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HENRI FANTIN-LATOURE
(Grenoble 1846, Buré 1904)

ETUDE DE FEMME, C.1874

Oil on canvas
21.6 x 15.9 cm; 8.5 x 6.25 in.
Signed upper right 'Fantin'

This work will be included in the forthcoming Fantin-Latour catalogue raisonné currently being prepared by Messrs Brame and Lorenceau

Provenance

Edwin Edwards, London;
Mr. Jacobs, Fox Rock, Dublin;
Walter Klinkhoff Gallery, Montreal;
Anonymous sale, New York, Sotheby's, 24 May 1995,
when acquired by the present owner (Private North American Collection).

Literature

Madame Fantin-Latour, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre complet de Henri Fantin-Latour*, Paris, 1911, p. 78 no. 705.

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Ignace Henri Jean Theodore Fantin-Latour (1836- 1904) was born in 1836 in Grenoble, France. His father, an artist himself, was his first teacher. When the family moved to Paris in 1850, Fantin-Latour spent three months on probation at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, but he was ultimately not admitted. Undaunted, he began to copy the old masters at the Louvre. In particular, he studied the still life paintings of Louise Moillon (1610-1696) and Jean Chardin (1699-1779). After his close friend James Abbott McNeill Whistler promoted his delicate flower paintings in England and facilitated his first visit to the island in 1859, he quickly gained the attention of local critics and collectors and, in turn, he developed a profound appreciation for British art and artists. The small scale of these works made them fit well into heavily decorated Victorian houses. As a result, there are over 800 extant still life paintings by Fantin-Latour, mostly of flowers and fruit. While portraiture and naturalistic paintings have the greatest occurrence in his artistic production, by the early 1860s he had begun to create imaginative mythological scenes often featuring female figures. His interest in this genre grew as his career advanced. Many of these works were inspired by literature and his deep appreciation for music, particularly the compositions of Berlioz, Schumann, and especially Wagner, who was highly regarded by the Symbolists. In the 1870s and 1880s, he produced additional allegorical works that stemmed purely from his imagination and, similar to other Symbolist imagery, departed from traditional iconography. In this regard, his production aligns more closely with the mystical literary creations of the Pre-Raphaelites or the richly coloured allegorical compositions of the Victorian classical painter George Frederic Watts, whom Fantin-Latour became familiar with during his time in England. While the present painting showcases certain English stylistic elements, it also incorporates techniques employed by his Impressionist friends to capture the fleeting effects of light and colour. This small *Etude de femme*, intimate in both scale and subject, is probably a study for one of Fantin-Latour's musical subjects. Specifically, such semi-nude and nude female figures appeared in his illustrations of Richard Wagner's 'Tannhäuser', which was first performed in 1861 in Paris, but also in his tributes to Schumann and Berlioz, and in the many scenes inspired by 'Der Ring des Nibelungen', which he had seen in 1876 in Bayreuth.

The compositions of Latour's figurative works are fluent and mobile. This is particularly the case in *Etude de femme* where we can appreciate his brush technique been particularly looser and freer than in his traditional still lifes. An additional impressionistic touch is rendered through the scratching of the back of his brush into the wet paint. Well-meriting the words of Emile Zola:

"The canvases of M. Fantin-Latour do not assault your eyes, they do not leap at you from the walls. They must be looked at for a length of time in order to penetrate them, and their conscientiousness, their simple truth you take these in entirely, and then you return."¹

¹ E. Zola, quoted in E. Lucie-Smith, *Fantin-Latour*, London, 1977, p. 37.