

# COLNAGHI



LÉONARD TSUGUHARU FOUJITA  
(Tokyo 1886 – 1968 Zürich)

*JEUNE FEMME EN PEIGNOIR, C. 1952*

Watercolour and India ink on paper  
38 x 29 cm; 15 x 11 3/8 in.  
Signed lower right 'Foujita'.

This work is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by Sylvie Buisson, no. E52.309.A, dated 15.06.2023.

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Provenance

Private Collection, UK.

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Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita's *Jeune Femme en Peignoir* (c. 1952) exemplifies Foujita's refined sensitivity in combining Eastern and Western artistic traditions, and it captures the delicate and serene vitality that characterises his later portraits. Created in the 1950s, a period in which Foujita returned to France after two decades of extensive travelling, this work marks a pivotal shift in his thematic focus - from his earlier nudes to more intimate and tender portrayals of young women and children. *Jeune Femme en Peignoir* is a key example of Foujita's draftsmanship, capturing the quiet poise of a young woman adorned in a light robe, delicately rendered in soft washes of blue and green, her contours defined by fine, needle-like brushstrokes.

Born in Tokyo in 1886, Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita moved to Paris in 1913, where he became a significant figure within the bohemian art circles, mingling with avant-garde artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Amedeo Modigliani. His ability to blend Japanese ink painting techniques with modern European aesthetics made him a particularly celebrated figure in the Montparnasse art scene. His early work focused on various subjects, including self-portraits, cats, women, and interior scenes. His paintings and drawings were praised for their synthesis of Eastern and Western art forms, an amalgamation that became the hallmark of his style. Foujita's early years in Paris were met with great success; his debut solo exhibition, organized by the renowned art dealer Georges Chéron, was a triumph, with all 110 works selling on the first day, including several pieces purchased by Picasso himself.

Throughout his career, Foujita remained committed to drawing, producing exquisite works on paper that showcased a meticulous precision in line and composition. Executed in various media - mainly charcoal, ink, watercolour, and pastel - his graphic creations maintained a consistent focus on fine, delicate lines, which conveyed both the vitality and nuanced details of his subjects. This precision in linework is a defining feature of *Jeune Femme en Peignoir*, where Foujita's mastery of ink and watercolour animates the figure of a young woman with remarkable grace. As Sylvie Buisson once stated, 'To travel in the work of Foujita signifies embarking for Cythera, forgetting the baggage on the banks and penetrating into a world situated halfway between the Orient and the Occident, at the fancy of a man in constant renewal and of his soul, perfected with the same dew that baths the leaves of the maple trees in Japan and those of the plane trees in Paris'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Buisson (ed.), *Foujita Inédits*, Paris, 2007, p.16.

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After spending a decade in Japan during World War II, Foujita returned to Paris in the early 1950s with his wife, Kimiyo. This period (1950-1968) marked the beginning of what could be regarded as the second French phase of his long artistic trajectory, a time when his style underwent a relevant transformation. By reengaging with the Parisian art scene, Foujita dedicated himself to portraiture, particularly of young women and children immersed in a fairy and dreamlike atmosphere (Fig. 1-2). By this time, he had largely moved away from his earlier depictions of nudes. As the artist once articulated on his first exhibition at Paul Petrides Gallery in 1950, 'As a reaction to the violent times, I imagined a few very tender subjects, even very childish, one could say.' The portraits from this period, including this *Jeune Femme en Peignoir*, reflect this shift, with their tranquil, almost ethereal quality (Fig. 3). Foujita further developed his distinct style of portraiture in the 1950s, often representing young women with doll-like features—large eyes, delicate necks, and refined, oval-shaped faces. His use of a pearlescent palette further emphasized the porcelain-like quality of his figures, lending them a timeless, almost otherworldly beauty. In *Jeune Femme en Peignoir*, this approach is evident in the sitter's gentle gaze, her face rendered with a sense of quiet introspection, her features softened by the artist's delicate handling of light and shadow.

Foujita's commitment to his craft, particularly his skill with ink and watercolour, remained a constant throughout his life. His ability to convey depth and emotion through minimal lines earned him critical acclaim, and his drawings, like his paintings, became highly coveted. Today, Foujita's works can be found in major international collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

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Fig. 1. Léonard Baptême de fleurs, 1959.

Oil on canvas, 129 x 96 cm.

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Fig. 2. Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita, *Femme et enfant*, 1952.  
Wash and Indian ink on Japan paper, 35.7 x 26 cm.  
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Fig. 3. Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita, *Jeune femme de profil, les mains croisées sur la poitrine*, 1954.  
Oil on canvas, 33.34 x 24.45 cm.  
Sold at Christie's New York, 17 Nov 2016, lot 1272