

ROALD KRISTIAN

FROM
MONTMARTRE
TO
BLOOMSBURY

ORIGINAL WOODCUTS
1915-1923



[PRIVATE
COLLECTION]



“Roald Kristian’s work has a starkness of detail and strength in contrast, and although it seems to be simple at first blush, it is wonderfully expressionistic... He didn’t seem to attach much to colours or symbolic meaning, he was instead much more interested in the idea of line”
(Art and the Aesthete).

We are thrilled to present original works by the Omega Workshops and Bloomsbury-related artist Roald Kristian, husband of the noted British bohemian artist Nina Hamnett. They were acquired many years ago by two enthusiast collectors of Bloomsbury art and literature. They are offered here for the first time. Only a handful examples of the artist’s oeuvre – chiefly the books and periodicals he illustrated or contributed to – can be found in institutional holdings, among others at the British Museum, The Courtauld Gallery, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, Cambridge and Oxford Universities, the National Library of Ireland, Harvard Library and the Yale Center for British Art [*A Bestiary*], U.S.A., Victoria University Library, Canada, and the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet in Paris. Items in private hands are very rare and desirable.

The painter, illustrator and designer Edgar Roald Kristian de Bergen (1893-?) was born in Norway. His father was an artist, his exact profession is unknown, but a theatrical sphere seems implied. Edgar met Nina Hamnet (1890-1956) in Paris in the summer of 1914 amidst the exciting artistic community of Montparnasse, which included Brancusi, Modigliani, Zadkine, Cocteau, Diaghilev and Picasso. Hamnet was studying at Marie Vassilieff’s Academy where Fernand Léger taught and stayed for a while at La Ruche with many of the leading members of the avant-garde living there at the time. She brought Kristian back to London as her lover and they were married in October of the same year. It is suggested that he adopted his two middle names, Roald and Kristian, in response to anti-German feeling in England. Kristian had not registered as an alien and was arrested in April 1917 and deported back to France three months later. He is said to have fought with the Belgian army. His trace was lost afterwards. The couple’s somewhat ambiguous relationship is documented in Walter Sickert’s painting *The Little Tea Party: Nina Hamnett and Roald Kristian* of 1915-16 (Tate Gallery, London).

Through Nina Hammet, Kristian became involved with Roger Fry (1866–1934) and his Omega Workshops. Founded in 1913, the Workshops employed some of the most radical avant-garde artists of the day, with Vanessa Bell (1879–1961) and Duncan Grant (1885–1978) as co-directors. Their anti-establishment approach paired with Post-Impressionist experimentalism produced modern designs and items for the home, from printed fabrics and textiles to ceramics, furniture and clothing. Fry's philosophy that art was an integral part of life found its most convincing expression in his radical approach to interior design, which shattered the conventional divide between the fine and applied arts. In establishing the Omega, Fry also wanted to provide young, visionary artists with regular work which, in turn, would generate a steady income and support their efforts to focus on their own art. He insisted that objects should be valued aesthetically rather than for the artist's reputation and so all of the Workshops' designs and products were unsigned and marked only with the Greek Omega letter. Later, it became an important bastion of the peace movement, providing employment for conscientious objectors, as well as a gathering space for talks and exhibitions. The Workshops closed down in 1919.

Kristian was active for some two years at the Omega painting murals (for the art dealer Arthur Ruck at 4 Berkeley Street, London, 1915, with Fry, Hammet and Dolores Courtney) and creating lampshade and rug designs. With his help, Fry was able to add publishing to the activities of the Omega; the young artist illustrated the first two Omega books (*Men of Europe* and *Simpson's Choice*, 1915) and contributed two pieces to *Original Woodcuts by Various Artists* (1918). He also made marionettes and put on a show of them to music by Debussy (*La Boîte à joujoux*, 1915).

Though fluent in French and German, Kristian lacked English. But despite this, and penury, he seems to have quickly made useful contacts. *Colour Magazine* could say of him, only about four months after his arrival in England: "Roald Kristian, a drawing of whose appeared in our last number, is a Norwegian by birth, and possesses a remarkable talent for sculpture. Kristian is also interested in the art of woodcutting, in which medium he has done some fine work. He was also responsible for the marionette show recently given at the Omega Workshops, all the figures and scenery being designed and executed by him".

Between September 1915 and February 1917, *The Egoist* carried a series of Kristian's woodcut portrait heads of literary and artistic figures (twelve in total). "*The Egoist*, an individualist review, formerly the *New Freewoman*, was published from January 1914 to December 1919. This journal, owned by Harriet Weaver and with Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot among its editors, played an important part in literary life during the First World War printing articles, poetry, reviews, news and obituaries. Weaver serialized several longer pieces, principally James Joyce's *A portrait of the artist as a young man*. Apart from three-line drawings by Gaudier-Brzeska and

a pen-and-ink heading by Kristian for a serial, very few illustrations were printed in *The Egoist* so the twelve woodcut portraits by Kristian are all the more remarkable. They form an interesting gallery of an aspect of literary Europe as it was then" (Greenwood).

Francis Marsden and Austin Osman Spare's literary and artistic journal *Form* illustrated woodcuts of animals – four in the April 1916 issue and three in April 1917. "Unlike the portraits, the animal woodcuts bear no relationship to the text in which they are set and may well have been originally executed by Kristian for his own pleasure" (Collins). Kristian was invited to stay with the aristocrat and society hostess Lady Ottoline Morrell at Garsington and was highly respected by Fry and the group who produced *The New Age*, for which he illustrated articles and even contributed an obituary note on Albert Aurier, thus showing a good knowledge of modern European art, literature and music, even though he was only 22.

A Bestiary with seventeen of his woodcuts of animals was published by Jean Varda and John Rodker at the Ovid Press in 1920. The same year two of his bookplate designs appeared in "*Petit recueil d'ex-libris, 16 bois graves originaux par plusieurs artistes modernes*" edited by Editions Atlas.

The artist had an exhibition of his woodcuts at the Omega Workshops in June 1915. No catalogue remains for this exhibition shown concurrently with Vanessa Bell's costumes and it seems unlikely that one was ever produced. Works, including oil paintings, were also shown at the Independent Artists' Exhibition at the Alpine Club Galleries, London, in April 1916.

Kristian's work falls into three main categories which were also favoured by Roger Fry: still lifes, animals and portrait heads. His "affinity with both the avant-garde developments in Munich before the war and the graphic art of the Blaue Reiter artists, particularly Kandinsky and Franz Marc, is apparent in his designs" (Alexandra Gerstein, *Beyond Bloomsbury*, p. 154).

Ref.

Greenwood (Jeremy), Omega Cuts: Woodcuts and Linocuts by Artists associated with the Omega Workshops and the Hogarth Press, (1998)

Nina Hamnet, Laughing Torso, Reminiscences, 1932

Collins (Judith), The Omega Workshops, London, 1983

Gerstein (Alexandra), Beyond Bloomsbury. Designs of the Omega Workshops 1913-19, London, The Courtauld Gallery, 2009

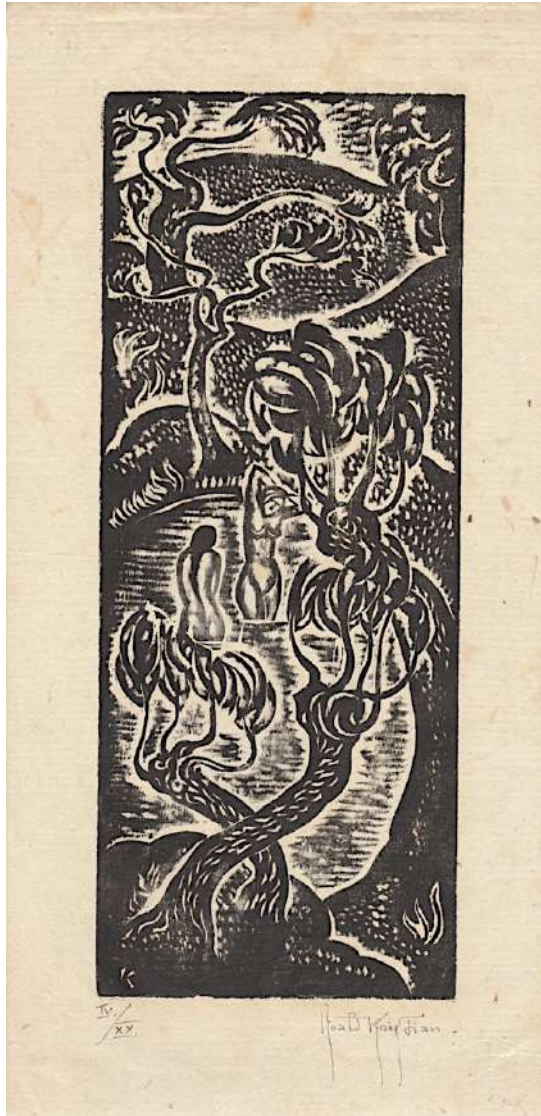
Green (Christopher), Art made Modern. Roger Fry's Vision of Art, London, The Courtauld Gallery, 1999

The Omega Workshops. Alliance and Enmity in English Art 1911-1920, London, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1984

The Omega Workshops 1913-19. Decorative Arts of Bloomsbury, London, Crafts Council Gallery, 1984

The Charleston Trust

The Bloomsbury Workshop



1
THE BATHERS
Woodcut
c.1916
241 x 96 mm
Numbered IV/XX and
signed in pencil
One of four known copies
Greenwood, p. 134
(illustrated)
€1800



2

BISON

Woodcut

c.1915

97 x 131 mm

Fourth illustration in *A Bestiary*, Ovid Press, 1920

Reproduced in smaller format on the back cover of

Form, volume 1, number 2, April 1917

Greenwood, p. 126 (illustrated)

€600



3
STAG
Woodcut
1915
77 x 121 mm
Proof on tan paper
Signed and dated XIII (X) MCMXV in ink
Seventh illustration in *A Bestiary*, Ovid Press, 1920
Reproduced in smaller format in *Form*, volume 1, number 1, April 1916
Greenwood, p. 127
€850



4

STAG

Woodcut

1915

77 x 121 mm

Proof on thin white paper

Seventh illustration in *A Bestiary*, Ovid Press, 1920

Reproduced in smaller format in *Form*, volume 1, number 1, April 1916

Greenwood, p. 127 (illustrated)

€600



5
DEER AND MOON
Woodcut
c.1916
120 x 79 mm
Sixteenth
illustration in
A Bestiary, Ovid
Press, 1920
Greenwood,
p. 132
(illustrated)
€1500



6
CUP
Woodcut in b/w and
colour
c.1917
165 x 104 mm
Not in Greenwood
€800



7

WYNDHAM LEWIS (1882-1957)

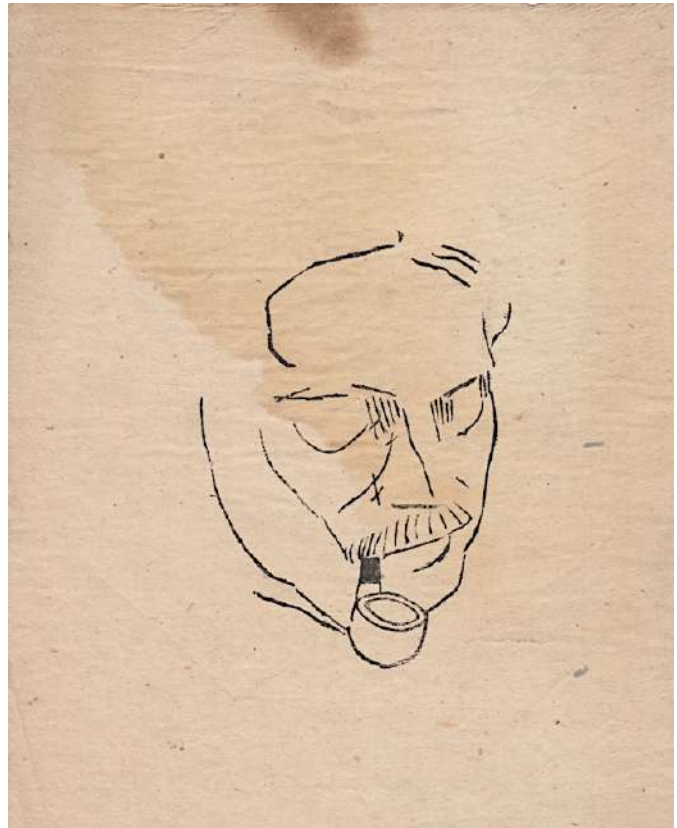
. Preparatory sketch in brown ink, 105 x 73 mm

. Woodcut portrait, 105 x 73 mm

The Egoist, 1 March 1916, p. 40

Greenwood, p. 112 (illustrated)

€600





8

CATTLE

Woodcut

c.1919

114 x 80 mm

Eleventh illustration
in *A Bestiary*, Ovid

Press, 1920

Greenwood, p. 129

(illustrated)

€600



Paul Klee
1920

9

GOATS

Woodcut

1920

128 x 89 mm

Signed and dated

MCMXX in pencil

Ninth illustration in

A Bestiary, Ovid

Press, 1920

Greenwood, p. 128

(illustrated)

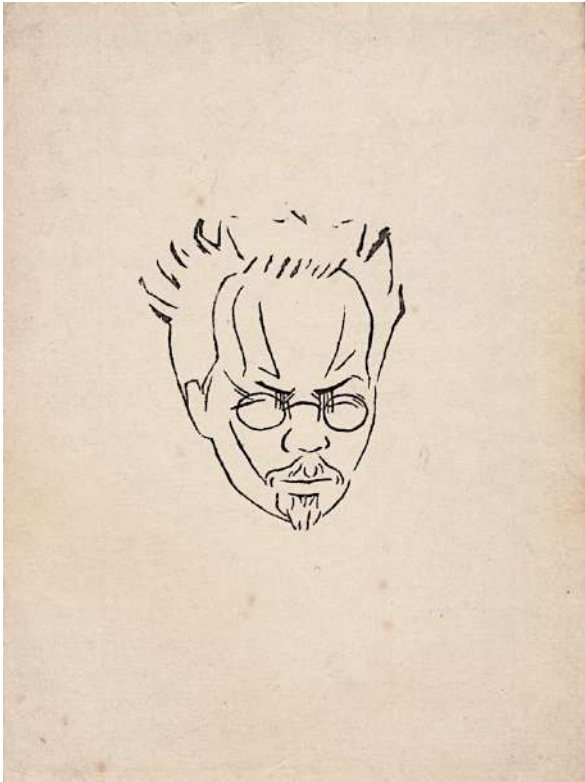
€900



10
FECUNDITY
Woodcut in bistre
c.1917
77 X 78 mm
Proof on thin laid paper
Numbered XXIV-XXXIII and
signed in pencil
Greenwood, p. 133
(illustrated)
€750



11
CHAMOIS
Woodcut
c.1919
108 x 79 mm
One of three
known copies
Greenwood, p. 133
(illustrated)
€1000



12

ALEKSEI REMIZOV (1877-1957)

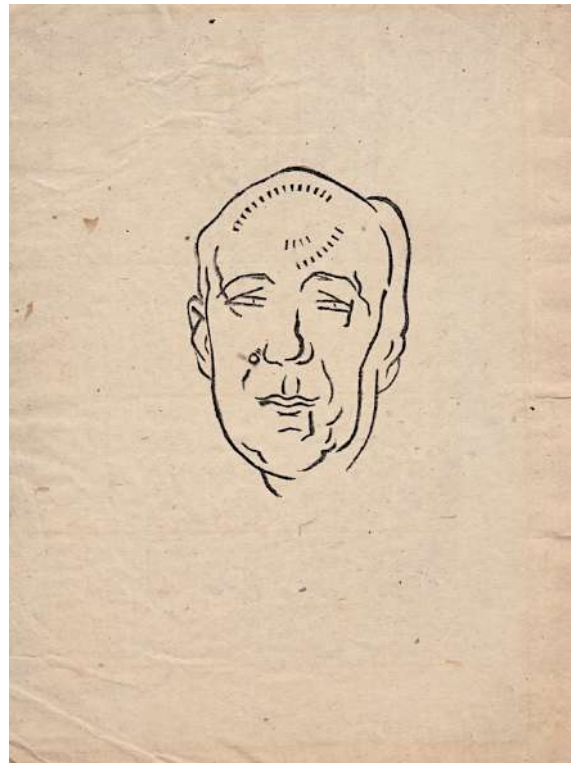
Woodcut portrait

86 x 72 mm

The Egoist, 1 February 1916, p. 28

Greenwood, p. 112 (illustrated)

€250



13

FEODOR SOLOGUB (1863-1927)

Woodcut portrait

91 x 61 mm

The Egoist, 1 January 1916, p. 4

Greenwood, p. 111 (illustrated)

€250



14

FECUNDITY

Woodcut

77 x 78 mm

c.1917

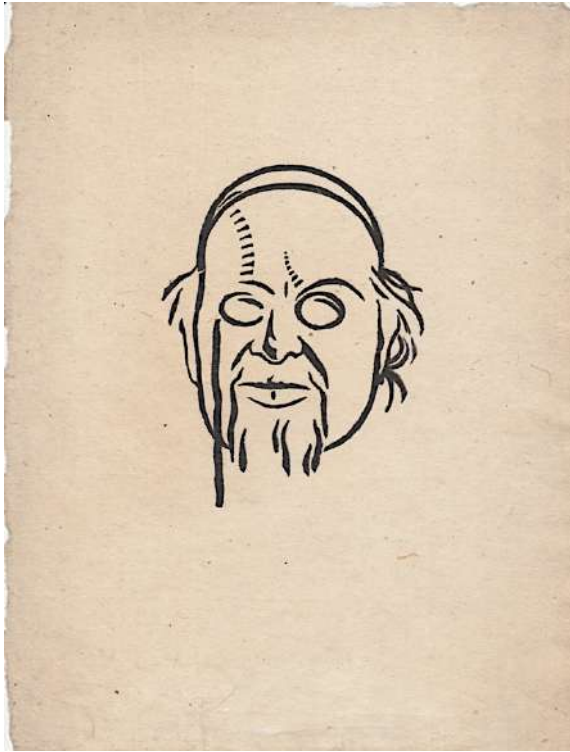
Proof on grey paper

Numbered in pencil

XXVI-XXXIII

Greenwood, p. 133

€600



15

REMY DE GOURMONT (1858-1915)

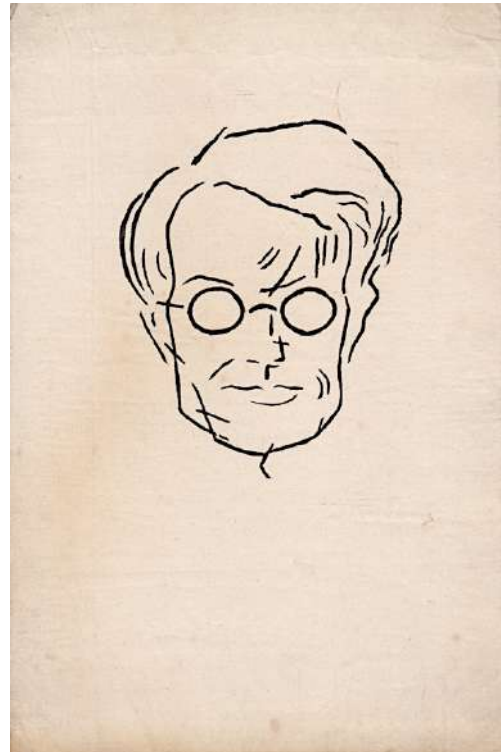
Woodcut portrait

95 x 73 mm

The Egoist, 1 November 1915, p. 169

Greenwood, p. 110 (illustrated)

€250



16

F.S. FLINT (1885-1960)

Woodcut portrait

114 x 90 mm

The Egoist, 1 December 1915, p. 188

Greenwood, p. 111 (illustrated)

€250



17
WOMEN BATHING
Woodcut, coloured
in shades of
green, brown and
grey
1923
216 x 153 mm
Signed and dated
MCMXXIII in pencil
Not in Greenwood
€1000



18

RICHARD ALDINGTON
(1892-1962)

. Sketch in red
gouache

1915

187 x 166 mm

. Woodcut portrait

99 x 75 mm

The Egoist

1 October

1915, p. 159

Greenwood, p. 110

(illustrated)

€1800





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