

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



GUSTAV KLIMT

1862 - Vienna - 1918

*Portrait of a Young Woman with a Feathered Hat*

Pencil on paper; c. 1917.

560 x 373 mm

PROVENANCE: Vally Wieseltier – Dr. Paul Goldscheider, London – Fischer Fine Art, London – Private collection, London (1975) – Thence by descent

LITERATURE: Alice Strobl, *Gustav Klimt, Die Zeichnungen 1912-1918*, III, no. 2670

EXHIBITIONS: *Vienna Secession. Art nouveau to 1970*, Royal Academy of Arts, London 1971, no. 153 – *Gustav Klimt*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels 1981, no. 43, repr.

When Klimt distanced himself around 1895 from his successful career as a painter working in the historicist tradition to emerge as a representative of Viennese modernism, it was not without significant implications for his portraiture. Influenced by Symbolism, he was to develop a new artistic genre – particularly as a draughtsman – and would adhere to it in every phase of his later artistic development – namely, the female half-figure portrait. In this portrait genre Klimt melds sensual immediacy with emotional distance in a highly original way. In contrast to his formal painted portraits and the studies preparatory to them, Klimt's chief focus in his half-figure portrait drawings was to achieve an idealized rendering of his models, most of whom remained unnamed. The majority of these exquisite, aesthetically ambitious half-figure drawings were produced independently of the thematically related, but comparatively small number of oil paintings and there can be no doubt as to their status as autonomous works of art.

This portrait of a fashionable young woman in half-figure – one of the finest examples of the genre – has no direct link to a recorded painting. The extraordinary freedom of line is characteristic of Klimt's late drawing technique around the year 1917. In a rapid, notational flurry of pale pencil strokes he explores the outlines of the woman's outfit, her face, features and high, feathered hat. He uses the edge of the sheet to truncate the crown of the hat – a masterly device that fixes the figure securely in the picture plane. He then uses a heavier pencil to define the salient details: accentuating her curving lips with their hint of a smile, the left nostril and the eyes – the left eye is partly veiled by transparent tulle netting and its enigmatic gaze fixes the viewer – and the animated whorls patterning the material, and the boldly reinforced outlines of the hat. Uncontrolled as the handling of textures and light may seem, their values are differentiated with calculated precision and the juxtaposition of the light and dark strokes of pencil is finely orchestrated. Deploying a spontaneous pencil style and dispensing with direct reference to factual detail Klimt explores the individuality of the figure, imparting to it an enigmatic quality – alluring in its immediacy yet elusive, as if frozen in a timeless void. In this masterly late drawing Klimt, using the simplest graphic techniques, produces an unmatched wealth of nuances which eclipses his achievement in the medium of oil.

Dr. Marian Bisanz-Prakken  
Catalogue raisonné of the drawings of Gustav Klimt  
Albertina, Vienna

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Vally Wieselthier (1895 Vienna - New York 1945) was a potter and ceramic sculptor particularly well known for her humorous sculptures and Art Deco surface designs. Having studied at the Wiener Kunstgewerbeschule from 1914 to 1920 under Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, she designed work for the Wiener Werkstätte beginning in 1912. Her ceramic pieces were produced by the Augarten factory. The objects she exhibited at the 1925 Exposition des Arts Decoratifs in Paris helped define the playful and sophisticated mood of the Art Deco era. Later in 1928, Wieselthier settled in America and created designs for the Contemporaria Group and the Sebring Pottery Company.

We would like to thank Marian Bisanz-Prakken for preparing this catalogue entry.