SPHINX FINE ART



**Maksimilian Aleksandrovich Voloshin (Kiev 1877 - Koktebel 1932)**

**Koktebel at Dusk**

with an indistinct dedication in Russian; signed in Cyrillic, inscribed and dated 'Koktebel'/1918' (lower right)
pencil, watercolour and ink on paper
26 x 34.7 cm (10¼ x 13½ in)

Maksimilian Aleksandrovich Voloshin's *Koktebel at Dusk* evokes a sense of calm which pervades the work. The rippled plains of Koktebel are marked with pencil, their skin-like folds adding an almost life-like quality to the landscape, as the mountainous expanse seems to heave a deep sigh. Above, the sun in all its glory casts a spherical, hazy light, the reflection of which is caught in the expanse of water below. The poetic nature and prominence given to the circular sun recalls the work of Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), in the way that it dominates and ripples outwards, as well as the work of Voloshin's contemporary Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947).

The serenity of the scene is enhanced by the artist's use of a restrained palette of blue, brown and green hues. The free, fluid movement of the artist's hand, and the apparent ease with which he delineates his forms, underline Voloshin's deep spiritual connection with Koktebel.

Koktebel, formerly known as Planerskoye, lies in southeastern Crimea, and is an area where Voloshin spent much of his childhood. Derived from the words *töbe,* meaning 'hill' or 'mountain', and *kök,* meaning 'sky blue', the origins of the name Koktebel, 'Land of the blue hills', are Turkic. Koktebel featured prominently in Voloshin's poetry and art, with his first collection of verse, published in 1910, containing over a dozen poems dedicated to the area. In addition to many watercolours, such as the present work, Voloshin devoted some sixty poems to this corner of the Crimea. 'Never were a poet's works so closely bound up with the place where he lived. He recreated the semi-mythical world of the

Cimmerii in pictures and verses. He painted landscapes of primeval eastern Crimea. Nature itself seemed to respond to Voloshin's art.'[1]

Many of Voloshin's landscapes of Koktebel were created from memory, becoming almost fantastical interpretations rather than exact reflections of the landscape. Voloshin created a mystical land, much like Roerich, and Konstantin Fyodorovich Bogaevsky (1872-1943). Voloshin was credited with launching the artistic career of Bogaevsky when he wrote a series of essays entitled Konstantin Bogaevsky, and stylistic comparisons are often made between the two artists.

One of the key representatives of Russian Symbolism, Voloshin was a poet, artist, philosopher and literary critic. His first collection of poetry appeared in 1910, and his collected essays were published in 1914. His poems were praised for their considerable historical observation, and drew on experiences from the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the ensuing Russian Civil War, appealing 'in the days of revolutions to be a human, not a citizen... in the disturbances of wars to realize the oneness. To be not a part, but all: not from one side, but from both'.

During the latter years of his life, Voloshin accompanied his literary and philosophical studies with painting, and gained additional recognition as a subtle watercolourist, with depictions of Crimean landscapes, such as the present work, forming the majority of his artistic legacy.

[1] Sossinsky, S., 'Keeping Aloof or Joining In the Fray', in *MoscowNews,* History; No.41, October 27, 1999.

**Artist description:**

Maximilian Alexandrovich Kirienko-Voloshin was a Russian poet. He was one of the significant representatives of the Symbolist movement in Russian culture and literature. He became famous as a poet and a critic of literature and the arts, being published in many contemporary magazines of the early 20th century, including "Vesy" ('Libra'), "Zolotoye runo" ('The Golden Fleece') and "Apollon". He was also known for his brilliant translations of a number of French poetic and prose works into Russian.

Voloshin was born in Kiev in 1877 and reportedly, "his schooling included a few years at the Polivanov establishment and a school in the Crimea, where in 1893 his mother had bought a cheap plot of land at Koktebel." After secondary school, he entered Moscow University during "a time of the resurgence of the radical student movement in Russia." Voloshin reportedly actively participated in it, "which resulted in his expulsion from the University in 1899." Not discouraged, Voloshin "resumed his travels the length and breadth of Russia, often on foot." In 1900, he worked with an expedition surveying the route of the Orenburg-Tashkent railway.

Upon his return to Moscow, Voloshin did not seek reinstatement at the university, but continued his travels to such places as Western Europe, Greece, Turkey, and Egypt. Reportedly, "his stay in Paris and travels all over France had a particularly deep effect on" him and he came back to Russia "a veritable Parisian."

Voloshin had a brief affair with Miss Sabashnikova, but they soon broke up, and this had a profound effect on his work. Gradually, Voloshin was drawn back to Koktebel in the Crimea, where he had spent much of his childhood. His first collection of poetry appeared in 1910, soon followed by others. His collected essays were published in 1914.

The Civil War prompted Voloshin to write long poems linking what was happening in Russia to its

distant, mythologized past. Later, Voloshin would be accused of the worst sin in the Soviet ideologue's book: keeping aloof from the political struggle between Reds and Whites. In fact, he did not for he protected the Whites from the Reds and the Reds from the Whites. His house, today a museum, still has a clandestine niche in which he hid people whose lives were in danger.

Miraculously, Voloshin survived the Civil War, and in the 1920s set up a free rest home for writers in his house, in accordance with his rejection of private property. Yet he continued to draw most of his inspiration from solitude and contemplation of nature.

Although some critics may note that Voloshin's poetry "may be esthetically inferior to that of Pasternak, say, or Akhmatova, and it is somewhat patchy," it has been noted that "it contains deep philosophical insights and tells us more about Russian history than the works of any other poet." Many of Voloshin's comments seem to be prophetic. During the latter years of his life, he accompanied his literary and philosophical studies with painting, and gained additional recognition as a subtle water-colour artist. Water colours of Crimean landscapes form the larger part of his artistic heritage.

**Collections**

M. Voloshin is represented in the following collections: State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; State Russian Museum, St Petersburg; M.A. Voloshin’s House Museum, Koktebel, and many private collections, amongst others.