

The Museum of Modern Art

West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Modernart

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PRESS PREVIEW:
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The ruin of a 14th century Gothic church which preoccupied Lyonel Feininger as a theme for paintings and drawings for more than three decades is the subject of an unusual exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, on view from August 1 through September 17. A major oil painting, Ruin by the Sea, thought to be lost for many years, was recently acquired by the Museum and is exhibited for the first time. One of three existing paintings of the ruin, the work is the focal point of the exhibition, which includes 24 drawings and watercolors on the subject.

LYONEL FEININGER: "THE RUIN BY THE SEA" is directed by William S. Lieberman, Director, and Eila Kokkinen, Assistant Curator, Drawings, Department of Drawings and Prints. The exhibition, which offers an opportunity to see Feininger's working methods and the evolution of his ideas, demonstrates the metamorphosis of his subject matter from factual reality, apparent in the earliest sketches, to the precise and exact delineation of form that he sought.

From the early 1920's, Lyonel Feininger had spent summers at Deep in Pomerania on the Baltic coast. On July 11, 1928, during an excursion to the nearby village of Hoff, he unexpectedly came upon the ruined church. Greatly excited by his discovery, that day he made twelve sketches on the spot. He followed these in 1928 and 1929 with drawings in the more exact architectural manner of his paintings.

A church had existed on the site as early as 1331, and when its vault later collapsed, the building was bricked over and retained only the Gothic windows of the choir. By 1868 the sea at the bottom of the cliff had approached to within three feet of the church. Dams and palings failed to save the church and in 1874 it was abandoned. Erosion caused the fall of large sections, until after the turn of the century only a wall and a portion of the choir remained. A supplementary panel shows the ruin photographed by the artist's son, Andreas Feininger, and
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earlier anonymous photographs dated about 1900 and 1924.

Feininger preferred to complete his oil paintings away from his subject, believing that its proximity bound him too closely to literal appearance. Away from Deep, in 1930, he completed Ruin by the Sea, the painting included in the exhibition.

Writing to his wife, Julia, in the summer of 1932, Feininger pinpointed the relationship of drawing to his painting: "In the medium of charcoal I have discovered a great relationship with pure painting. Jotting down one's first nebulous, chaotic conceptions, one gradually can work...through to firm ground and precise form. That which has been half-way indicated is open to further evolution. Nothing is quite definite until it has reached final clarity in the completed oil painting."

Lyonel Feininger was born in the United States in 1871 and spent the years between 1887 and 1936 in Germany. He came back to the United States in 1937 and lived here until his death in 1956. While in Germany, Feininger returned to the ruin in 1932 and 1934, and the exhibition includes a glowing watercolor of 1934. Feininger executed several larger watercolors on the same theme in 1953 from memory.

Ruin by the Sea was acquired by the Museum with funds provided by Mrs. Julia Feininger, Mr. and Mrs. Richard K. Weil and Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. Mrs. Julia Feininger, the artist's wife, has generously given most of the other works in the exhibition to the Museum. Two late. watercolors are the extended loan and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bareiss; an additional drawing is lent by the Joan and Lester Avnet Collection.

After its showing in New York, LYONEL FEININGER: "THE RUIN BY THE SEA" will tour under the auspices of the Museum's Department of Circulating Exhibitions.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Patricia B. Kaplan, Assistant Director, Press Services, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 245-3200.

LYONEL FEININGER: "THE RUIN BY THE SEA"

August 1 - September 17, 1967

Wall Label

Lyonel Feininger is presented here by a single theme, the ruin of a 14th-century Gothic church, a subject which was to preoccupy him from 1928 until his death in 1956. The exhibition, varying from quick sketches to carefully executed drawings and watercolors, features a painting in oil of 1930 recently purchased by The Museum of Modern Art with funds provided by Mrs. Julia Feininger, Mr. and Mrs. Richard K. Weil and Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. Feininger was accustomed to spend summer vacations at Deep in Pomerania on the Baltic coast, attracted by its wild and unpopulated coastline. While there, in July 1928 when he was fifty-seven, during an excursion to the nearby village of Hoff, he discovered at the top of a cliff a ruin overlooking the sea. Excited by his discovery, he described the event in a letter to his wife.

The ruin that intrigued him has been documented in the State Archives of the county of Stettin, Pomerania, which is now in East Germany. Records indicate that the Church at Hoff existed as early as 1331, and beyond it, three farmlands extended north to the sea. When its vault, originally built on Gothic arches, collapsed in later years, the building was bricked over and a wooden roof added, retaining only the Gothic windows of the choir. Gradually but inexorably the sea approached, eroding and inundating the farmlands. By 1868, the sea at the bottom of the cliff was only three feet from the church. Dams and palings failed to save the building from destruction, and it was abandoned in 1874. Falls carrying off large sections occurred in 1900, 1901 and 1903. When Feininger saw it, only a wall and a portion of the choir remained. On the day of his discovery, July 11, 1928, he sketched directly a dozen small studies of the ruin from various vantage points. These he followed later with drawings in the more exact and architectural manner of his

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paintings.

Feininger preferred to complete his oil paintings in surroundings removed from his subject, believing proximity bound him too closely to literal appearance. Away from Deep, in January 1930, he completed one of three existing paintings of the ruin, Ruin by the Sea. This, long thought to be lost, is the painting included in the exhibition.

The Museum of Modern Art is indebted to the artist's wife, Mrs. Julia Feininger, whose generous gifts to its collections have made this exhibition possible. Two late watercolors are the extended loan and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bareiss and an additional drawing is lent by the Joan and Lester Avnet Collection.

Eila Kokkinen

This exhibition has been prepared by the Department of Drawings and Prints for travel in the United States under the auspices of the Museum's Department of Circulating Exhibitions.

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Writing to his wife, Julia, on June 4, 1932, Feininger pinpointed the relationship of drawing to his painting: "In the medium of charcoal I have discovered a great relationship with pure painting. Jotting down one's first nebulous, chaotic conceptions, one gradually can work...through to firm ground and precise form. That which has been half-way indicated is open to further evolution. Nothing is quite definite until it has reached final clarity in the finished painting in oil." This series, The Ruin by the Sea, reveals the metamorphosis of the subject from its factual reality to the precise and pure delineation of form he sought.

He revisited the ruin in 1932 and 1934, and the resulting drawings include the particularly lucid and glowing watercolor of 1934. In 1953, after having been in the United States for sixteen years, he returned to the theme and executed several large watercolors, achieving a delicate and further dematerialization of form.

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August 1 - September 17, 1967

Checklist

In the listing below, titles in parentheses are descriptive titles. In statement of dimensions, sheet size is given, height preceding width. Dates in parentheses are unscripted. Acquisition numbers are followed by photographic negative numbers in parentheses.

- (Cliffs and sea). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 82.63. (S-18.500).
- (Cliffs and sea). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 83.63. (S-18.499).
- (Cliffs and sea with ruin). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 85.63. (S-18.501).
- (Ruin on the cliff). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 86.63. (S-18.497).
- (Ruin on the cliff). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 87.63. (S-18.502).
- (Ruin on the cliff). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 88.63. (S-18.498).
- (Ruin on the cliff). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 89.63. (S-18.506).
- (Ruin on the cliff with two trees). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 91.63. (S-18.503).
- (Ruin on the cliff). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 92.63. (S-18.504).
- (Ruin on the cliff). July 11, 1928. Pencil, 5 1/2 x 8 3/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 93.63. (S-18.522).
- Ruin by the Sea, I. August 6, 1928. Pen and ink, 11 1/4 x 16 1/8".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 94.63. (S-18.282).
- Ruin by the Sea, II. August 7, 1928. Pen and ink, 11 1/4 x 15 7/8".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 95.63. (S-18.284).
- Ruin by the Sea, V. August 8, 1928. Pen and ink, 11 1/4 x 16 1/8".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 96.63. (S-18.283).
- Ruin by the Sea, VI. August 25, 1928. Pen and ink, 11 1/8 x 16 1/8",
irreg. Lent by the Joan and Lester Avnet Collection, New York. 67.769.
(Petersen 866).

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Ruin on the Cliff. August 20, 1929. Charcoal, 11 5/8 x 18 1/4".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 97.63. (S-18.290).

Ruin by the Sea, II. August 21, 1929. Charcoal, 11 1/2 x 17".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 98.63. (S-18.289).

Ruin by the Sea. 1930. Oil on canvas, 27 x 43 3/8". Purchased with funds
provided by Mrs. Julia Feininger, Mr. and Mrs. Richard K. Weil and Mr. and
Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 593.66. (Petersen 2634).

(Two compositions of the ruin, one with figure of woman). July 17, 1934.
Pencil, 5 3/4 x 8 7/8". Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 101.63. (S-18.520).

(Ruin on the cliff). July 17, 1934. Pencil, 5 3/4 x 8 7/8".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 102.63. (S-18.505).

(Ruin on the cliff). July 17, 1934. Graphite and colored pencil, 5 5/8 x 8 7/8".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 100.63. (S-18.508).

Ruin by the Sea, II. 1934. Watercolor, pen and ink, 12 x 18 1/2".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 99.63. (S-18.291).

Ruin on the Cliff. 1935. Charcoal, 12 3/8 x 18 1/2".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 103.63. (S-18.287).

Ruin on the Cliff. (1935). Charcoal, 12 3/8 x 19".
Gift of Mrs. Julia Feininger. 104.63. (S-18.288).

Church on the Cliff. July 3, 1953. Charcoal, wash, pen and ink, 12 5/8 x 19 1/4".
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bareiss. 344.63. (S-18.524).

Church on the Cliffs. 1953. Charcoal, wash, pen and ink, 12 5/8 x 19 1/8".
Extended loan from Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bareiss. EL 63.607. (S-18.523).

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