

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Leonor Fini
(Buenos Aires 1907 – 1996 Paris)

A couple in courtship

Pen and ink on paper
32 x 26 cm. 12 5/8 x 10 1/4 in.

Signed lower right: *Leonor Fini*

Provenance

Private Collection, Switzerland;
Galerie Kornfeld Auktionen, Bern, 15 July 2017, lot 275;
Private Collection, Paris.



The present work's line quality - free, sinuous, with little hatching - reflects Leonor Fini's mature draughtsmanship. She drew from life and imagination with equal ease, her "automatic" Surrealist impulse preserved from her 1930s circle. In later decades her drawings retain that vitality: lines swirl organically around the subject, imbuing the composition with spirited dynamism. Her technique is unadorned yet expressive - a single confident line can coalesce into an arm, a long dress, or a curling lock of hair.

Curator Cédric Lefebvre has noted that the composition corresponds to scenes from *Monsieur Vénus*: the drawing likely represents Raoule and Silvert (the heroine and hero of the 1884 novel by the French Symbolist and Decadent writer Rachilde) at an intimate moment. In that period Fini produced a deluxe artist's book of *Monsieur Vénus*, featuring 35 etchings signed by the artist (printed in 1971). The thematic content of courtship and gender-role reversal in Rachilde's novel resonated with Fini's long-standing interest in powerful women and erotic fantasy. Indeed, the dynamic in *A couple in courtship* reverses the usual gender script - the woman appears in command, thrusting her hand into the opening of the man's shirt - reflecting Fini's long-held focus on female agency in love and desire.

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. Her oeuvre spans paintings, illustrations, costumes and books; she famously illustrated Poe and Sade. Throughout her life Fini cultivated a fiercely independent, feminist persona: a fiercely independent artist, she rejected traditional roles for women and refused to be categorized or labelled.

We are thankful to Cédric Lefebvre for confirming the attribution of the present work.