

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Eric Henri Kennington
(London 1888 - Reading 1960)

Study of a sleeping figure

Signed on backing paper at lower right: *Eric H. Kennington*

Charcoal on paper

24.2 x 32.3 cm. (9 ½ x 12 ¾ in.)



We are grateful to Dr Jonathan Black, who has confirmed the attribution to Eric Henri Kennington and who has suggested an early date for the drawing.

Though undated, the present work is likely a rare pre-World War I sheet, executed soon after Kennington graduated from Lambeth Art School in 1908. He used the 'Eric H. Kennington' signature most often from c. 1908 to 1916; when he became an official war artist for the Department of Information, from April 1917, he tended to sign his work 'EHK'. Stylistically too, the drawing is in keeping with Kennington's early works (fig. 1), which are generally a little softer and more nuanced than the World War I sheets.

Kennington's skill as a draughtsman, perhaps the finest of his generation alongside Augustus John, is fully on display in the present work, where the charcoal is used to masterfully build up volumes and forms through shading and outlines of varying width and dynamism. The result is a work both beautiful and modern. As the serrated upper edge confirms, this sheet once belonged in a sketch book which Kennington must have carried around with him, at the ready to dash off at a moment's notice any appealing subject he came across. The subject, a sleeping male figure, prefigures Kennington's frequent depictions of soldiers at rest during the War (fig. 2), and the quiet intimacy on display is entirely in keeping with the atmosphere of these slightly later works from the trenches.



Fig. 1, Eric Henri Kennington, *Portrait study of a young woman*, chalk on paper, 29 x 23 cm, Private Collection



Fig. 2, Eric Henri Kennington, *Infantryman resting*, charcoal on paper, 54 x 37 cm., Imperial War Museum

The son of a portrait and genre painter, Kennington studied at the Lambeth School of Art. With the outbreak of the First World War, the young artist immediately enlisted as a private

in the 1st Battalion 13th London Regiment, also known as the 'Kensingtons'. Fighting in both Belgium and France, Kennington was badly wounded, thereby ending his military career. He worked on the *Kensington's at Laventie* (fig. 3), one of the most distinguished and iconic wartime paintings by any British artist. An intensely autobiographical glimpse of life on the front line, the work was exhibited to great acclaim at the Goupil Galleries in 1916. He returned to the front on his own volition the same year, making a series of portrait drawings of French and British soldiers which were exhibited at the Goupil Galleries again in March 1917. Brought into the public consciousness, Kennington was made an Official War Artist, with the specific brief to make drawings of British infantrymen on the Western Front. As William Rothenstein remarked, 'no-one has so marked a gift as he for drawing and understanding the magnificence of the Tommy'.



Fig. 3, Eric Henri Kennington, *The Kensingtons at Laventie*, oil on glass, 140 x 152 cm., Imperial War Museum