

# KARL&FABER

## Carl Spitzweg

## Lot 29

The Forbidden Path

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Low estimate :

€ 100,000

High estimate :

€ 120,000

Buyers premium incl. VAT :

32 %

**Artist**

Carl Spitzweg

**Additional description**

Öl auf Leinwand. (Um 1840). 32,3 x 25,7 cm. Bezeichnet und undeutlich datiert (?) unten links auf dem Feldstein „S im Rhombus“. Gerahmt.

**Period**

(1808 - München - 1885)

**Technique**

Gemälde

**Provenance**

Neumeister, München, Auktion, 2.7.2003, Los 776; seitdem in Privatbesitz, Süddeutschland.

In 1920, a now forgotten silent film by Henrik Galeen premiered under the same title as our painting: *The Forbidden Road*, in which the film's protagonist, a Dutch bailiff, goes astray because he takes a fancy to the innkeeper's wife Susanne. In order to get rid of his troublesome rival, the bailiff has his husband arrested and imprisoned on flimsy charges. However, the innkeeper breaks out of his cell and Susanne frees herself from the bailiff's clutches, which results in him receiving two good beatings - from the deceived innkeeper and from his own wife. Galeen's comedy was only moderately successful and we can rule out at least the latter for the protagonist of our picture - he belongs to the clergy, but he too is at a point where he is tempted to a certain extent. The priest - a Jesuit - has given meaning to his walk in the foothills of the Alps by reading a book, probably a breviary, studying texts for the Liturgy of the Hours, but now he has interrupted his reading, holding the open breviary in his hands clasped behind his back. He has reached a barrier on his way, a cudgel fastened between two posts blocks his path - a path lined with a cornfield and vines, but where does it lead? A sign attached to a winding, towering pole warns him that this path is forbidden. The titular sign protrudes steeply like a cross, preventing the priest from taking the wrong path, where beyond the barrier a soldier in a hussar's cap and a lady have stepped into the cornfield. They have met for a rendezvous to see how the tender little plant of love is developing. This path is barred to the priest, but he is in doubt, wondering what it would be like to cross this border, possibly even to follow the couple and eavesdrop on them. We don't know what the priest decides, but he is clearly at a crossroads, as in the ancient myth of Hercules, who had to choose between virtue and vice - the priest pauses exactly where a small path branches off from the path denied to him, leading to a village and its church with its towering twin spires. He has to decide whether to turn off towards his church or cross a border and enter regions that are actually off-limits to him, even if only in his

mind. Spitzweg leaves it open as to how the priest decides whether to stray from the "right" path or return to the bosom of his church. As the large back figure dominating the picture, this marvellous invention of Romanticism, he is alone with his decision, nor does he find any contact with the viewer, from whom he has turned away. He is on his own, just like the viewer, who has to ask himself how he would have decided. In 1850, the story "The Forbidden Path" was published in Vienna, which the author Joseph Heilmann defines more precisely in its subtitle as a tale of Austrian country life for young people. In the course of the story, children learn about the importance of community and family and are introduced to the requirements of a righteous and God-pleasing, virtuous life. It is a narrative guide to morality and ethics - we do not know whether Spitzweg, who read a great deal himself, was familiar with this short work, indeed it is unlikely, but it shows how the subject of morality and virtue, the question of an honest and upright life in general, was of particular concern to the aspiring middle classes in this period of upheaval in the 19th century. In his paintings, Spitzweg repeatedly addresses the conflict between morality and immorality, between freedom of thought and the fulfilment of social norms. He holds up a mirror to society, always lovingly but also ironically targeting society's outsiders, including the clergy in an increasingly secularised society. Country parsons and village priests populate Spitzweg's landscapes reading their breviary, observing them on their walks, monks have retreated to lonely forest hermitages and hermitages because their monasteries no longer exist - and they are always alone. It is the story of the incipient isolation in society that would later play a major role in the art of the late 19th century. The subject was popular and Spitzweg was very successful with it; Siegfried Wichmann lists no fewer than seven versions of our pictorial invention in his *Catalogue Raisonné* (nos. 274-280). Spitzweg often dealt with these major issues of social conflict and controversy in the genre of landscape - here, too, it is a landscape in the foothills of the Alps as the painter knew it from his numerous excursions and hikes. Our landscape is probably also based on a real encounter, as the church on the right could be St Tertulin in Schlehdorf am Kochelsee. In impasto painting, Spitzweg depicts the meadow at the front in particular with great attention to detail - grasses, flowers, stones and the earthy path are closely observed, and the viewer almost feels as if they can read the open breviary. And then there is the warm light that falls on the ears of corn and the vine that grows to a height on the right-hand post. All of this is embedded in the mood of a cloudy, fading day, in which the couple on the other side are approaching the sunset, while the priest remains behind alone. Dr Peter Prange With O. expert opinions by H. Uhde-Bernays, Starnberg, dated 14.9.1960 and by E. Hanfstaengl, Munich, dated 20.12.1962, as well as the copy of each.