

ELLIOTT FINE ART

Nineteenth Century to Early Modern

Paul Lothar Müller
(Berlin 1869 – 1956)

Portrait of a Haratin woman

Signed lower right: *Paul Lothar (Müller)*.

Oil on panel

46 x 28 cm. (18 x 11 in.)

Provenance:

Bruun Rasmussen, Copenhagen, 29 April 2024,



This stunning portrait of a Maghrebi woman in all her finery was painted by Paul Lothar at the end of the 19th century. The bright colours of the headscarf, the gleaming metals and the careful study of a particular physiognomy all contribute to the remarkable immediacy of the image.

Although details of his trip to North Africa are sparse, extant painting suggest that Lothar was there by 1890 and spent time in Tunisia. Indeed, the woman's colourful headscarf and distinctive jewellery suggest that she may be Haratin, a socially and economically marginalised ethnic group found primarily in Morocco but also in Tunisia. The Haratin are primarily of sub-Saharan descent - sometimes mixed with Berber and Arab populations - whose ancestors either migrated to the Maghreb or were brought north via the trans-Saharan slave trade routes.

Totally forgotten today, the Berlin-based Lothar was best known in his lifetime as a technically proficient though relatively unremarkable landscapist. This portrait is the only known example of his work in this genre, and it leaves one wishing he had explored portraiture further. In terms of visual impact and emotive quality, it far surpasses most of his other work. Although stylistically different, with its satisfying impasto brushwork, Lothar's painting evokes the spirit of Josep Tapiro's Moroccan portraiture from around the same time. One of Tapiro's most famous images (fig. 1), drawn in Tangier, likely also depicts a Haratin woman.



Fig. 1, Josep Tapiro, *A Tangerine Beauty*, c. 1891, watercolour, 66 x 46 cm, Dahesh Museum