

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Leonor Fini

(Buenos Aires 1907 – 1996 Paris)

Face with closed eyes, c. 1967

Watercolour on paper

42 x 32.7 cm; 16 1/2 x 12 7/8 in.

Signed lower right: *Leonor Fini*

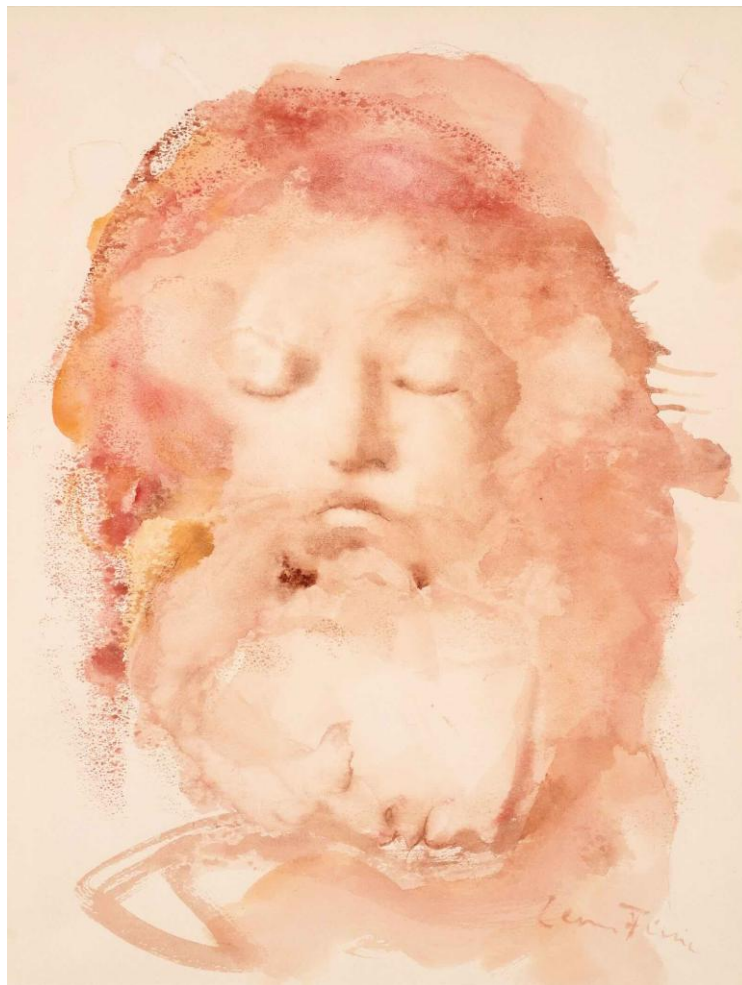
Provenance

Anonymous sale, Gallery Koller, Zürich, 28 November 1996, lot 3074;

Private Collection, Switzerland;

Anonymous sale, Galerie Kornfeld Auktionen, Bern, 15 July 2017, lot 275;

Private Collection, Paris.



Translucent washes of watercolour and a delicate layering of roseate and orange tones allow the close-cropped visage to emerge from the blank surface of the paper. Leonor Fini's watery brushwork is at once fluid and controlled: subtle gradations define the eyes, nose and lips without hard outlines, and gentle bleeding of colour at the periphery suggests the figure surfacing from an indeterminate mist. The tranquil visage appears enveloped in a private dream, aligning with the artist's frequent exploration of psychological interiority.

The world of the reluctant Surrealist Leonor Fini has indeed been described as 'the domain of sleepwalkers... of glazed gazes, of an exaggerated dimension of reality where irrepressible hallucinations exist'.¹ Immersed in such oneiric calm, the closed eyes of the subject seem to suggest that the true "vision" is an inner one, accessible to the imagination rather than the external experience. Notably, the expert Cédric Lefebvre has suggested that the present watercolour may have been conceived as a preparatory study for the 1967 illustrated edition in four volumes of *Poésies* by 19th-century French Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine (Paris, Nouvelle Librairie de France, 1967). Even without the overt fantastical creatures seen in some of her other works, this solitary closed-eyed face conveys the liminal quality so often present in Fini's universe: a scene poised between reality and reverie.

Leonor Fini was born on August 30, 1907 in Buenos Aires, and raised in Trieste, on the Italian–Slovenian border. An ocular disease in her adolescence forced her to wear bandages over both eyes, and after recovering her vision she resolved to become an artist. In Paris, she came to know de Chirico, Picasso, and Dalí and was often seen and photographed in cafe society dressed in men's clothes or in nothing but white boots and a feathered cape. Largely a self-taught artist, she studied the Flemish masters and Italian mannerists and drew upon her own concupiscent dreams for inspiration. Fini painted the present work in the context of a richly productive career that by the 1960s had garnered international acclaim. Residing in Paris, she was by then an established luminary of the avant-garde, known for her refusal to formally join the Surrealist group despite her regular inclusion in major Surrealism exhibitions. At the time of her 1967 exhibition at the Hanover Gallery in London in 1967, Fini was actively re-engaging with easel painting after years devoted largely to theatre and ballet costume design. Her independence and imaginative breadth during this era allowed her to draw inspiration from fin-de-siècle literature, classical mythology, and personal fantasy alike, synthesizing these influences into her own distinctive iconography.

We are thankful to Cédric Lefebvre for confirming the attribution of the present work which will be included in his next publication on the artist currently under preparation.

¹ T. Villani, *Parcours dans l'œuvre de Leonor Fini*, translated by Jean-Claude Dedieu, 1989, p. 48.