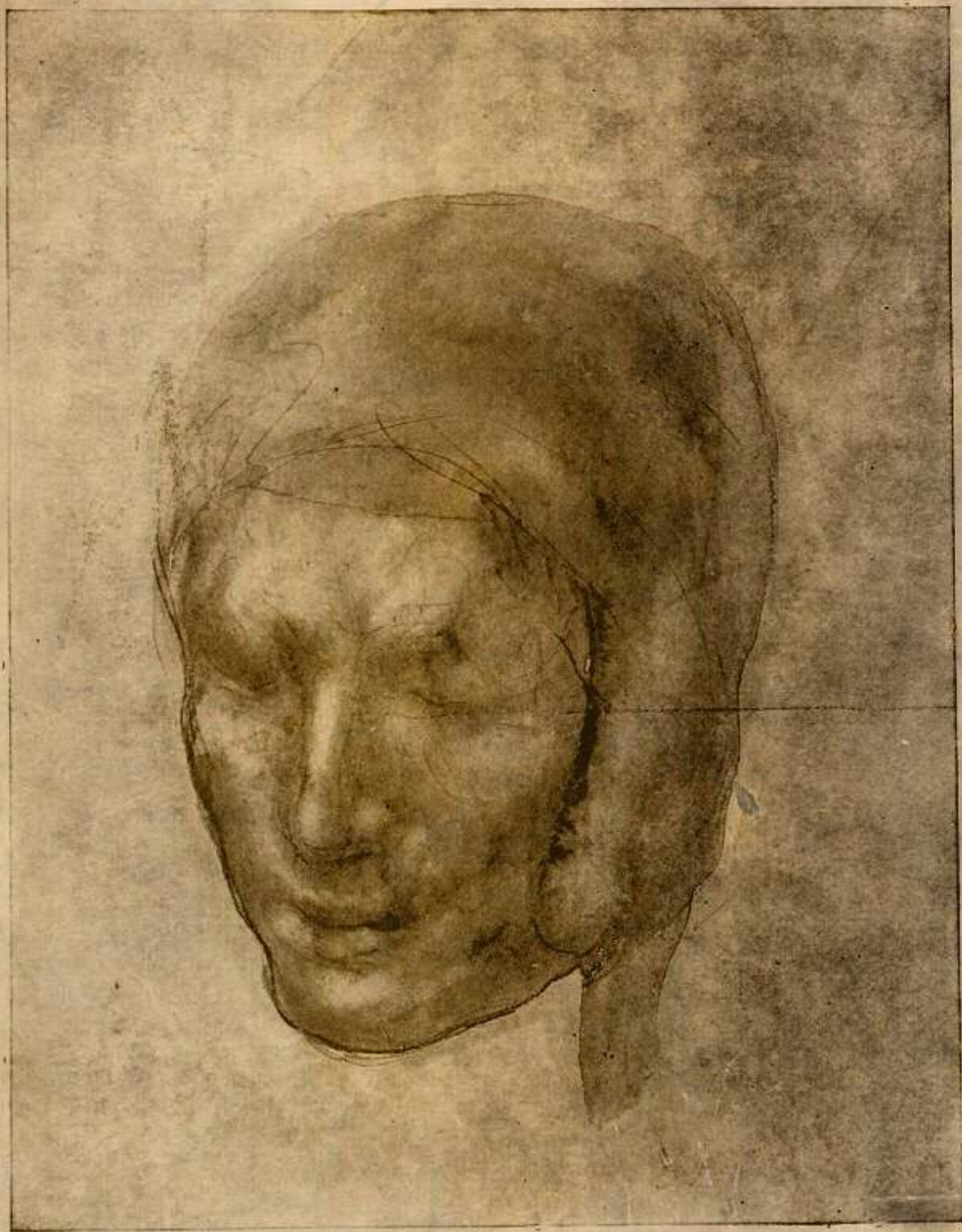


TWENTY DRAWINGS
BY KAHLIL GIBRAN

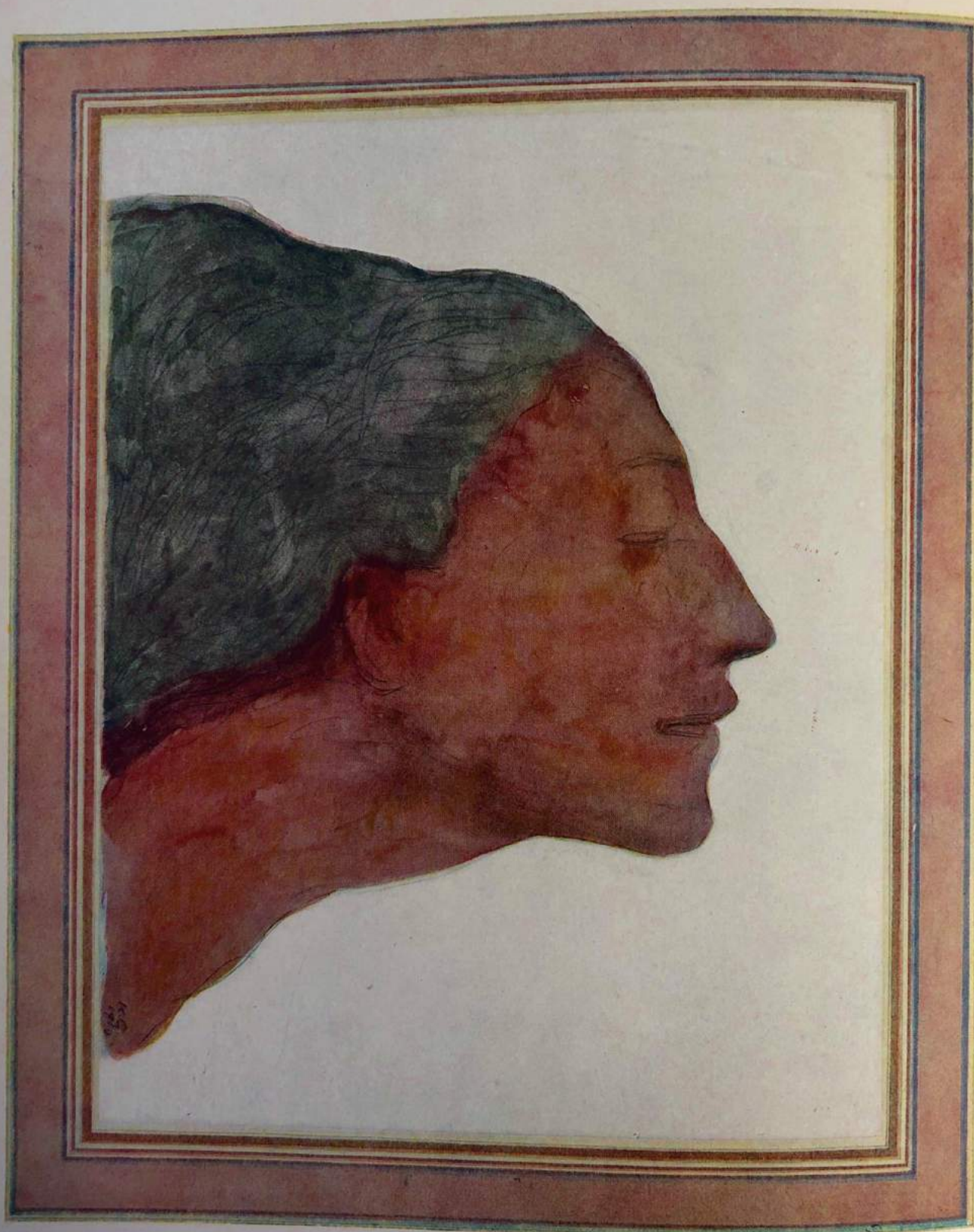


NEW YORK
ALFRED A. KNOPF
MCMXIX

TWENTY DRAWINGS BY KAHLIL GIBRAN







DRAWINGS

KHIL GIBRAN

INTRODUCTION BY ALICE RAPHAEL

TOWARDS THE INFINITE, Frontispiece



KNOPF

LOWLANDS AND MOUNTAINS OF AFRICA

TWENTY DRAWINGS

BY KAHLIL GIBRAN

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY BY ALICE RAPHAEL



NEW YORK
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ON THE ART OF KAHLIL GIBRAN

"The lives of former generations are a lesson to posterity." This quotation from the volume which is currently accepted as the masterpiece of ancient Arabic literature, *The Thousand and One Nights*, serves in a slightly paraphrased form as a fitting introduction to the work of the most authoritative artist and poet of modern Arabia—Kahlil Gibran.

In the near East there are over a hundred million whose native language is Arabic and the poetry of Gibran has become so incorporated with the national traditions of these people that one is not quoting lightly in saying that "the works of the present generation are a lesson to posterity." But Gibran the poet, who has been known to the Arabian world of letters as poet, critic and historian for twenty-four years, has already been introduced to the English reading public by his book "*The Madman*," a collection of poems and parables, some translated by him for his own works in Arabic and others written directly in English with an admirable fluency and command of the Western tongue.

It is Gibran the painter whose drawings are now being brought to the attention of his American audience and the following interpretation of his art will perhaps serve as a clue to the ever entrancing mystery of the harmonies and dissonances which exist between the East and the West.

Kahlil Gibran was born in Mt. Lebanon and although he has deliberately chosen to identify himself with the new world and its surging problems, his affiliations with Syria form such a vital part of his life that in this instance it seems as if the links between the old world and the new were admirably forged and adequately tempered. Despite the fact that he feels himself to be essentially a Syrian and that he is acclaimed as the authoritative spokesman for the Arabic people in the allied arts, Gibran belongs to the world outside of nationalistic interests and his art is a product of a deep sympathy with the problems which constitute the moving current of life in all nations and throughout all ages. His poetry is a blend of ancient imagery coupled with the poignant irony of modern introspection, and his painting is also a product of the abundant phantasies of the Orient set forth with as scrupulous a perfection of technique as the West has ever produced.

It is this blend of the poet and the painter which makes his work stand apart from the modern poetry of the East which we have come to know in the work of Tagore for instance, and which separates his painting from the traditional conception of Oriental art. For Gibran, in spite of his filial allegiance to Syria, is a citizen of the land of Cosmopolis—that ever moving realm, somewhat like the fabled island of Atlantis, which belongs to all times and to no particular place; so that Gibran, besides being the most widely read poet of modern Arabia, is also closely affiliated with Paris. There he worked with Rodin and he exhibited at the Salon a series of portraits, which included Debussy, Rostand, Sarah Bernhardt, and Rodin himself, who said: "I know of no one else in whom drawing

and poetry are so linked together as to make him a new Blake."

His sensitive appreciation of the interrelation of the arts enables him to be the spokesman for the genius of the Arabic people to whom the Western world owes a debt which it is only beginning now to appreciate, and no poet of former generations has done more to bring about a closer understanding between the East and the West than Kahlil Gibran.

Tagore, for instance, belongs exclusively to India. Whether we read him or not—whether we incorporate his work with that of other modern schools, nevertheless this does not affect the value of Tagore to India. For he has not lived in the land of Cosmopolis nor does he lend his interests to the new era in western literature. But Gibran has chosen to co-operate with Western arts and letters and his faith in the development of our "static culture" is indeed a lesson to posterity.

He has surrendered his position as a leader in the world of the near East in order to bring the traditions and genius of the Arabic people to the attention of the Western world. And although commentators have long since acknowledged our debt in literature to the Arabs, who introduced rhyme into Europe over a thousand years ago, and historians have admitted the impetus which was given to the sciences by Arabic philosophers, yet it remains the task of a modern to introduce us in painting to the vast poetical conceptions which constitute a part of the heritage of the Arabian race mind.

Kahlil Gibran is one of the artists who are engaged in the struggle between the old and the new, or as in other times, the conflict was termed, the oscillation between the classic and the romantic tendencies in art. As a poet, he is a Romanticist,

moving abreast the times and incorporating the keenly analytic spirit of our age into the ancient parable or the simple form of rhythmic prose. But in painting he is a Classicist and his work owes more to the findings of da Vinci than it does to any of our modern insurgents. Thus Gibran is also caught in the struggle which is the besetting problem of the world today, the reconstruction of an era which will adjust the imperishable legacy of the old world, the classic traditions, with the ever evolving, fluctuating tendencies in art which constitute the essence of true Romanticism.

For the cataclysm which has overwhelmed our world and is causing us to reconstruct our geographical boundaries and political tenets, also demands us to reconstruct our moral valuations and our standards in the life of the soul, of which art is one of the most profound manifestations. And as we think back upon the destruction which has separated the world with which we were familiar from the world in which we move today, we become more and more aware of the cataclysm which has so completely shattered our philosophies, dogmas and artistic beliefs.

A sombre burden has descended upon the shoulders of the coming generation, whose task it is to create a world as yet in embryo—and, if our arts are not to go down before such inspirations as the camouflage, and if science is not to be prostituted to such creations as the tank,—if a nobler expression of energy is yet to redeem man from the pit into which his destructive power has plunged him, then in the period of reconstruction he must insensibly turn to new and more vital forms of self-expression. Religion in the traditional meaning can no longer

lift him out of the rut of his suffering and only in another form of expression which will portray the realities of the soul devoutly, either in terms of art, science or social creeds, will he be able to effect a transition between the death agony of the old world and the travail of the new.

But even in this dark traverse through which we are passing in an effort to win a newer life as our own, we are aware of certain germinating influences which already foreshadow the art of the future, so that the productions of an artist can never be evaluated in terms of self-expression alone but must be measured by their relation to the organic processes of which they are an integral part.

To the interpretive mind, for instance, the destruction of Carthage cannot be judged as a pyrotechnical display of military prowess, for that which is significant was the impetus of change which that act gave to civilization. With the importation of the cult of Cybele, the great Mother, Rome was placed in direct communication with the East and a contact between the modern and the ancient world was firmly established. Eventually, the religion and the art of the East not only acquired a foothold, but became an integral part of later Roman culture, so that Rome was conquered by that which centuries before it had set out to subdue. The Romans set out to conquer a rival and brought back the religion and thereby much of their rival's system of power. In this way a process which on the surface was nationalistic became fundamentally a part of the organic evolution of civilization, which redirected the cultural processes of a nation and eventually of what was, then, the modern world.

Thus the term modern loses its coin value when we see how lightly it can be shifted from era to era, denoting certain types of ideas rather than periods of time. For the life of the inner world is without boundaries other than personal limitations, without national or particularistic interests other than those we voluntarily adopt. We shift our emotional contents upon a word like "Spartacide" and it becomes a modern equivalent; it is at once cut adrift from its original connotation and it becomes vitally related to our own interests and feelings. In short the word, the symbol flashes the past to life and passes on to meaning into the present in order to stimulate the mind to seek out new intellectual pastures.

For the soul is occupied with but a few problems and these are singularly few. Life in its elemental functioning is but a transformation of the processes of Birth, Love and Death. The hunger of the appetites and the hunger of possession; the desire for adventure and the fear of the unknown; to love and to be loved; out of these essential simplicities, man has erected the vast complexities of life and to these essential simplicities the artist must return who seeks a new means of expression amidst the clutter of religions, arts and moralities.

Those who have witnessed the disintegration of a world can no longer find satisfaction in objective painting. What has the art of Messonier to say to a man who has lived in a trench? What has the art of Watteau to offer to men who have experienced shrapnel or the submarine? We know that Veronese worked amidst the voluptuous realities which he depicted; we know that Watteau phantasied the shepherd and shepherdess exquisitely, but to us this type of painting is merely interesting

because of its historic value. Intrinsically, it has no message to offer us.

It is at this point in art that symbolism reveals itself as the interrelating principle between the life of the soul and objective life; that is to say that just as the symbol of the word is the interchanging coin between ancient and modern concepts, so in art, the symbolic meaning is the interchanging medium between the modern and the antique. Yet before we apply the word "symbolic" to an artist we must first come to a clear conception of its value, for it is a word which one approaches with hesitancy as its meaning has become so clouded by misuse that our mind flashes instantly to that group who were thus classified and then to the satirical lyric of the man "walking down Piccadilly with a lily in his mediaeval hand."

We can get no clearer picture of symbolism in Art than by recalling that period and school which gave every appearance of it and yet never possessed its essence. The pre-Raphaelites for instance, attempted to recreate in their mode and manner, that which was for ever past just as certain modernists attempt a crude simplicity which was only characteristic of primitive humanity. The true symbolist is concerned with the life of the inner world. To his eyes the changing cultures of man are merely transformations upon which he focusses his attention. Whereas, to the ideationist—the objective artist—each epoch, each strata in the history of man is a separate and distinct reality and he occupies himself depicting the surfaces and planes of the outer expression of life. He is in constant relation to the present; he has no personal affiliation with the vast

spiritual life of the past and possesses no embryonic conception of the future.

But to the true symbolist life is a perpetual recreation and he moves in a world freed from traditions and confines. He need not attempt to escape from the limitations of the present by seeking the mannerisms of an enigmatical past. He is in direct contact with that past and hence the future is an ever fluid and ever luminous atmosphere; he is at one with fundamentals.

If we examine the work of the early Primitives we see at once how deeply imbued they were with the essence of symbolism. In fact, they cared so deeply for the spirit of the idea that the manner of its presentation caused them little concern. They covered the walls of Assisi because they wished to tell the story of Jesus that others might know and profit by it. To them, Jesus was a reality, not a story about which to make a painting, and consequently it was a matter of indifference to Ghirlandaio whether the women attending the Virgin wore the dresses of his own age or those of antiquity. They *were* the women attending the Virgin and that which has given the Santa Maria Novella its lustre, is the power of a feeling, visioned, experienced, grasped—and then put forth again.

However, in the minds of the pre-Raphaelites, the vision was most assiduously cultivated. Their very pre-occupation proves them to have been objective artists diverted from their proper functioning. They did not seek the vision of England, which would have been their true expression, the sentimental Victorian England of their day, but they turned their eyes

towards the Italy of the past and became blinded by the dust of the centuries which lay upon it. The result was narrative art, a beautiful and ingenious affectation of the source of inspiration, but the symbols of love and sorrow, of joy and pain became involved in confused mysticism. For the pre-Raphaelites sought not their own spirit but that of another, not the meaning within but that lying as far away as possible—in fact the more remote it was, the more they sought it. They reproduced instead of creating, and they have given us beautiful stories, beautiful pictures, beautiful ideas—everything except that which can never be reproduced, and that is the spirit of their own age.

In the separation of the symbolist from the ideationist, the art of the East is most concisely divided from the art of the West. To the East the lotus is a flower, but also a symbol of divinity; to the West it is a flower developing into the acanthus design and completing the circle, it becomes a decoration, and so again only a flower. Again the earth, the sun, the sea, that which is above, and that which lies beneath, are to the Western mind, materials of study to be touched, represented, understood and grasped. But to the East, it suffices that these things are and will be eternally, and that behind these realities which we visualize and know, lie other and again other forces and experiences, other suns, other seas, melting mysteriously into one another as the leaves of the lotus.

It is at this dividing line of East and West, of the symbolist and the ideationist, that the work of Kahlil Gibran presents itself as an arresting type in our conception of painting. He

has accepted both the traditions of form and the inner meaning of the idea, and he exhibits both a new type of work and another method of approach to fundamental truths.

The qualities of the East and the West are blended in him with a singular felicity of expression, so that while he is the symbolist in the true sense of the word, he is not affixed to traditional expression, as he would be if he were creating in the manner of the East, and though he narrates a story as definitely as any pre-Raphaelite, it is without any fan-fare of historical circumstances or any of the accompaniment of symbolic accessories. In his art there is no conflict whether the idea shall prevail over the emotion, or whether emotion shall sway the thought, because both are so equally established that we are not conscious of one or the other as dominant. They co-exist in harmony and the result is an expression of sheer beauty in which thought and feeling are equally blended. In this fusion of two opposing tendencies the art of Gibran transcends the conflicts of schools and is beyond the fixed conceptions of the classic or romantic traditions.

An illuminating beauty informs his work; to him the idea becomes beautiful if it is true; the emotion becomes truth if it is real. He possesses a singular power of dividing what is essential from what is extraneous in the presentation of beauty and truth. And he keeps to a simplicity of manner in the portrayal of an idea which is closely akin to the spirit of the Primitives, albeit the art of the centuries has gone into the moulding of his powers; but in his statements he is simple, almost instinctively simple. In fact, he may be described as an intuitive artist—as that type of artist whose feeling is like

the divining rod which leads down to shafts of golden values and who does not obfuscate his mind with intellectual conceptions of what or how he should create. And having followed his instinctive flair for truth he now applies his conscious powers to perfect his finding and to create his embryonic expressions into paintings of beauty and value.

He needs only a small sheet of paper to give us the meaning of the "Erdegeist"; we see a body of a woman who rises out of the vast form of the All-Mother, carrying in her arms man and woman. Only the head of the unfolding mother with its mysterious smile is drawn in what we are accustomed to think of as drawing. There is the story, interpret it as you will; Erda—Amida—Ceres—Mary—the choice is a matter of time and temperament. The meaning is the same and Gibran is dealing with fundamentals.

But in the portrayal of the idea he is scrupulously faithful to the perfection of his technique. Thus beauty is the final arbiter upon the destiny of his production. He creates with intuitive feeling then shapes his work into unity with the power of thought, but both these impulses are guided and guarded by a profound love and appreciation of the beautiful which enables him to portray that which he has to say as simply and as sincerely as it is possible for him to do so. It is this quality of instinctive simplicity which makes his painting so clearly akin to the art of the sculpture, for the sculptor, unless in relief, cannot deal with anything other than the essential idea and the beauty of form. In sculpture there are no accessories of background, no gradations of colour values to attract the eye and deflect the mind from thought. Very few painters have been able to express the

essentials of life in painting. Da Vinci attempted it but he was lured away from the quest by his love of subtleties, and pupils like Luini or Sodoma expressed the subtleties but failed to grasp the inner meaning which held Da Vinci to his perpetual quest.

The art of Gibran is symbolic in the deepest meaning of the word because its roots spring from those basic truths which are fundamental for all ages and all experiences. He senses the meaning of the earth and her productions; of man, the final and the consummate flower, and throughout his work he expresses the interrelating unity of man with nature. He shows us Man evolving out of the beast in a struggle with another centaur; he portrays the recumbent Mother crouched against a centaur who holds the child in his arms—the child who is already one step beyond, a conception closely parallel to that of Nietzsche. In yet another picture he shows us Man driving or being driven by a horse, divinely frenzied.

His centaurs and horses have a charm beyond their natures so that they are never wholly animal in character. They have a grace which is reminiscent of the Chinese statuettes of horses, with their square nostrils and delicate hoofs, hoofs that paw the air rather than the ground and stamp upon the mind the finest qualities of a horse, its fleetness, swiftness and strength. So that in regarding these centaurs we sense the beast that is yet man and again that man which is and must be animal; we become conscious of that evolution upwards which is in itself a miracle, although there is a barrier which will for ever prevent man from clutching the stars.

The picture of the flying figure suggests the sweeping onrush

of the winged victory, man's supreme aspiration; it is symbol of the divine force which impels man for ever onward to higher levels of evolution. The study of the human body in flight has been a source of inspiration to almost every artist; in the Palazzo Ducale at Venice for instance, Tintoretto has introduced a multitude of flying figures into his great ceiling painting of "Venice as the Queen of the Adriatic." But in all these studies there are certain distortions of the human body. These forms are either too aspirant or too convulsive so that one is unpleasantly reminded of the muscular sensations of cramped arms and benumbed legs.

In the Sistine Chapel however, the great patriarchal paintings of the Jehovah creating the world, dividing the waters of the earth or sweeping through space to touch the finger of the recumbent Adam, are all so balanced and so benignly reposeful that they convey not only a sense of flight through space but the impression of the very weight of space which is able to sustain these moving bodies.

Gibran's studies of movement are akin to those of Michelangelo because he has arrived at a unity of thought and representation. Not only is he the master of the symbolic idea which he expresses but he has attained the technical grasp upon his material. Hence we are not disconcerted by false conceptions of the human body or erroneous perspectives.

His paintings are mostly wash drawings and only here and there does his pencil co-operate with his brush to suggest and complete the theme. The level of his painting is very delicate—plane suggesting another plane in the most subtle gradation so that at first there seems to be but little colour and then comes

a swift realization that it is all colour—only imperceptibly diffused. In one or two of the studies like the sombre picture of the man with the cap, more vivid reds and blues are introduced and a certain greenish blue, wholly of the East, reappears constantly in his studies of definite types. But in his more profound interpretative work, the gradation of colour is delicate in the extreme. He uses colour to reveal his form unlike many painters who lose their sense of form in the pursuit of colour; that is another reason why his paintings are so suggestive of the art of the sculptor.

This impression is conveyed most powerfully in the study of a woman's head, the frontispiece to this volume, a painting which is the most complete exposition of the art of Gibran. The head is thrown back and seems to rest upon a white background that is yet not exactly white; it is the colour of the sea at an infinite distance when colour is no longer colour but merely light. The head, lying upon this luminous ground is so delicately delineated that the throat veins almost quiver and the pale lips are about to move. And as we look upon the fine profile, the sensitive, highly arched nose and the tender, compassionate mouth, it seems as if this woman's head had arisen out of those deeper waters which we call the sea of memory, as if indeed

“Our souls have sight of that immortal sea from whence we came.”

There is little drawing as we are accustomed to think of drawing, but the painting is modelled in colour and is akin to the

interpretation of a sculptor who usually seeks the greater freedom which larger material begets. That something flowing which alone makes the earth other than a piece of stone is revealed in almost all his work. It is the very soul of sculpture and he is but expressing it in kindred form.

Gibran is an interpreter of "the heavens above and the earth below." He recalls like a fleeting memory, the meaning of the great clouds which swept like a flock of storm gulls before the bewildered eyes of primitive man, but he has likewise sounded the pit of agony into which the soul descends during the crucifixion of its development. For Gibran is not alone interested in the story of man, he is interested in the history of life; he is not concerned merely with its portrayal, he shares its struggle. He is impelled by that force which lies beyond all things animate and inanimate—that force which produces, destroys and recreates with the same intensity, the same purpose and always to his eyes, with the same succession of beauty.

Therein lies the reason why his work is of today with its unrest and grouping in spite of its intuitive simplicity in the use of symbolic material of the past. It is of today because we are seeking to infuse a new meaning into life whereby we can accept the bitter in order to gain the sweet; we are endeavouring to come to terms with the ancient symbols and although the concepts which Gibran portrays are as old as Cronos, they are also as modern as the interpretative spirit of our age. His art arises out of the past but its appeal is to the thinking minds of today and it foreshadows a trend in the creative work of the future.

The tryptich of the crucifixion in this series of drawings shows

at once how the symbol of the Christ between the two thieves can be used either to express the complete religious and mythological conception, as it would have been used by the Primitives in some large fresco, and how the same idea can be conveyed on a small sheet of paper by one who understands the inner meaning and is able to put it forth as a representation of the conflict of every self-conscious being. In this drawing a man rests upon the shoulders of two companions. There are no religious accessories either of halo or stigmata with which to associate or localize the conception and yet the story of the crucifixion is completely portrayed.

It is in this absolute simplicity of idea and intuitive revelation coupled with an instinctive grasp of the beauty of form, that Gibran attains the consummation of his powers and commands a respect meritorious of the classic. For amidst the deluge which has overwhelmed our world of art, when Cubists collide with Vorticists and both are submerged by the onrushing of the Orphicists—when school and type arise and as swiftly decline in the quest of the new and the age is seeking a picture of its soul in barbaric imitation of genuine barbarism, it is of inestimable value to come upon an artist who is fulfilling himself in his work apart from any claptrap of modern devices. Gibran has not gone to strange lands to study the new but he has walked the silent path of the meditative creator and he has brought out of his own depths these eternal verities of the history of man's inner life. He has recreated the symbolic incarnation of the All-Mother—he has divined the flying wish of humanity and he has laid bare and retold the story of the Passion.

In the poetic revelation of these psychologic conceptions of humanity he exhibits a world of consummate beauty to the younger artists of America whose life he has chosen to share. He is expressing the vast, the infinite forms of the ever fluid past and is showing us how these imperishable memories can stimulate the art of the future.

Only in the acceptance of this infinitely varied racial history as a living part of the present, will America prepare herself for the eventual renaissance of the arts and as a forerunner of this renaissance, Gibran will occupy a similar position to that of Giotto and Ghirlandaio in relation to the Italian Golden Age. The painters of the Renaissance showed the world that the human being could be portrayed as if he were divine. But to those who preceded the Renaissance the "as if" did not exist. To them—as to Gibran, human life is divine. The body reflects and represents the spirit, and art arises out of the interplay between the inner and the outer world.

It is a fact that in painting as well as in poetry, we are standing today on the tiptoes of expectation, awaiting the fusion of a closer union between the old world and the new. We are no longer bounded by New England conceptions of the poetical on the one side and by the various quasi-tragic representations of the Last of the Mohicans as a basic expression of American art on the other. In the anticipation of the eventual renaissance of the world, we in America can lend ourselves to study those who are its precursors.

For Gibran belongs to that group of artists whose message always heralds a period of transition and whose voice challenges the present to a recapitulation of its standards.

There is a tradition which that no singer is lost in the world
of antiquity while it is so known in the spirit of our modern
society. Adam, his wife, together with their eldest son,
Moses. That at the same time, illustrating the fact
something is more known, fully, perfectly, completely, known and
known. The great mystery of the world of our
what if this same illustration of the world of our
ing our children, provided that we are strong enough to
understand and be ourselves in the world of our

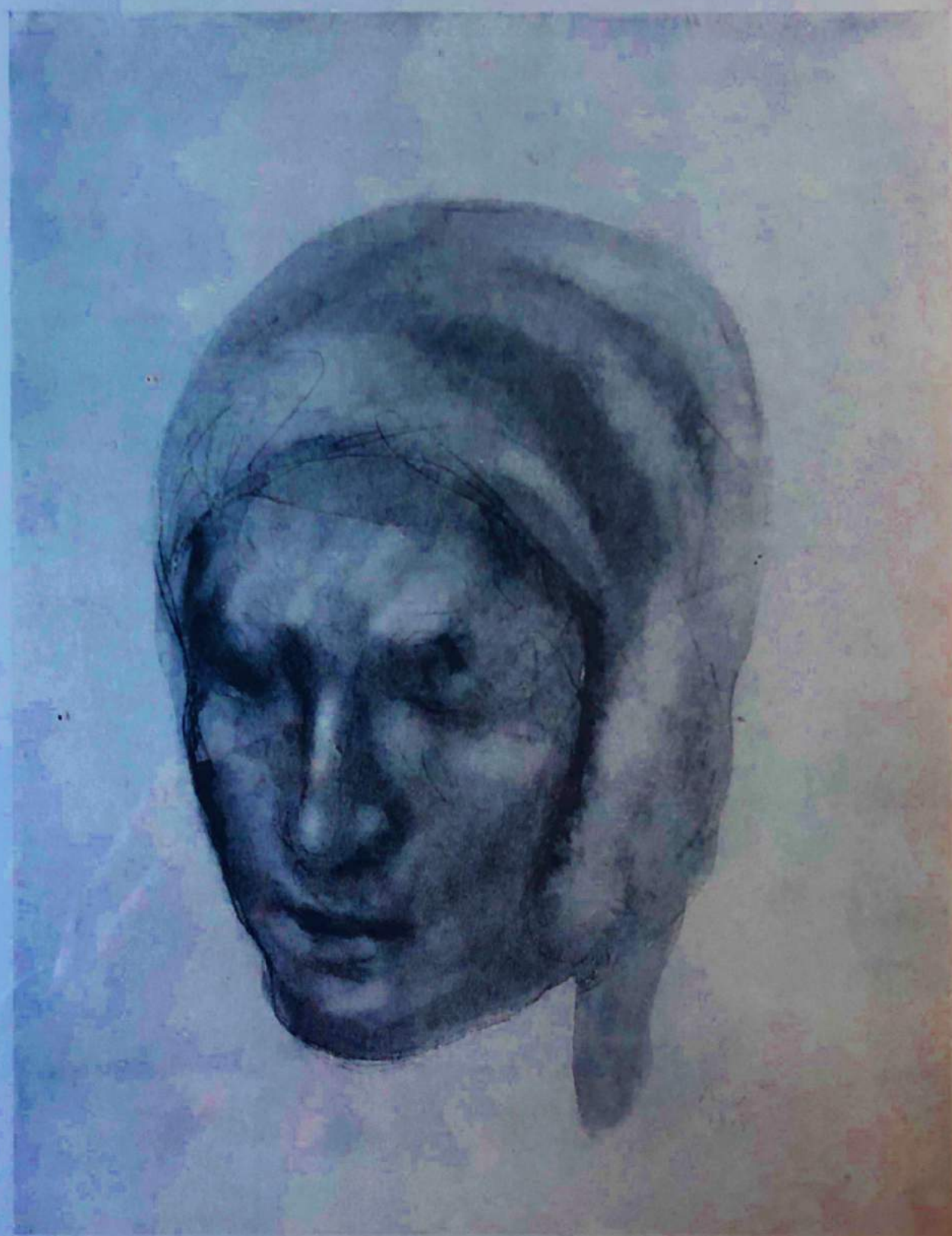
THE GREATER SELF

There is a notion so old that its origin is lost in the mists of antiquity where it is declared to be the symbol of our common race and of our common life. Its sign signifies Adam, the spirit of the East, the spirit of the Middle Ages, the spirit of the Renaissance, the spirit of the Reformation, the spirit of the French Revolution, the spirit of the Industrial Revolution, the spirit of the modern world. It is the spirit of the human race, the spirit of the human mind, the spirit of the human soul. It is the spirit of the human race, the spirit of the human mind, the spirit of the human soul. It is the spirit of the human race, the spirit of the human mind, the spirit of the human soul.

THE GREATER SELF



THE BLIND



THE MOUNTAIN



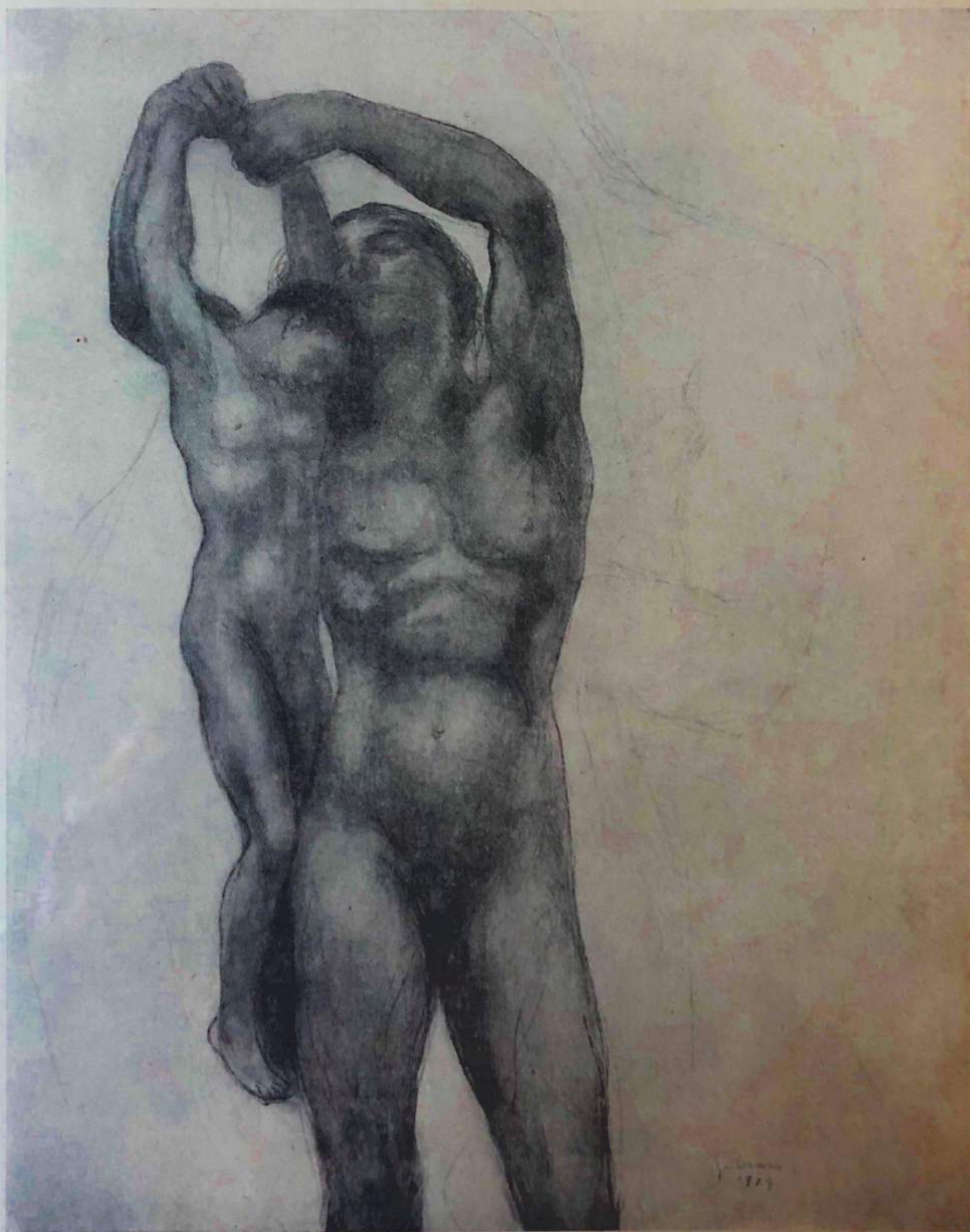
FLIGHT



CENT AUR AND CHILD



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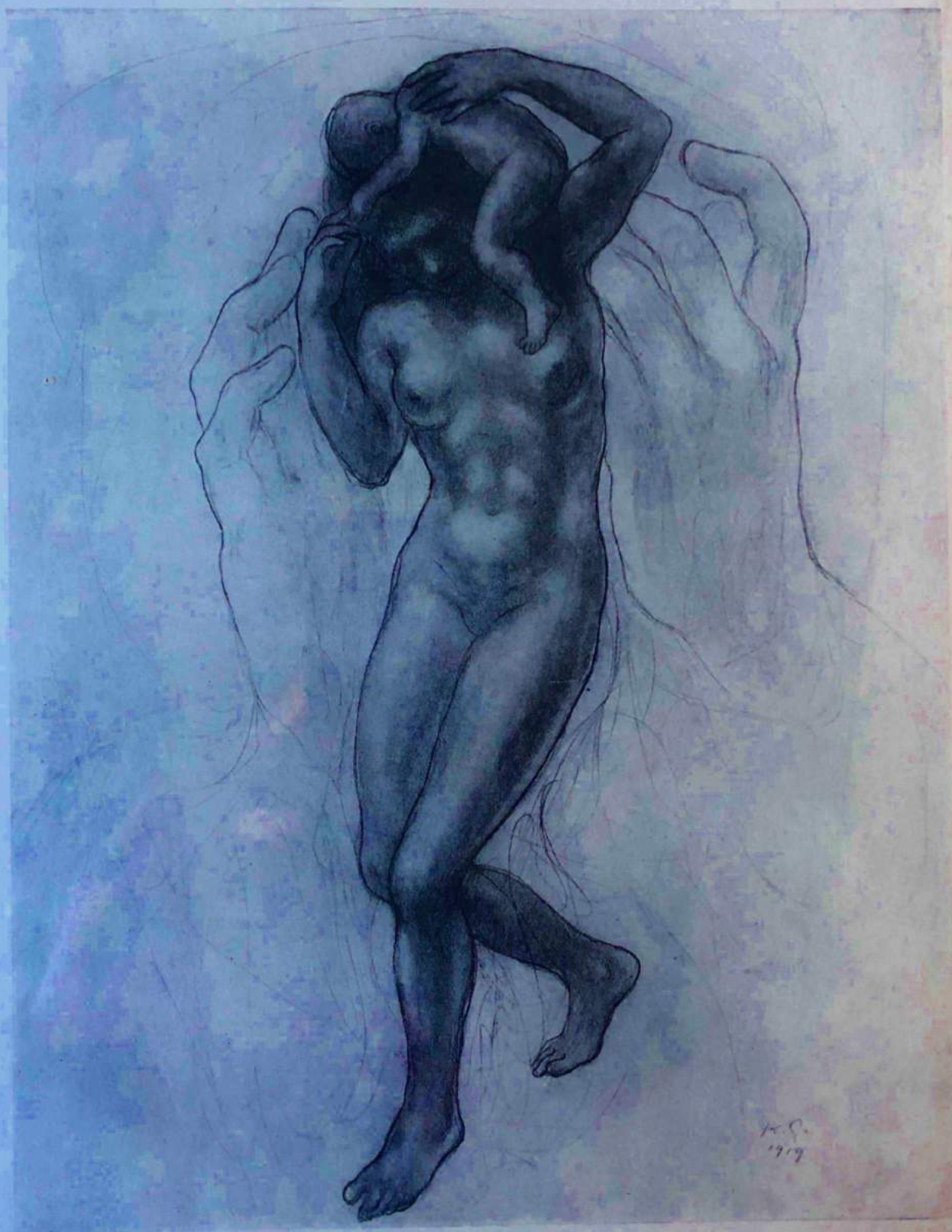
THE ROCK



THE WATERFALL



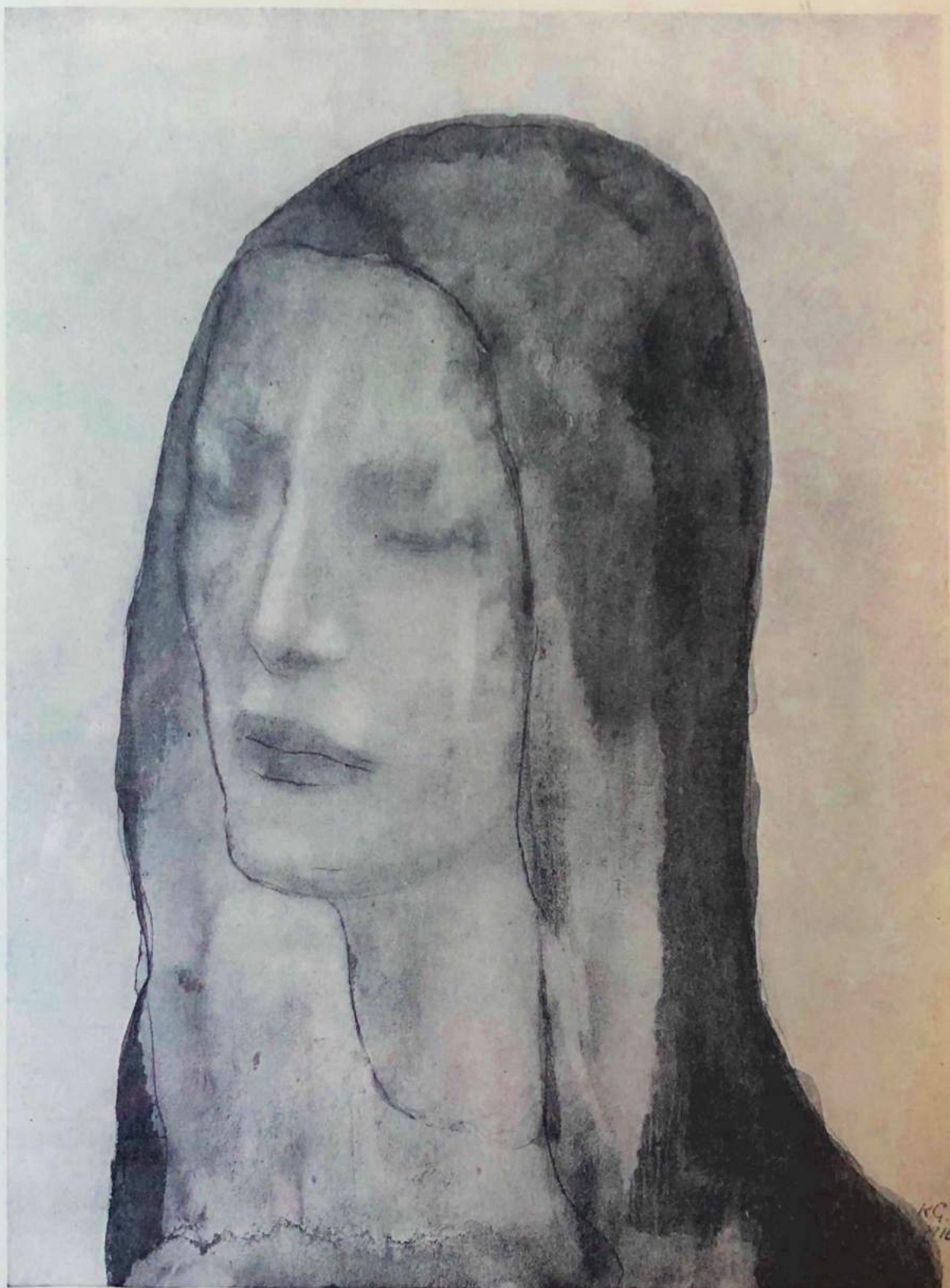
THE BURDEN



THE GREAT LONGING



VEILED FACE



CRUCIFIED



COMPASSION



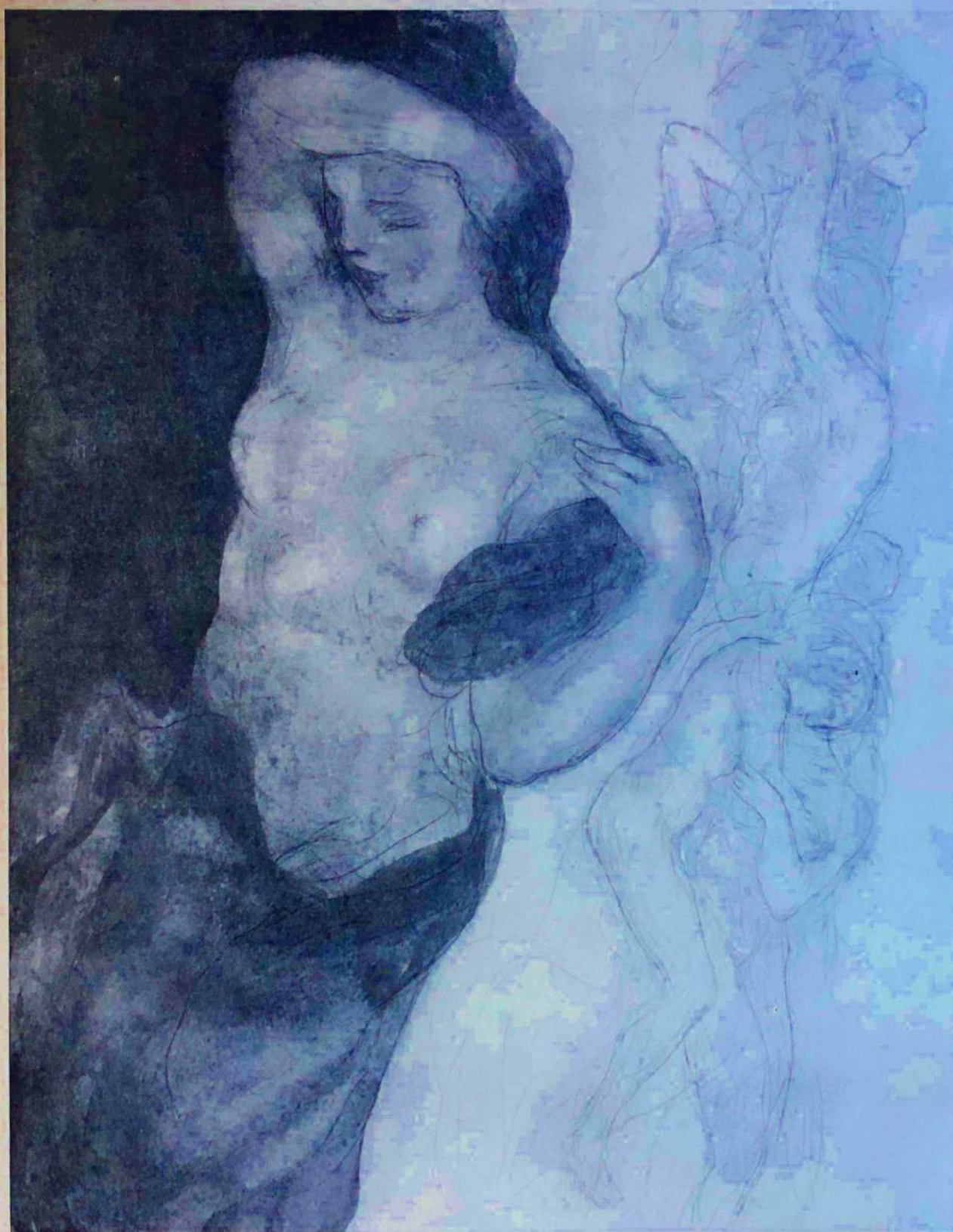
THE TRIANGLE



THE STRUGGLE



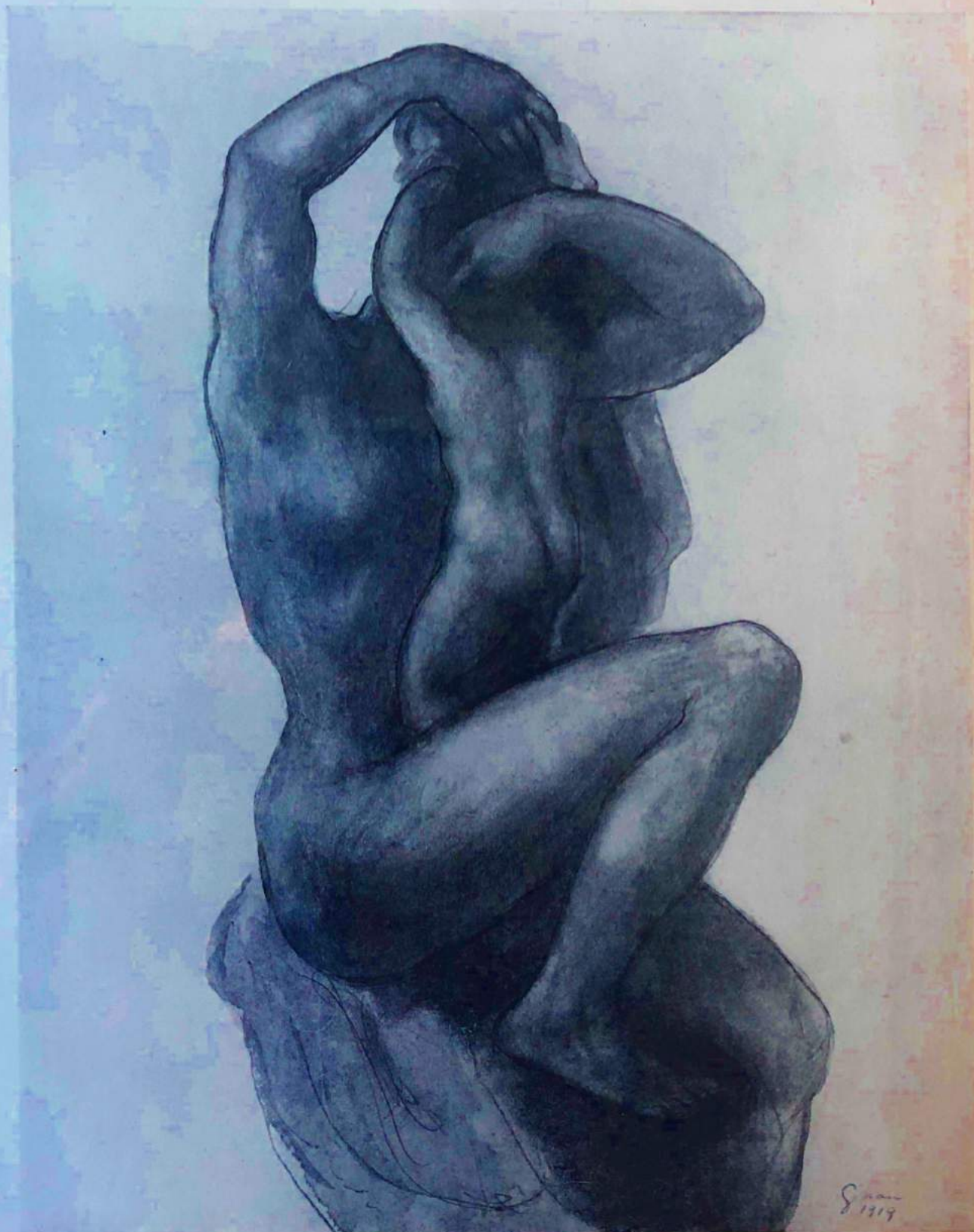
THE GREAT ALONENESS



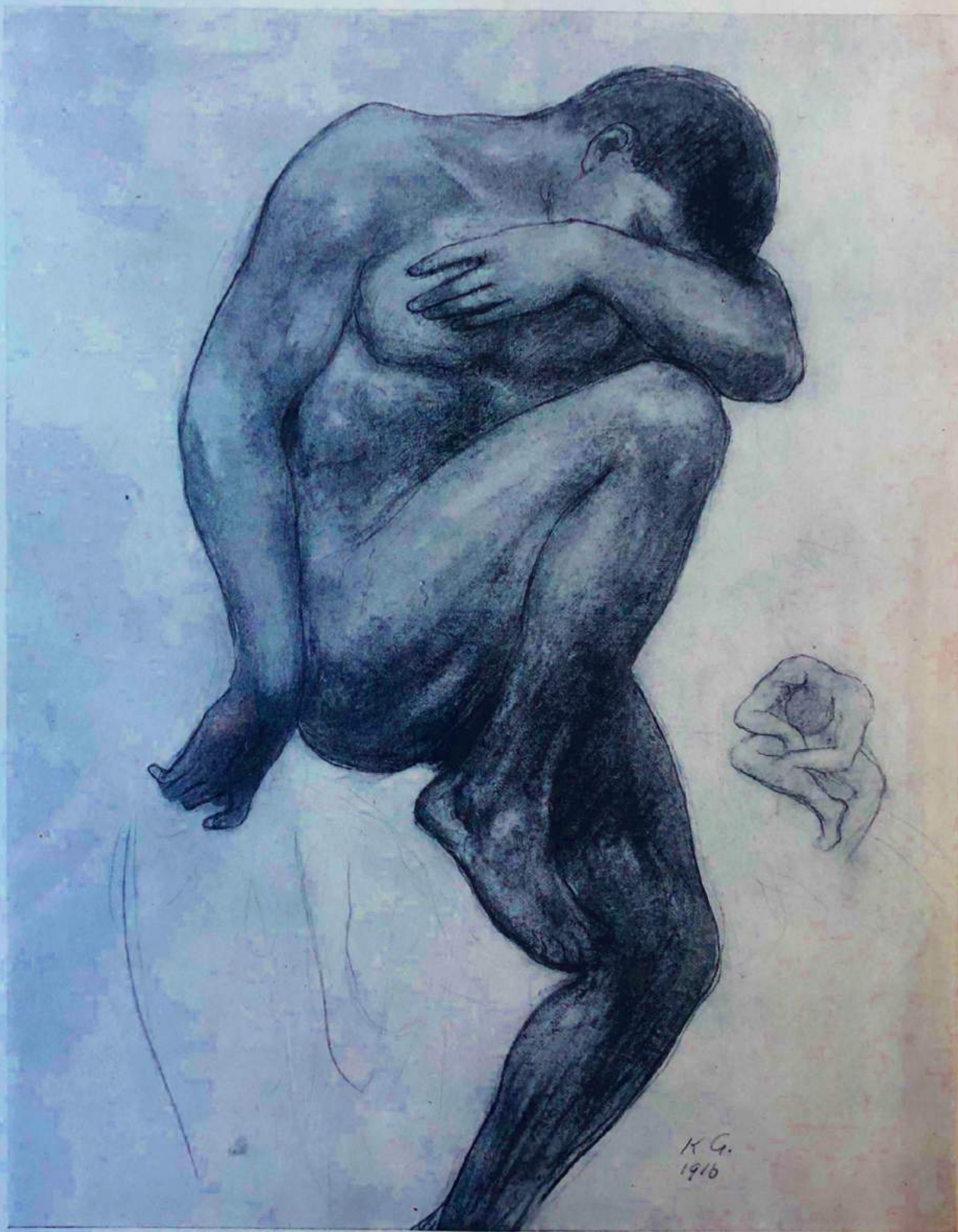
WOMAN WITH GARMENT

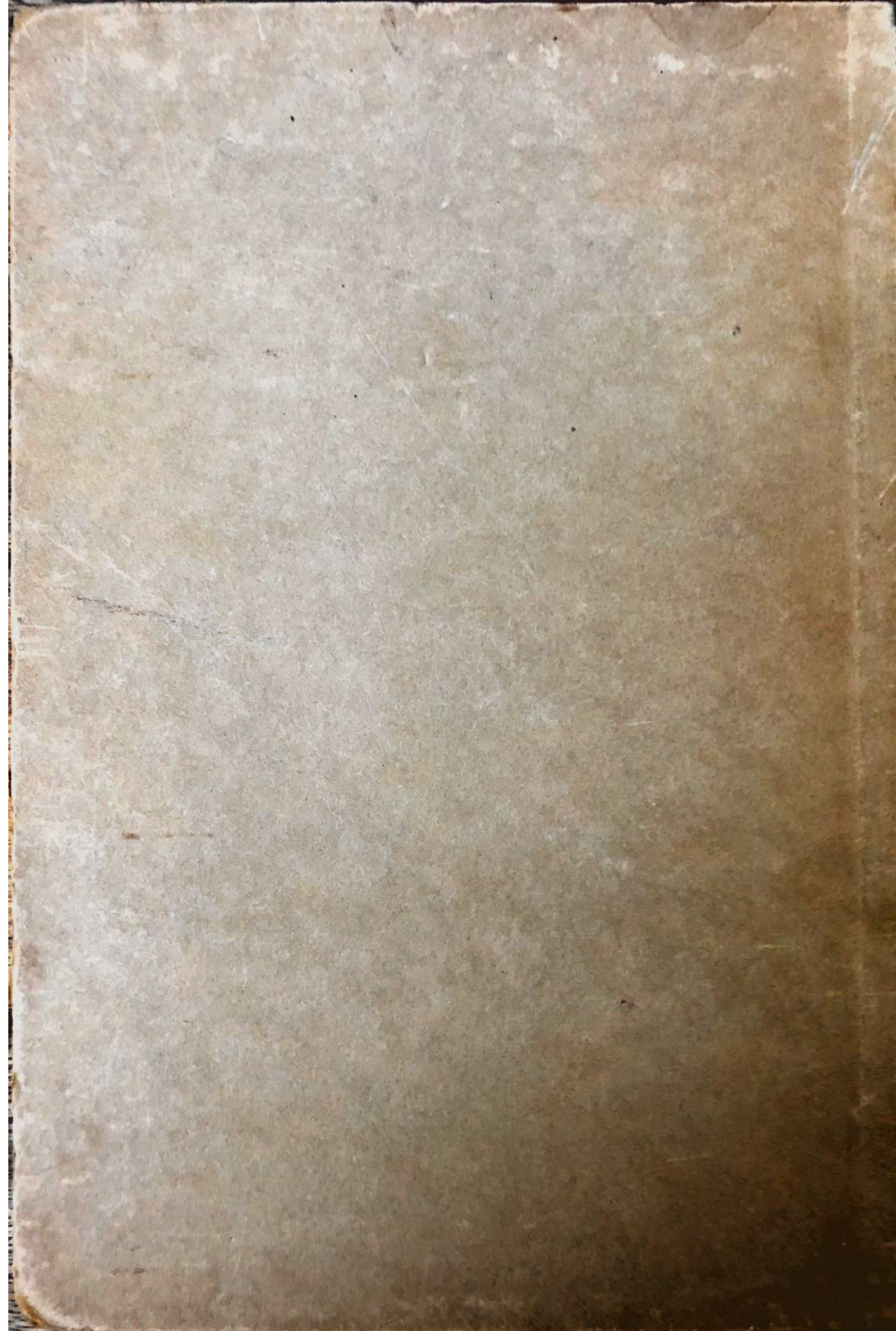


MOTHER AND CHILD



THE INNERMOST





TWENTY DRAWINGS

By KAHLIL GIBRAN

with an Introductory Essay

By ALICE RAPHAEL

KAHLIL GIBRAN'S poetry is known not only to millions who speak Arabic, but since the publication of *The Madman*, his first work in English, to Europe and America as well. His art has much of the quality of his poetry. Auguste Rodin, his friend, said of him: "I know of no one else in whom drawing and poetry are so linked together as to make him a new Blake."

These pictures represent the human form in attitudes expressing the eternal verities. There is the "Erdgeist"—the spirit of creation; the Transfiguration, expressing the suffering of mankind; there are delightful, delicate pictures of the Centaurs—who but Gibran could portray a *delicate* Centaur?—in their legendary battles, expressing the struggle of man against his brute nature. Of the twenty drawings one is in full color, the rest in wash with very faint pencil lining. The introductory appreciation is informing and complete.

The whole is a representative collection of the best work of one of the most remarkable figures of the day—a man who has brought the mysticism of the Near East to America and has chosen to throw in his lot with the artists of the occident in an endeavor to fuse new bonds of interest between the old world and the new.

Alfred A. Knopf



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