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| **Werefkin, Marianne (1960 - 1937)** |
| **Mariamna Veriovkina; Marianne von Werefkin** |
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| Werefkin was born into an aristocratic family and herself a baroness. Her mother, Elizabeth Daragan, was an artist; her father, an army general decorated by the tsar for his accomplishments during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Werefkin began art lessons at age 14, studied at the Moscow Art Academy with Illarion Prianishnikov from 1883-1886, then with Ilya Repin for ten years. Through Repin, Werefkin met, in 1891, Alexei Jawlensky, another student of his. Werefkin painted in a realist/naturalist style, akin to the works of the Russian Realists of her day. Like them and other members of the intelligentsia, Werefkin was concerned with social consciousness and improving life for the poor and underprivileged. She was also interested in deeper spirituality, primarily in nature, but also for humans and their existence. Although few survive, Werefkin’s early sketches and portraits of the destitute and of Jewish men praying explore these themes, addressing a prevailing notion that those individuals living outside mainstream society were the purest in spirit. The high caliber of her portraiture earned her a reputation as the ‘Russian Rembrandt’ during this period. In 1886, she exhibited with the First Women Artists Circle Exhibition in St. Petersburg, the XX Peredvizhnik Exhibition in 1892, also in St. Petersburg and in 1896, at the All-Russian Exhibition in Nizhni-Novhorod. Upon the death of her father in 1896, Werefkin received an inheritance of a government pension allowing her to live independently, provided she would not marry. That same year, she, Jawlensky and their friend and fellow artist Igor Grabar, moved to Munich to further develop their artistic careers. There, they met Anton Ažbe, an innovative teacher whose school attracted many international students, particularly from Eastern and Central Europe. Jawlensky and Grabar enrolled and met Wassily Kandinsky, who had also arrived recently in the city. Werefkin befriended Ažbe, but took a hiatus from painting herself from 1896 until 1906. In its place, she formed a salon at her apartment in 1897, the St. Lukas Brotherhood and, through regular meetings, led artists, teachers, writers and other intellectuals into important discussions about an emotional art of the future, recalling the work of Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh and Eugène Delacroix. From 1901 to 1905 she wrote Lettres a un Inconnu – diary-like essays on aesthetics, symbolism, alienation. She traveled extensively throughout France in 1903-05, gaining direct access to the avant-garde’s work, including the Fauves and the Nabis. She also visited Ferdinand Hodler in Switzerland. In 1906, Werefkin resumed painting, working with tempera in highly saturated, intense colors, flatter depth and more angular, rigid forms. In 1908, she developed towards Expressionist idiom, working with Jawlensky, Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter in Murnau. Together with these artists, she established the Neue Künstlervereinigung München in 1909 [until 1912]. In 1912, she exhibited with Der Blaue Reiter at the Galerie ‘Der Sturm’ in Berlin, and at the Internationale Sonderbundausstellung in Köln. In 1914, she showed paintings at the Art Society of Vilnius with Jawlensky and Bencion Cukerman. In her accompanying lecture, she characterized her work as ‘mystic Expressionism’. Upon the outbreak of World War I in 1914, she evacuated to Switzerland, first to Saint-Prex, then Zurich in 1917 where she became involved with Dada. She finally settled in Ascona in 1918. In 1919, she exhibited at the Züricher Kunstsalon with Arthur Segal, Robert Genin, and others. In 1922, she and Jawlensky separated. Werefkin formed the artists’ group ‘Der grosse Bär’ with other Ascona artists in 1924 and participated in a group exhibition in Bern in 1925. She traveled extensively in Italy in 1926. In 1928, ‘Der grosse Bär’ held an exhibition at the Nierendorf Galerie in Berlin which was followed by additional venues in Switzerland. |
| Further reading:  (Brögmann)  (Fäthke)  (Lauckaite)  (Haus)  (Weidle) |