

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Adolphe Lalire
(Rouvres-en-Woëvre 1848/50 – Courbevoie 1933)

Two Nude Sketches

First sheet signed and numbered mid-right: *A Lalire / 242*

Second sheet signed and numbered mid-bottom: *A Lalire / 929*

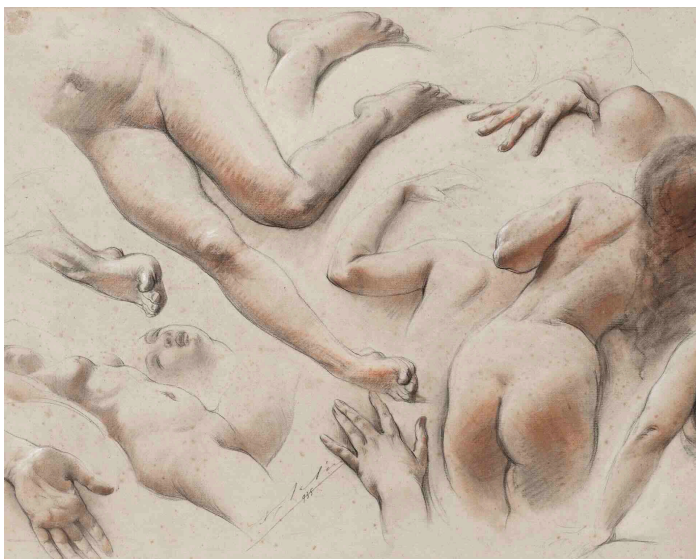
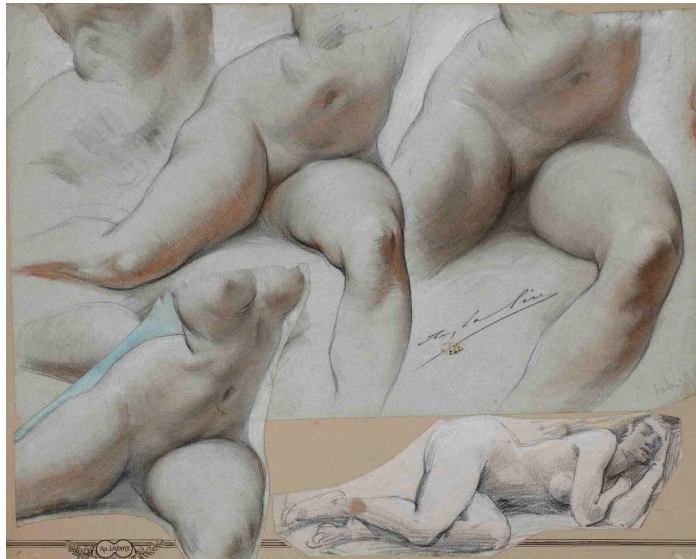
Black crayon and red chalk on paper

First sheet 45 x 59 cm (17 ³/₄ x 23 ¹/₄ in.)

Second sheet 49 x 60 cm (19 ¹/₄ x 23 ¹/₂ in.)

Provenance:

Private Collection, France, until 2024.



Filled corner-to-corner with delicate, yet energetic anatomical studies, these two sheets by Adolphe Lalire show the French artist's mastery of the female form. With their sprawled limbs and sensual gestures, the figures were likely used in preparation for a painting depicting sea nymphs, a favourite subject of the artist (See figs 1-2).



Fig. 1. Adolphe Lalire, *Song of the Seas*, oil on canvas, 1912. Private collection.

Fig. 2. Adolphe Lalire, *Naiads*, oil on canvas. Private collection.

Having graduated at the top of his class at the Parisian *École des Beaux-Arts* in 1875, Lalire's creative process was steeped in academic tradition. The artist's intensive relationship with drafting the feminine nude stemmed from his formative years at the *École* and remained with him throughout his career, so much so that in 1910 he wrote an entire book on the subject, titled *Le nu féminin à travers les âges, chez tous les peuples*.

The manner in which Lalire handled the nude depended on the context of the final work. For his religious subjects, the artist often drew from famous examples of Renaissance and Baroque sculpture, rendering them more sumptuous -- and often more nude. Such is the case with his *Saint Cecilia* (Fig. 3), which is a clear reference to Stefano Maderno's famous sculpture of the Saint in Rome (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. Adolphe Lalire, *Saint Cecilia*, oil on canvas, 1896. Chartres, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

Fig. 4. Stefano Maderno, *Saint Cecilia*, marble, 1600. Rome, Santa Cecilia in Trastevere.

For his more fantastical compositions, such his nymphs, Lalire would repeatedly draft and redraft the same position from a live model to ensure that the figures in his final paintings were filled with energy and dynamism. In the case of these two sheets, the unmistakably redheaded sitter is likely Marthe Lalire Levesques, Adolphe's wife and an artist in her own right. Marthe and Adolphe are documented as repeatedly posing for each other and for inspiring each other's work (see Figs 5-6).

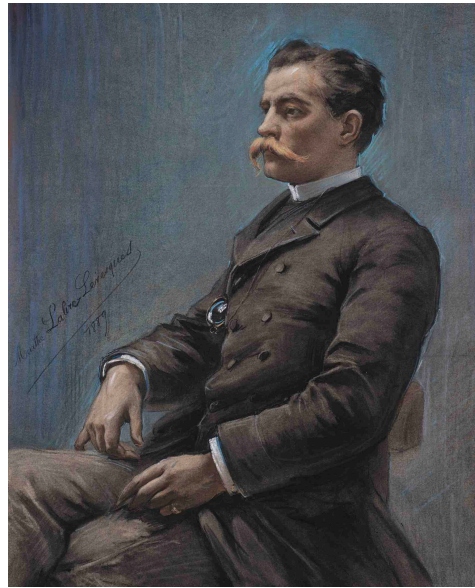


Fig. 5. Adolphe Lalire, *Portrait of Marthe Lalire Levesques*, oil on canvas, Private Collection.

Fig. 6. Marthe Lalire Levesques, *Portrait of Adolphe La Lyre*, Pastel on paper, 1889. Private collection.

Beyond being part of the rich testimony of their artistic collaboration, these two sheets show that Marthe's modelling for Adolphe went beyond simply sitting for portraits. Posing for Adolphe for his mythological paintings meant that Marthe became nearly omnipresent in Adolphe's *oeuvre*, a sign of their love for one another and deeply integrated artistic processes. Adolphe's intensive manner of working with the human figure-- made possible thanks to his relationship to Marthe-- gained him widespread success, including medals at two Universal Exhibitions.