

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Marthe La Lyre Levesques
(Paris 1865 – 1952)

Portrait of Adolphe La Lyre, husband of the artist

Signed and dated: *Marthe Lalire Levesques / 1889*

Pastel on paper

54 x 45 cm. (21 ¼ x 17 ¾ in.)



Marthe La Lyre Levesques' beautifully rendered pastel portrait depicts her husband, the artist Adolphe La Lyre, seated, in three-quarters profile. Dated to 1889, the sitter is a youthful looking forty-one, and the artist twenty-five. Adolphe, with his distinctive strawberry blond moustache, seems to be at repose, deep in thought, with the left hand poised delicately above his crossed legs. Marthe's technical skill is in evidence throughout. Other than the masterfully depicted head, other focal points include the starched white collar and cuffs, standing out against the darker shades of Adolphe's jacket, and the light-reflecting monocle, resting on the sitter's chest.

Adolphe was a subject of predilection for Marthe. As well as the present portrait, another notable example is the almost Symbolist depiction of Adolphe seated at work, surrounded by the couple's dogs, with his painting *Les horreurs de la guerre*, a maelstrom of tumbling female figures and a fire-breathing dragon, in the background (fig. 1). A third portrait of Adolphe, half-length and in coloured chalk, was on the art market fifteen years ago.¹ Marthe herself was also a regular model of Adolphe (fig. 2). Her husband painted multiple portraits of her during their marriage and her features were also often used for the femme fatales who populated many of Adolphe's compositions.



Fig. 1, Marthe La Lyre Levesques, *Portrait of Adolphe La Lyre*, pencil on paper, 57 x 42 cm, Private Collection



Fig. 2, Adolphe La Lyre, *Portrait of Marthe La Lyre Levesques*, oil on canvas., Private Collection

Marthe and Adolphe married in 1886. Marthe had been a student in a drawings class Adolphe taught and had also studied under Léon Bonnat. They lived together with her family in Chennevières-sur-Marne, on the outskirts of Paris, before moving to Courbevoie in 1897. Although specialising in still life, Marthe was a talented portraitist, as the present

¹ Boscher Enchères, Cherbourg 10 August 2009, lot 767.

work aptly demonstrates. Whilst Adolphe had a successful career, reaching the usual milestones expected of an important academic artist, Marthe did not exhibit so widely, despite her undoubted talent. That said, she was a member of the Société des Artistes Français from 1901 and took part in their Salons. Clearly both husband and wife were supportive in each-others artistic endeavours, sitting for each other frequently.