

Franz von Stuck (1863 - 1928)

Portrait of the Artist's Daughter Mary

Black and white chalk, pastel, watercolour and touches of gouache on cardboard.
Signed FRANZ / VON / STUCK at the right centre.
610 x 465 mm. (24 x 18 1/4 in.)

Mary Stuck (1896-1961) was Franz von Stuck's only child, born from an affair with a woman named Anna Maria Brandmaier. The following year the artist married the American Mary Lindpainter, and in 1904 the couple formally adopted the young girl, who had been christened Maria Franziska but was simply known as Mary. Mary Stuck posed frequently for her father in the 1910's and 1920's, often dressed in costume as a Greek or Spanish girl, bullfighter or gypsy, in works which were much prized by collectors.

Working from photographs which the artist took of her, the resulting portraits of Mary were, as one modern scholar has noted, 'assured of a certain degree of likeness, but they underwent the process of stylization that was habitual in Stuck's work from photographs to paintings…The regular and still unindividualized features of the young girl offered an excellent basis for aesthetic treatment…The numerous paintings of Mary, done as portraits, masquerade studies or impersonal symbolic works, sold extremely well.'

This striking portrait can be dated to around 1910, when the sitter was around fourteen years old. Mary is shown here wearing her new motoring bonnet, in which she also appears in several of the artist's photographs of her, including one on which the present composition is based. As in several other paintings and drawings of Mary wearing the same bonnet, the deep blue hat here becomes a decorative motif in its own right. As Thomas Raff has written of another painting of Mary wearing the same bonnet, '[Stuck] has made from the hat and the ribbon at the neck a sort of luminous blue halo, but that of a seductive saint, a child-woman à la Wedekind's Lulu.'

A more finished variant of this composition is in a private collection, while a smaller, circular version is in the collection of the Museum Villa Stuck in Munich and an octagonal painting of this composition is in the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio. Another small octagonal painted portrait of Mary wearing the same bonnet, in which she is seen full face, is in a private collection.

Provenance:

Private collection, Thuringia, Germany.

Artist description:

Born in lower Bavaria, Franz Stuck came from a peasant stock, and his talent as an artist was evident from an early age. He received his artistic training at the Academy of Applied Arts and the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. While still a student he began supporting himself with work as an illustrator, producing drawings and caricatures for the picture magazine Fliegende Blätter, as well as designs for bookplates, menus, and so forth. Active as a painter, sculptor, printmaker and architect, Stuck was one of the founders of the Munich Secession in 1892, and soon became among the most successful and renowned artists in the city. His large and boldly coloured mythological paintings, characterized by Symbolist overtones, won medals and prizes at exhibitions in Germany, Europe and America over the next three decades, and he was also much in demand as a portrait painter.

In 1895 Stuck was appointed a Professor at the Akademie in Munich, where his pupils were to include Paul Klee, Josef Albers, and Wassily Kandinsky. In 1897 he began work on the construction and elaborate decoration of a new home and studio in Munich, known as the Villa Stuck, for which he also designed the furniture. The house was completed in 1898, and is today a museum devoted to the artist's life and work. In 1905 he was awarded a Knight's Cross of the Order of the Bavarian Throne, which raised him to the nobility, and from this point onwards he signed his works as 'Franz von Stuck'. At the International Exhibition in Venice in 1909 Stuck was given a room to himself, and in the later years of his career began to focus on sculpture over paintings. By this time, however, his work was beginning to fall out of favour with art critics outside Munich. Although his reputation in Munich itself remained undimmed throughout most of his career, his work and his reputation had fallen into a gradual neglect elsewhere in Germany and the rest of Europe by the second decade of the 20th century.