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Nineteenth Century to Early Modern

Danish or German School, 1838

Portrait of Maria Raggia, an Ischian woman

Inscribed lower right: *Maria Raggia / Lacco d'Ischia / 14/8 1838* Oil on canvas 55 x 42 cm. (21 ½ x 16 ½ in.)

Provenance: Private Collection, Germany.



This gorgeous portrait, full of vibrant colour and detail, depicts an otherwise unknown woman called Maria Raggi from Lacco d'Ischia.¹ Ischian women, celebrated for their beauty, and known for their colourful headscarves and distinctive jewellery, made popular models for the many northern artists who flocked to southern Italy during the opening decades of the early 19th century (fig. 1).



Fig. 1, Adolf Senff, *Ischian woman with a basket of flowers and fruit*, 1840, 100 x 75 oil on canvas, Kunstmuseum Moritzberg



Fig. 2, Wilhelm Marstrand, *Portriat of a young Roman woman*, circa 1835, 35.5 x 25.5 cm. oil on paper, Hirschsprung Collection

The author of the present work is unknown. Stylistically speaking, it is likely to be by one of the numerous Danish and German artists who visited Naples and its environs during the 1830s. One candidate is Wilhelm Marstrand, who was in Italy at this date, visited Ischia, painted many portraits of locals, and often painted with oil on paper (fig. 2). The portrait's exceptional quality – seen notably in the masterfully rendered headscarf, a true painterly tour de force – and its technical distinctiveness suggest that a more definitive attribution may be possible in the future.

Whoever the author, it is intriguing that they felt compelled to inscribe the sitter's name on what is, ostensibly, an unfinished work. This detail might indicate that Maria Raggia held special significance for the artist or perhaps, though currently untraced, was a well-known model among foreign artists of the time. During this period, another model, Vittoria Caldoni, was particularly popular amongst the Nazarene painters, who considered her the ideal female figure (fig 3).

¹ This is probably Lacco Ameno, a town on the northwest of Ischia.

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Fig. 3, Johann Heinrich Richter, *Portrait of Vittoria Caldoni*, 1833, 62 x 50 cm, oil on canvas, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe