



Fine Interiors - Two Day Sale - Live Online (A944)

Wed, 31st Mar 2021

Viewing:

Due to Government guidance around social distancing, we are unable to offer general viewing of all items in our auction rooms. All lots are, however, extensively illustrated and carry detailed condition reports - see 'Condition report' at the foot of each lot description.

Removal of Lots

All lots should be removed by **5pm on Friday 9 April 2021**.

Furniture lots remaining after this date will be removed to: Perry Removals, Chapel End, Broxted, Essex CM6 2BW.

Removal will be at a cost of £20 +VAT per lot and storage will be charged at £2 +VAT per lot, per day.

Lot 518

Estimate: £3000 - £5000 + Fees

John William Waterhouse RA (1849-1917)

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Study for 'Psyche opening the Golden box'

black and red chalk

22.5 x 30.5cm

Inscribed by a previous owner "study" by J W Waterhouse RA bought by me at Christie's sale 23.7.1926 (Mrs J W Waterhouse's sale) James Nivel (?) in pencil.

Provenance: The artist's widow, Mrs. Esther Waterhouse, by whom sold Christie's, London, 23 July 1926, 'The Remaining works of the Late J.W. Waterhouse, Esq., R.A.', Mrs George Packham; presented to her by Mrs L A Duran; by descent to Mrs M Duran in 1980.

The story of Psyche, like many Greek myths, is one of great drama and passion. Psyche, a mortal princess, is cursed by Venus who is jealous of her beauty, which has inspired many to worship her rather than pay their respects to Venus. She sends her son Cupid to shoot an arrow at her to make her fall in love with a monstrous creature. Instead, Cupid scratches himself and falls in love with Psyche. Abandoned by her family, she is saved by Zephyrus, god of the west wind, and carried away to Cupid's palace where she is waited on by invisible servants. There, Cupid visits her every night but she is not allowed to see his face. Encouraged by her jealous sisters, she lights a lamp one night to see her lover's face and injures Cupid in the process by dropping hot oil on him and he flees. She travels the earth searching for him and entreats Venus to help her. Venus instead sends her on a series of impossible tasks, the fourth of which is to take a golden box to the underworld to obtain a dose of beauty from Proserpine. She is told not to look in the box. Like Pandora, however, she cannot resist and opens the box, finding within it not beauty, but sleep, and she falls into a deep slumber. Cupid eventually finds her, takes her to Zeus, who allows her to become a goddess and marry Cupid on equal terms.

Waterhouse painted many mythological subjects including several depictions of Psyche: Psyche Entering Cupid's Garden, 1904 (Harris Museum and Art Gallery) and Psyche opening the Golden Box, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1903 (private collection). The finished picture shows Psyche, seated in a dark wood, bending her head low as she peers into the slightly open box. A small plume of smoke rises from the interior. Fewer than 150 preparatory sketches by Waterhouse are known. They consist mainly of model's heads - generally the most important element of the painting - in chalks. Here we have a typical preparatory sketch, confidently exploring the composition with fluid strokes, exquisitely modelling the flesh of the shoulder and back of the model. Not much is known about Waterhouse's models and while it has been argued that he had a single muse who he returned to repeatedly over the decades (Miss Muriel Foster has been identified as a contender), it may also be the case that he chose a series of women with the same swan-like neck, doe eyes, modest features, full of understated grace that made his paintings both sensual yet innocent; a duality that has delighted viewers for more than a century.

Condition Report

Inscribed in pencil by previous owner. The paper is a light beige/grey and could be a little faded. Some scattered spots of foxing. Some light discolouration and smudges of surface dirt throughout, in particular close to the edges. Lots of pentimenti visible. The pencil writing is a little smudged, and there is a pencil mark lower left. A pin hole centre top, and at each extreme corner. Attached to backing card by hinges of tape. A thin border of tape around the outside of the back of the sheet. Many specks of brown discolouration and grey lines verso (we assume dirt). The surface of the paper verso has some scuffs as if it was stuck down previously.

Condition Report Disclaimer

A condition report made by us, whether orally or in writing, is a matter of opinion, of the seller or Sworders, and cannot be considered a statement of fact; our staff are not professional restorers, historian's or conservators.

The condition of an item can vary widely due to factors such as age, damage, restoration and repair, their very nature means they are rarely in perfect condition, therefore, all lots are sold 'as is'. Whilst all due diligence is taken to ensuring the information provided is accurate, we cannot be held responsible for omissions, faults, defects, restoration, alteration, variations in colour and shades, or changes not identified, and you must satisfy yourself (without limitation) as to the condition, age, authenticity, and provenance prior to purchasing a lot.

All dimensions and weights are approximate.