

# COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Jacques Majorelle  
(Nancy 1886 – 1962 Paris)

*Portrait of a man from Kayes, wearing a Fulani fibre hat*

Signed, dated and located lower right: *Kayes 45 / J. Majorelle*  
Gouache and pastel on paper  
59 x 49 cm.

Provenance:  
Private Collection, Paris;  
Piasa, Paris, 19 March 2025, lot 9.

The work is accompanied by a certificate from the Comité Jacques Majorelle.



Looking for new subjects to paint, it was in the autumn of 1945 that Jacques Majorelle decided to respond to the call of West Africa. Now that the difficult wartime period was over, he prepared for the trip in the hope of finding new African models even more characterful than those he had already painted in Marrakech—with their proud allure, elegant walk, and commanding figures he so admired.

Majorelle made three trips to West Africa: first to French Sudan (now Mali) in 1945, then to Guinea in 1947, and finally to Ivory Coast in 1952, with short stays in Guinea, French Sudan, and Senegal during his last voyage.

Accompanied by his daughter Jika, he left Agadir in a military plane and, after stops in Mauritania, landed in Dakar on 1 November 1945. Two weeks later, Jika returned to Marrakech due to rising political tensions, leaving Majorelle to pursue the rest of his journey alone. In mid-November, he boarded a train from Dakar bound for Bamako, passing through Diourbe, Kaffrine, and Tambacounda before arriving in Kayes, the first major town he encountered on his route through French Sudan, and the old capital. There, he lingered, captivated by riverside life, colourful markets, and village gatherings.

Among the works he produced during this period is this compelling pastel portrait of a man, executed in Kayes in 1945. This drawing offers a striking example of Majorelle's deeper engagement with the character and dignity of his male sitters—contrasting with his often more decorative and stylised depictions of West African women (fig. 1).



Fig. 1, Jacques Majorelle, Foulani woman, 1948, gouache and pastel on paper, 66 x 44.6 cm., Private Collection

The sitter in this portrait appears poised and self-assured, dressed in a flowing robe and adorned with a necklace of beads. He wears a dramatic fibre Fulani hat crowned with a vivid flare of ochre, rust, and dark blue coloured grasses - an element that adds both visual grandeur and a cultural symbolism. Majorelle's medium of choice, pastel on toned paper, allows him to blend immediacy with nuance: the rich tones of the man's skin are modelled with great sensitivity, catching the light across the brow, nose, and cheekbones to render a compelling sense of form and presence.

Unlike many Orientalist artists of his time, who often exoticised or romanticised their sitters, Majorelle conveys a quiet dignity and psychological depth, with the man's direct gaze meeting the viewer with a solemn, steady intensity.

This portrait encapsulates much of what Majorelle sought in his travels: a fresh vitality, a proud bearing, and a visual language that extended his fascination with the human figure. In Kayes, far from his adopted Moroccan home, he found both a new subject and, perhaps, a deeper sense of artistic connection.