



**Odilon Redon (1840-1916)**

*Ecstasy (L'extase)*, 1880s

Charcoal on buff paper  
19½ by 14¾ inches (49.5 by 37.5 cm.)

**Provenance**

Sale, Kornfeld & Klipstein, Berne, 18 June 1965, lot 958, ill.  
Galerie van de Loo, Munich, 1977, 1986  
Private collection, United Kingdom  
Sale, Christie's, 30 November 1993, lot 128  
The Lefevre Gallery, London  
Sale, Christie's, London, 29 June 2000, lot 531  
Private collection, United States  
Sale, Cornette de Saint Cyr, Paris, 6 July 2011, lot 21  
Barry Friedman, New York, 2014  
Private collection, New York

**Exhibited**

New York, David Zwirner, *Endless Enigma: Eight Centuries of Fantastic Art*, 12 September-27 October 2018

**Literature**

*World Collectors Annuary*, vol. XVII, 1965, no. 3728, p. 376 (*Die Ekstase*)  
A. Wildenstein, *Odilon Redon, catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint et dessiné, Portraits et figures*, Paris 1998, Vol. I, p. 91, no. 211, ill.

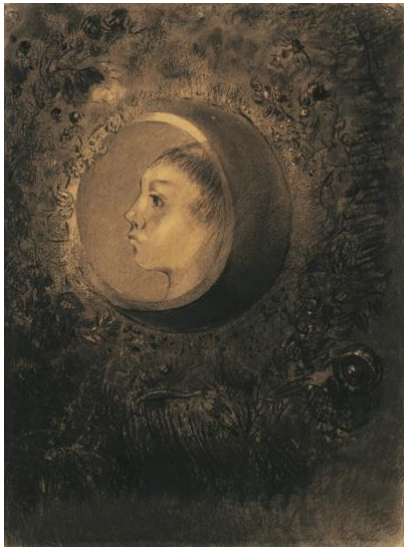
**Note**

Odilon Redon is an amorphous artist, who explored the medium of drawing as an idiosyncratic practice. Trained under Jean-Léon Gérôme and Rodolphe Bresdin, this highly conventional path nevertheless led to an unparalleled imagination over observation of nature, reinterpreting reality to create extraordinary creatures. Through the technique of lithography and etching, Redon discovered infinite gradations of tone and richness of light and dark. His reputation flourished, due in part to the availability of his prints, and he became a celebrated figure in fin-de-siècle Paris, admired by the Symbolists with whom he shared an enthusiasm for the fantastic, mystical, and sublime forces found beneath the surface of everyday life. Using nature as his starting point, Redon imagined new worlds through his enigmatic creations.

Writers with fantastical imaginations, like Edgar Allen Poe and Gustave Flaubert, inspired an essential part of his work, almost entirely executed in black until 1890, when Redon introduced polychromy. Redon found black the most effective to express emotions and imagination. His fascination with darkness was accompanied by a powerful attraction to the world of the indeterminate, the phantoms of insomnia, and the monstrous dreams and obscure fantasies usually rendered invisible by daylight. His *noirs*, executed in charcoal or ink, reveal a disturbing world inhabited by deformed beings and shadows.

Exploring the esoteric aspect of the human soul, imbued with the mechanisms of dreams, Redon's *Ecstasy (L'extase)* evokes a state of being. A humanish figure with wide open mouth, deformed by a silent cry is pushed out of the luminous cell behind it. Already shrinking and soon to disappear: the transparent blob has released its mysterious nucleus. *Ecstasy* seems to be angst birthed by the unconscious. Redon's hybrid creature with its grotesque grimace, oscillating between a human being and an animal, does not impress upon us a state of euphoria.

By his own admission, a title "is not justified unless it is vague, indeterminate, and aspiring, even



confusedly equivocal." To this sentiment Redon added: "My drawings inspire and do not define themselves. They determine nothing. They place us, just as music does, in the ambiguous world of the indeterminate."<sup>1</sup> Possibly *Ecstasy* was inspired by *C'est l'extase langoureuse*, one of Claude Debussy's most sophisticated experiments in tonal compositions from 1887. Yet *Ecstasy* does not lend itself to a singular interpretation. Rather, the artist requires us to use our imagination to find meaning according to our own sensitivities and inclinations.

**Odilon Redon**

*Cell*, ca. 1879-1883

Charcoal, black chalk and black pastel with stumping and erasing, on pale pink wove paper, 50.8 x 37.8 cm.

The Art Institute, Chicago, 1950.1421

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Hendrix, ed., *Noir: The Romance of Black in 19th-Century French Drawings and Prints*, exh.cat. The Getty, Los Angeles 2016