

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Pauline Auzou
(Paris 1775 – 1835)

Portrait of a young woman with braids

With later inscription, lower right: 'Gerard'
black chalk and white heightening on laid paper
43 x 31 cm (17 x 12¼ in.)

Provenance:
Private collection, France.



This delicate sheet, drafted by Pauline Auzou through the careful application of black chalk and white heightening, depicts a self-confident woman in the prime of her youth. Looking directly at the spectator through her long, spindly eyelashes, she offers the faintest hint of a smile. Her hair, restrained with long chains of braids at the back and let loose at the front, is typical of the Early Napoleonic period (ca. 1800). While the sitter's locks are portrayed in careful detail (almost strand by strand), the artist has chosen to barely fill in the young woman's loose chemise, which gives the entire sheet a feeling of studied informality.

Bust-length head studies form a significant proportion of Auzou's drawings, unsurprising for a French artist active around the turn of the nineteenth century. Indeed, their crucial aspect within Auzou's oeuvre can be gleaned from the publication in 1800 by the printing firm Didot of an album of her head studies, entitled *Tête d'études*.¹

Auzou was a passionate and skilled draughtswoman; according to her friend Albertine Clément-Hémery 'nothing could distract her from her studies'.² Though she never signed her drawings, stylistic attribution to the artist is possible thanks to a group of head studies offered at Christie's London in 2000, which came directly from the artist's descendants.³ Comparing the present work with those offered at that sale (see Figs. 1-2), one can see the same detailed rendering of highlight-laden hair, careful gradation of black chalk along the skin, and the faintest idea of the sitter's clothing.



Fig. 1, Pauline Auzou, *Head study of a man*, black chalk on paper, 48.7 x 42.8 cm, Private Collection



Fig. 2, Pauline Auzou, *Head study of a boy looking up*, black chalk on paper, 44 x 35 cm, Private Collection

¹ Three individual sheets depicting head studies of young boys were with Alexis Bordes in 2014, one of which was sold at Sotheby's London in 2020 (25 June, lot 22). A fourth sheet from this folio, of a nude male model, was sold at auction by Aguttes in Paris in 2022 (28 June, lot 70). All these sheets are executed primarily in black chalk.

² C. Clément-Hémery, *Souvenirs de 1793 et 1794*, Cambrai 1832.

³ Christie's London, 15 December 2000, lots 193, 194, 197, 198 and 200.

Born in Paris, Auzou received her artistic education from Jean-Baptiste Regnault, in whose studio the boundaries of decorum were broken when women studied the nude as part of their training. Auzou first exhibited at the Salon in 1793 aged eighteen, showing a *Bacchante* and a *Tête d'étude*, the latter being of particular interest given the subject of the present work. Exhibiting at the Salon at this age was a remarkable feat for a women artist at this time, given their systemic exclusion from the academies. Auzou continued to exhibit regularly at the Salon until 1817, showing portraits, genre scenes and mythological subjects in a Neoclassical and later Romantic style. She won a First Class medal at the Salon in 1808 for a group portrait of the Pickard family. In 1810 Auzou received a commission to paint Napoleon and his wife, Marie Louise, giving some indication of the very high esteem in which the artist was held. In the second half of her career, Auzou opened an art school for the education of young women, running this establishment for twenty years. All in all, Auzou had a very successful career, particularly given the adverse conditions within which she worked.