

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Leopold Carl Müller
(Dresden 1834 – 1892 Vienna)

Portrait of a south Italian girl

Signed lower right: *Leopold Carl Müller*
White chalk and black crayon on paper
39.2 x 32.4 cm. (15 ½ x 12 ¾ in.)

Provenance:
Private collection, Vienna.



This arresting image of a young Italian girl is undoubtedly one of the finest portrait drawings within the oeuvre of the Austrian artist Leopold Carl Müller, notable for its technical quality and finish. Müller's mastery is evident throughout, with the more rapidly executed white shirt and headscarf standing in counterpoint to the acutely detailed face and hair, built up with varying degrees of subtle shading and highlights.

Müller is best known as an Orientalist artist, one of the major figures in that genre. Over the course of his career Müller visited Egypt no less than nine times and so many of his most famous works are related to his sojourns there. That said, Italy was also an important source of inspiration for the artist. Easily accessible from Vienna, Müller visited Italy on multiple occasions and lived in Venice between 1870 and 1872 and Sicily between 1872 and 1873. With her distinctive headscarf, Müller's sitter comes from the south of Italy and was probably drawn in Sicily or Naples.

Portraiture forms an important part of Müller's output, with most of his work in this genre depicting Egyptian subjects or members of the artist's family. This striking portrait of an Italian girl therefore constitutes a significant and rare work within Müller's oeuvre, as much for its quality as for its uncommon subject. Nevertheless, the direct and bust-length depiction, as well as the sitter's captivating gaze, are typical of Müller's Egyptian portraits, many of which are outstanding works within the Orientalist genre.



Fig. 1, Leopold Carl Müller, *Portrait of an Egyptian girl*, oil on canvas, 47 x 38 cm, Private Collection

Born in Dresden to Austrian parents, Müller began his artistic training under Karl von Blaas. A government stipend enabled the young painter to visit the Exposition Universelle of 1867 in Paris, where he was greatly impacted by the paintings of Eugène Fromentin. In the winter of 1873 Müller embarked on the first of nine extended tours of Egypt, immersing himself deeply in the local culture, and painting both scenes of everyday life and individual portraits. In 1877 Müller took a professorial post at the Vienna Academy, teaching many prominent Orientalist artists of the next generation, including Ludwig Deutsch, Paul Joanowitch and Charles Wilda.