

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Leonor Fini

(Buenos Aires 1907 – 1996 Paris)

Young woman's head, c. 1976

India ink, pen and wash on paper

12.5 x 13.5 cm; 4 7/8 x 5 3/8 in.

Signed lower right: *Leonor Fini*

Provenance

With Galerie Minsky by 1976;

Private collection;

Anonymous sale, Maurice Auction, Paris, 23 June 2025, lot 105.



The sheet presents a single female visage delicately rendered in India ink with fine pen line and wash. Few but secure lines sharply delimit the features while washes model shadows and planes. Leonor Fini's the careful economy of line gives this small portrait a great sense of immediacy and psychological charge. Indeed, as observed by the writer Ron Horning, the closer one inspects Fini's drawn faces, the more one discerns expressive nuances: heads "tilted or thrown back, fire ready to burst from [the sitters'] eyes".¹

Leonor Fini was born on August 30, 1907 in Buenos Aires, and raised in Trieste, on the Italian–Slovenian border. An ocular disease in her adolescence forced her to wear bandages over both eyes, and after recovering her vision she resolved to become an artist. In Paris, she came to know de Chirico, Picasso, and Dalí and was often seen and photographed in cafe society dressed in men's clothes or in nothing but white boots and a feathered cape. Largely a self-taught artist, she studied the Flemish masters and Italian mannerists and drew upon her own concupiscent dreams for inspiration. Residing in Paris, she was by then an established luminary of the avant-garde, known for her refusal to formally join the Surrealist group despite her regular inclusion in major Surrealism exhibitions. By the 1970s Fini was a mature artist with a well-established visual lexicon (mystical subjects, dramatic female figures, decadent interiors). The present drawing comes from her late period, when she often produced small, finely worked portrait heads and scenes in ink and watercolour. Its technical restraint reflects Fini's focus on the figure itself, while still embodying the same concerns she held for decades: the enigmatic woman, the fluidity of identity (akin to her love of masquerade and masks), and the subversion of expectations about femininity.

Galerie Minsky held the drawing by 1976. In the mid-1970s Fini's work was significantly championed by the Paris dealer Arlette Souhami (Galerie Dionne, later Galerie Minsky), who organized exhibitions and publications of Fini's art. Galerie Minsky (which would later manage her estate) was instrumental in reviving interest in Fini's work in subsequent decades.

We are thankful to Cédric Lefebvre for confirming the attribution of the present work.

¹ R. Horning, "Leonor Fini," *The Brooklyn Rail*, ArtSeen, June 2025, <https://brooklynrail.org/2025/06/artseen/leonor-fini/>