

# COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Eric Johansson  
(Dresden 1896 – 1979 Löybruna, Sweden)

*Bust-length study of a man*

Monogrammed middle right: *EJ.*

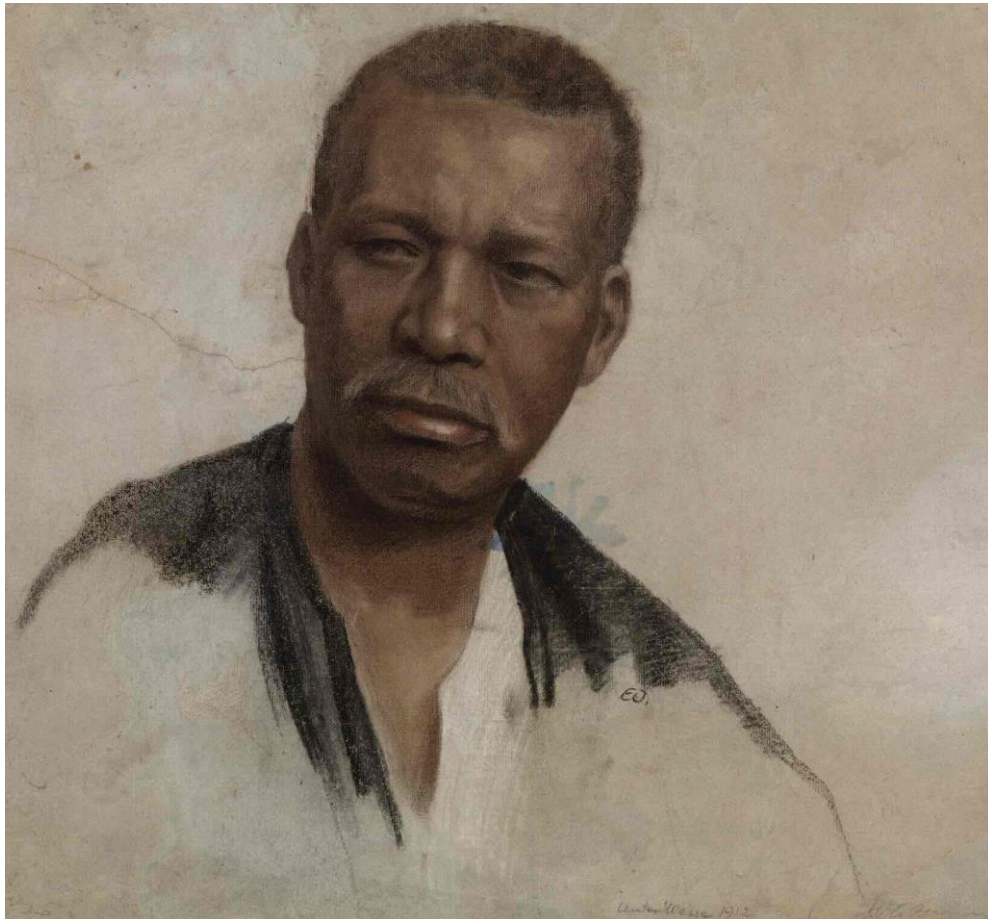
Inscribed, dated lower and signed lower right: *Untere Klasse 1912 / Johansson*

Crayon and pencil on paper

43 x 47 cm. (17 x 18 ½ in.)

Provenance:

By descent in the family of the artist, until June 2023.



This beautifully drawn depiction of a Black model dates to 1912, when the artist, Eric Johansson, was a sixteen-year-old student in his first year at the Dresden Academy, one of the leading art schools in the Germanophone world. Although he never went on to become a household name, the study demonstrates Johansson's accomplished technical skills at the outset of his career.

The sitter is possibly the same model who sat for Max Pietschmann (fig. 1), Osmar Schindler and Robert Sterl in 1885, when all three were studying at the Dresden Academy under Professor Leon Pohle. A young man in 1885, the model's age twenty-seven years later accords well with the sitter in Johansson's study, who might be around fifty. It is not unknown for a model to be affiliated with an art academy over a period of decades. In Sweden over the same period, the Black model and dockworker Pierre Louis Alexandre sat for students at the Swedish Royal Academy from at least 1878 to 1903.

There are two other Black men known to have been longer term residents in Dresden at this time. One was a Togolese man, named Karl Atiogbe, who would have been around thirty-one in 1912. The other was Nathanael Zabo from the Caribbean, the former servant to the Governor of Cameroon, Jesko van Puttkamer. About forty-eight when Johansson's study was drawn, he is perhaps a better fit for the model in terms of age. Either way, both were quite well-known figures in the city and could have conceivably sat for Johansson and other students at the Academy. Of course, there may well have been other Black men either living in the city or passing through who we don't know about.<sup>1</sup>

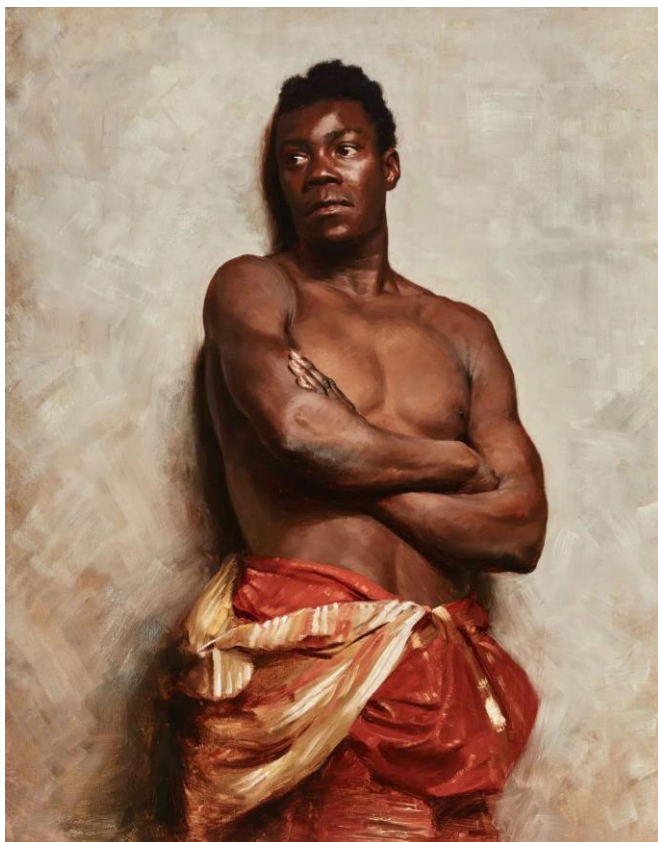


Fig. 1, Max Pietschmann, *Study of a model*, 1885 oil on canvas, 105.5 x 80 cm, Milwaukee Museum of Art

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<sup>1</sup> This information was provided by Dr Robbie Aitken, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, following German colonial expansion, there was an influx of Africans into Germany, primarily from Cameroon and Togo but also from German East Africa (consisting of parts of modern-day Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania), as well as, to a lesser extent, German Southwest Africa (present day Namibia). Some of these arrivals, like the sitter in Johansson's study, found work as models at the art academies or were privately employed by individual artists. In Dresden, a model named Tommy Todtman, born in 1877, worked with the Academy from 1921 onwards, although his employment ended with the coming to power of the Nazis, despite the objections of Pohle and another professor, Richard Müller. Also in Dresden, in the early 1910s, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner employed Black models (fig. 2), three of whom we know as Sam, Milli and Nelly.

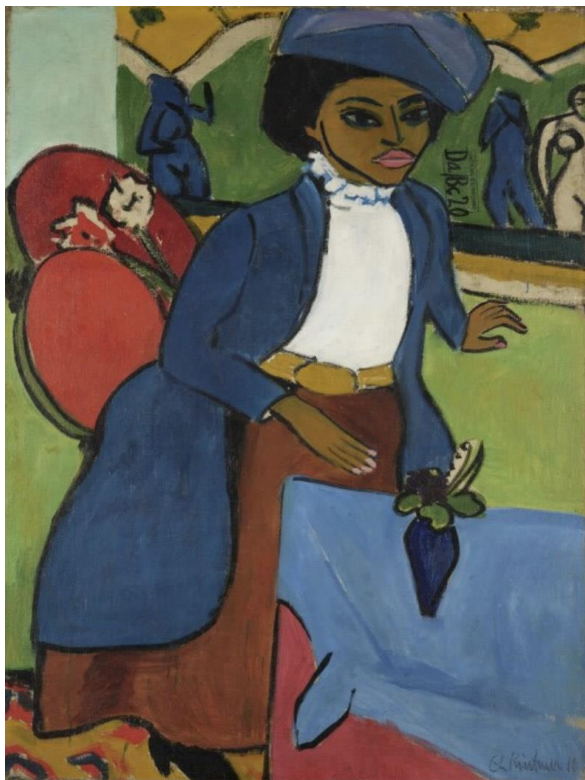


Fig. 2, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Portrait of a woman*, 1911, oil on canvas, 118 x 88 cm, Buffalo Art Museum

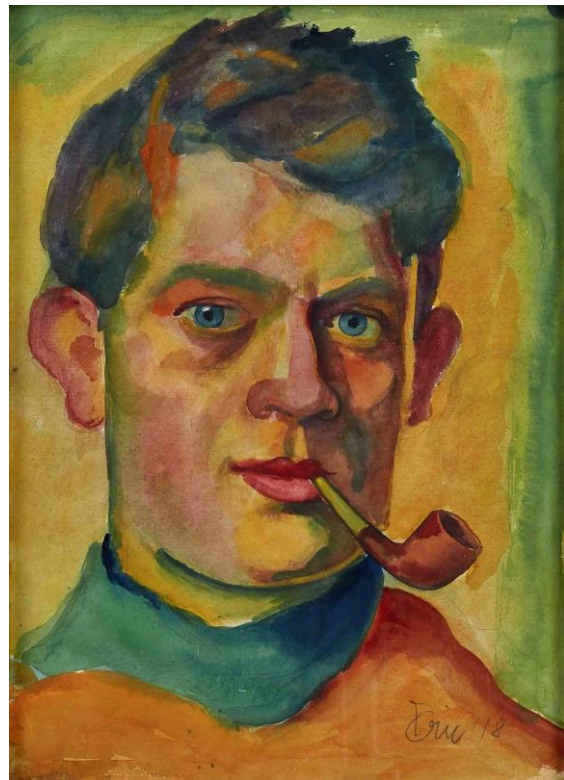


Fig. 3, Eric Johansson, *Self-portrait with a pipe*, 1918, watercolour, 36 x 26 cm, Private Collection

Born in Dresden in 1896, Johansson (fig. 3) later became the only Swedish artist whose works were classified as 'degenerate' by the Nazis. He studied at the Academy between 1912 and 1920 and was initially influenced by the Dresden-based Die Brücke Expressionists. His political leanings were left, joining the Communist Party in the 1920s and exhibiting in Moscow, Leningrad and Saratov in 1924. After 1933, Johansson soon came to the Nazi's attention through his revolutionary politics and marriage to a Jewish woman. In 1937 two of his paintings were confiscated from the Dresden City Museum: one was destroyed and the other exhibited as a degenerate artwork. A misplaced comment about Göring in a restaurant landed Johansson four months in prison. Upon his release in 1938, Johansson

fled Germany for Sweden, via Czechoslovakia and Poland. He remained there for the rest of his life, continuing to paint and draw, though no longer professionally.

We are grateful to Professor Robbie Aitken for his help in cataloguing this work.