



The Story Of The Belle époque In One Portrait By John Da Costa



17 400 EUR

Signature : John da Costa

Period : 20th century

Condition : 2021 entièrement restauré par un restaurateur d'art professionnel, également un cadre nouvellement fabriqué à partir de 2021. la tête de la fille a été préalablement découpée, notre restauratrice a mis beaucoup de temps à la réparer, ce qui a été très réus

Material : Oil painting

Diameter : 85 cm

Height : 147 cm

Description

The story of the Belle époque in one portrait

When it comes to glamour, no period in the history of art can compete with the Belle époque. A generation of highly talented artists developed new styles of portraiture that not only showed fashionable taste and elegance - but also the tensions and changes to come that lurked behind the surface of this glittering age. One of them was John da Costa (1867-1931) also - involuntarily - known as "The John Singer Sargent of children's portraits".

The time period between the Franco-Prussian war of 1871 and the outbreak of the first world war of 1914 was an unusually peaceful and prosperous one - at least on the surface. The decades leading

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up to the largest and most destructive war the world had ever seen were characterized by a combination of industrial boom, cosmopolitan life, the birth of modern art and literature and political movements that eventually would change society forever. In other words, it was a melting pot for many phenomenon and societal transformations that we still today are affected by, not least in the form of art.

Breaking away from the more conservative academic traditions, new styles of painting of varying radicality emerged and both chocked and delighted audiences. When it comes to portraiture, names like John Singer Sargent and Anders Zorn conquered international audiences with their electrifying paintings of high society, politicians and celebrities of the era. Their erringly light brushwork created an almost dreamlike atmosphere where everything from the sheerness of dress fabrics, subtle lights of ballroom evenings and dense psychological facial expressions vibrated with the zeitgeist. Initially controversial and breaking with traditional expectations, eventually it was this kind of portraits that became the "dernier cri", a hallmark of good taste and ultimately the very essence of the Belle époque. And it is here, in the vibrant field of portraiture, that John da Costa finds his place and artistic calling.

Born in Teignmouth in southern England, a career in the arts was not an obvious choice for John da Costa. Teignmouth, however, beautifully located in the Devon landscape with its proximity to the roaring sea and picturesque fields, was a small fishing town far away from urban life and the art scene. It appears that it was rather early on that his artistic talent became evident, and after studies in Southampton and Paris he eventually established himself as a prominent painter who would soon achieve an international reputation. Interestingly, he was for a period a member of the Newlyn artist colony in Cornwall, not too far

from his hometown, where the natural light inspired numerous artists to explore a new realism "En plein air", not unlike the more famous Barbizon School in France. However, this path, although certainly an important experience, was not right for da Costa who soon searched for other artistic inspiration. Fellow artist Norman Garstin noted with grief his departure from the colony, but new adventures were on their way and they would take on the form of portraiture.

It is hard for us today to understand how esteemed and culturally important the genre of portraiture was during this time. Portraits were constantly discussed and commented on, not only in their function of depicting a person but also as an artistic expression of its own, expanding the notion of what art was capable of documenting in terms of the human psyche, the mood of the time and of course the specific temperament and visions of the artist. Furthermore - and not unimportant - it was also an especially lucrative genre for a younger artist, who could more easily get an income through portraits while at the same time challenging themselves artistically.

Painting portraits demanded social skills, patience to deal with customers and a real understanding of different identities, ideals, fashions and particular wishes that each sitter might have. And then, the opinions of art critics and audience was also important to consider. In other words, portraiture is far from only capturing the likeness of a person - it is a deeply psychological, artistic and entrepreneurial endeavor. John Singer Sargent is perhaps the prime example of the complexity of Belle époque portraiture; it seems that he with a few meticulous but light brushstrokes could express an entire identity and of person and an era in a portrait. Perhaps this is why his style became so admired, and why so many artists were inspired to paint in a similar manner. Da Costa was far from alone in his fascination for swift, elegant brushwork in

Sargent's manner - but he was unusual in his ability to interpret it in his own distinct way.

Judging from where he received commissions, da Costa was a true cosmopolitan. He was as comfortable working in London as he was in Scotland, France and the US, where some of his most prestigious works were produced. For a number of years, he ran his own art school in Kensington in collaboration with his friend Phil Whiting from the Newlyn colony. The list of famous clients was impressive, among them we find the secretary of the treasury Andrew W. Mellon, an american politician, banker, businessman and art collector who became famous when paying the staggering sum of \$1,166,400 dollars for the Alba Madonna by Raphael, the highest price ever paid for a work of art at that point. Another sitter was heiress Cornelia Stuyvesant Vanderbilt, member of what was the wealthiest family in America who later studied art herself. The fact that names like these chose to be painted by da Costas tells us something about his success and ability to socialize in these circles.

However, despite all these stories and an impressive legacy of portraits in in both private and public collections across the world, very little research has been carried out to map out the life and dynamic career of John da Costa. When looking at his works we are instantly smitten by their charm and glamour, but much more is to be discovered about him and the networks he was part of.

This portrait of a currently unknown girl might prove to be an important piece of the puzzle, but even now as a "secret" it is without doubt a thought-provoking piece of art. The confident brushwork, the multilayered historical references in the proud posture, the dress, hair and ceremonial staff; everything signals dignity and ambition while at the same time having a playful

quality because the sitter is a young child. Apart from da Costas strong connection to the style of Sargent, one is also reminded about portraits by Anthony van Dyck who, without a doubt, was another obvious reference point for da Costa. But again, it is in the blend of ideas and influences that we find the essence of him.

The portrait is dated 1902 when da Costa was at the height of his career and reflects the fanciful glamour that was so typical of the era. Also, a certain darkness lures behind the shining surface; making the painting much more complex than what one would expect from a child's portrait. Soon, this style of portraiture would not only be out of fashion, it would be the symbol of a lost age. Perhaps future exhibitions and studies will be one way to gather further knowledge and identify more portraits and other works of his hand. Still, enjoying the works of da Costa as almost mystery-like has a charm of its own. We may not know all the details about him as of yet, but we can certainly feel the glamour and festive mood of a time long gone and full of questions about the ever-changing nature of art.

oil on canvas

signed John da Costa and dated -02

canvas size 57.87 x 33.46 inches (147 x 85 cm)

frame dimensions 62.99 x 38.58 inches (160 x 98 cm)

Provenance:

Possibly sold at Liverpool Dicksee & Co 1902 (see label), they were both frame makers and art agents;

Christie's, sale 707 GF according to a stencil on the back of the painting;

English collection until sold to Sweden 1936;

Acquired 1936 by Ingrid and Seth Molander, Sweden;

A private collection Sweden until acquired by Classicartworks Stockholm in the summer of 2021.