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Max Höser

(Bavaria, 1902 – 1981)

Self-portrait, with a hand study

1919

signed and dated lower right:

M. Höser / 1919

pen and ink on paper

46.2 x 34.3 cm.;

18 1/4 x 13 1/2 in.

Provenance

Private collection, Pforzheim, probably by descent from the artist until 2022.

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Very little is known about the Bavarian artist Max Höser. Clearly though, at the outset of his career, he was a young man brimming in self-confidence and talent. This pen and ink self-portrait dates to 1919, the year after the Great War, when Höser was seventeen years old. Despite the forceful and confident stare, Höser's downy moustache betrays his tender age.

The drawing is a *tour de force*, displaying impressive technical skill. The volumes are created for the most part with scratchy, hatched pen lines, with thicker lines in the collar and hair. Höser has drawn a spidery right hand at the lower edge and there are a mass of inarticulate forms at the lower left. Here we see the experimentation and playfulness of a young artist. Looking at the portrait, so powerful and skilfully put together, it is beyond surprising that Höser did not go on to have a successful career, though he does have a footpath named after him in Bayerisches Gmain, in south-eastern Bavaria on the Austrian border!

The present work probably descended in the family of the artist, as when it was acquired at auction in Pforzheim, it came with a group of other studies by the artist from throughout his career, including a second early self-portrait from 1918 and a portrait of a young woman from the same year (fig. 1).

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Figure 1. Max Höser, *Portrait of a young woman*, 1918, pencil on paper, 28 x 20 cm.
Private collection