

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



John Singer SARGENT (Florence 1856 - London 1925)

A Young Boy Lying on a Cushion

Watercolour on buff paper.

Signed and dedicated a mon ami Subercaseaux / John S. Sargent. at the upper centre and upper left.

246 x 330 mm. (9 3/4 x 13 in.) [sheet]

John Singer Sargent produced numerous vibrant watercolours over his long career. The present sheet is likely to have been drawn in Venice, which Sargent visited numerous times over a period of more than forty years. He first saw the city while travelling with his parents in 1870, at the age of fourteen, and his last visit took place in 1913. The artist had a lifelong love affair with the city on the lagoon, of which he produced numerous watercolours and paintings, particularly in the early 1880s and from the late 1890s through to the first decade of the 20th century.

As Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray note of the present sheet, 'This intimate study of a young boy resting, with lips parted, is similar to other heads of Venetian models... Assuming that Venice is the location, it is probable that the boy is a local inhabitant rather than the son of one of the artist's friends.'

This watercolour bears the artist's dedication to his friend, the wealthy Chilean politician, diplomat and amateur painter Ramón Subercaseaux Vicuña (1854-1937), who served as the Chilean consul in Paris from 1874. In 1880 Subercaseaux commissioned Sargent to paint a full-length portrait of his wife, Amalia Errázuriz Subercaseaux, which won the artist a second-class medal at the Paris Salon the following year. When, in September 1880, Sargent rented a studio on the Grand Canal in Venice, Ramón Subercaseaux was one of the artists who joined him there. During this period, Sargent painted a portrait of Subercaseaux sketching in a gondola; a painting now in the Dixon Gallery and Gardens in Memphis, Tennessee.

This drawing was later inherited by Subercaseaux's grandson, Gabriel Valdés Subercaseaux (1919-2011), who served for many years as a Minister of Foreign Affairs and a senator in Chile and, upon his retirement, as the Chilean ambassador to Italy between 2006 and 2008.

Literature:

Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, John Singer Sargent: Figures and Landscapes, 1874-1882. Complete Paintings, Volume IV, New Haven and London, 2006, p.385, p.422, no.836 (where dated c.1880-1881).

Artist description:

Born in Italy, the son of expatriate Americans, John Singer Sargent received his artistic training in Paris. He travelled widely throughout France, Italy and Spain, and became established as the leading portrait painter working in England and America in the latter part of the 19th century. Sargent settled in London in 1886, although he continued to make regular trips to the Continent, often in the company of his younger sisters Emily and Violet, and also to New York and Boston. In 1894 he was elected an Associate member of the Royal Academy in London, becoming a full Academician three years later. Although he was arguably Sargent was the most fashionable portrait painter in England and America by the end of the 19th century, he chose to abandon commissioned portraiture in 1907, working instead on landscapes and mural projects as well as working as a war artist during the First World War. This resulted in a monumental canvas of soldiers injured by poison gas, completed in 1919 and today in the Imperial War Museum in London.