

Howard Chandler CHRISTY (1873 - 1952)

An Elegant Woman in a Fur-Trimmed Coat

Charcoal, pastel and watercolour.
Signed and dated HOWARD CHANDLER CHRISTY. 1902 at the lower right.
894 x 445 mm. (35 1/4 x 17 1/2 in.) [sight]

This large drawing, executed in 1902, is a splendid example of the depictions of young American women with which Christy established his reputation. This ideal of feminine youth and beauty, which came to be known simply as the 'Christy Girl' - and for which hats, shoes and dresses were also named – was a type described by the artist as 'high bred, aristocratic and dainty though not always silken-skirted; a woman with tremendous self-respect.'

Provenance:

Brooke Astor, New York
Thence by descent until 2012.

Artist description:

One of the best-known American artists of his day, Howard Chandler Christy was a pupil of William Merritt Chase. He began his career as an illustrator, working for many of the leading publications in America in the first quarter of the 20th century, and also briefly taught at the Art Students League and the Cooper Union in New York. A stint as a war artist-correspondent in Cuba led to a series of drawings of scenes from the Spanish-American War, published in Harper's Magazine, Leslie's Weekly and Scribner's Magazine, which garnered the artist considerable renown and earned him numerous magazine commissions. Around the turn of the century he began to develop a particular specialty of depictions of an idealized kind of young American womanhood, a type which soon came to be known simply as the 'Christy Girl'. These works proved very popular and were often reproduced as posters or calendars. (A selection of drawings of this type was published in a book entitled The Christy Girl in 1906, with each plate accompanied by brief poems written by the artist; this was to be the one of several such published books or albums.) As the writer S. J. Woolf recalled in 1948, 'The way Christy drew the Christy Girl she was popular with the males because of her charm, while the young women liked her because she embodied their dreams of emancipation.' By 1910 Christy was earning some $50,000 a year, with numerous magazines commissioning illustrations from him, and was among the most recognized artists of the time. He also provided illustrations for books and short stories by such authors as Jack London, H. G. Wells and Thomas Nelson Page.

During the First World War Christy designed a number of popular recruiting posters for the Navy and the Marine Corps, many of which were also reproduced as postcards. Around 1920 Christy abandoned commercial illustration in favour of a second career as a portraitist, producing portraits of such prominent social and political figures as the newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, Presidents Calvin Coolidge, Warren Harding and Herbert Hoover, the aviator Amelia Earhart, General Douglas MacArthur and Charles Evan Hughes, U. S. Secretary of State and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, as well as the Prince of Wales. In 1940 he began to paint large mural pictures of historical subjects for public buildings, of which undoubtedly the most prominent is the monumental canvas of The Signing of the Constitution of the Unites States, completed in 1940 and measuring twenty by thirty feet, which hangs on the grand staircase of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.