



HERBERT ROLF SCHLEGEL

(Breslau, 1889 - Landsberg am Lech, 1972)

Sieben freunde (Self-portrait with six women)

monogrammed and dated lower right: *HRS 1931*

pencil

121 x 151 cm

Provenance:

Private collection, Germany

Striking for both its size and subject matter, like many of Schlegel's works this exceptionally large drawing is charged with gender ambiguity and innuendo. Drawn in 1931 whilst Schlegel was living in Dießen am Ammersee, what appears to depict a group of female friends assembled on a verdant outcrop is in fact an elaborate self-portrait with the artist shown directly in the centre. The close crop hair, sharp nose, ankle-length buckled boots, side-buttoned shorts, and silk shirt are all elements recognisable from another self-portrait by the artist in the Schwules Museum (Gay Museum) in Berlin which was painted just a year before.

The group of women that surround Schlegel are dressed in fashionable modern clothing, with short haircuts, 'masculine' shorts and loosely-draped dresses, pleated skirts or shorts. These modernising traits are complimented by symbols of autonomy, such as the act of same-sex affection in the upper right, the timepiece and pouchette under the woman's arm to the right and the open clutch of the woman to the left. Androgyny and the subversion of gender norms are recurring themes in Schlegel's works of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as a near-fetishistic interest in fashion, which reflects the liberalism of the period.