

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Emile De Specht (Saint-Denis 1843 -)

A Presumed Portrait of Edgar Degas

Black chalk, with stumping.

Signed and dated Le 22 Novembre 1878 / Émile de Specht / Paris at the lower right.

305 x 232 mm. (12 x 9 1/8 in.)

Emile De Specht produced a number of portraits of some of the artistic and literary figures of his day. This fine drawing would appear to be a portrait of the artist Edgar Degas (1834-1917) at the age of forty-four. A similar portrait drawing in black chalk by Émile de Specht, depicting Dr. Paul Gachet and dated the 19th of December 1895, is now lost, but is known from an engraving by Paul van Ryssel.

A watercolour sketch of the painter Edouard Manet and writer Edmond Duranty by De Specht, which once belonged to Gachet, was recently sold at auction in Paris.

Artist description:

Born in Saint-Denis, the painter, draughtsman and printmaker Wilhelm Émile Charles Adolphe de Specht was a pupil of Léon Cogniet and Félix-Joseph Barrias at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, which he entered in 1861. He exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Français from 1865 to 1897, showing mainly views of Paris, genre scenes and portraits. He also exhibited one work at the Salon des Refusés in 1873 and at the Salon des Indépendants in 1888. A typical work by De Specht is a View of Paris from the Butte Montmartre, dated 1879, which was recently on the art market in Paris, or a charming

scene of painters working en plein air in the dead of winter, sold at auction in 2015. De Specht also produced a number of prints, including a drypoint portrait of the printmaker Marcellin Desboutin. He was a member of the Société des Éclectiques, a group of printmakers and poets founded in 1872.

De Specht also worked as a painting conservator, as noted by the journalist Charles Virmaître in 1888: 'Emile de Specht is one of our most skilful restorers of paintings, ancient or modern: this art requires a great lightness of hand, and a thorough knowledge of the manner of the great masters: de Specht is, at the same time, a most distinguished watercolourist; it was he who painted the cabinet of Mr. Albert Wolff. This watercolour was exhibited at the Salon of 1887...and earned the author the congratulations of the connoisseurs.' Indeed, the artist seems to have produced a number of watercolours of fashionable interiors, to judge from a report of an 1891 sale of the contents of the home of the actress Mme. Anna Judic, of which the Paris correspondent of the New York Herald noted, 'One of the most interesting of the water-colors is by Emile de Specht, and shows the big hall and picture gallery of the house where the sale takes place today, with Mme. Judic standing in the centre. It is a masterly bit of work, on account of the close attention which has been given to the work in the matter of detail. There is also a pendant to it, showing the outside of the hotel.'