

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Samuel John Lamorna BIRCH (English 1869 - 1955)

A Flower of November

Pen and brown ink and watercolour.

Inscribed A flower of November., and signed, dated and dedicated To Greta from John. / S.J Lamorna Birch 1939 at the bottom.

111 x 89 mm. (4 3/8 x 3 1/2 in.)

This small, charming sketch is dedicated to the artist's longtime friend Greta Sequeira, an amateur painter Birch met in 1937, when she was aged twenty-eight and staying at a holiday cottage in Cornwall with her parents. They soon became friends and spent much time together, often travelling to London to visit exhibitions and artist's studios. The close friendship between Greta and Birch, despite the significant age difference between them, seems to have led to occasional gossip about the nature of their relationship. At the time he made this small drawing for her, Birch seems to have been somewhat infatuated with the young woman, writing poems to her and taking great pleasure in her constant company. Yet, as the artist's biographer has noted, 'The attractions of Greta Sequeira for Birch went beyond her good looks. He was stimulated by her enthusiasm for painting and travel. Her energy, he told her, was like oxygen, giving him the drive to pursue his painting with unflagging vigour... Birch's friendship with Greta continued to be a rather odd mixture of serious endeavour and high-spirited excitement, cemented by a shared enjoyment of the earthiness of life.'

Although in 1941 Greta married the artist's patron, the Dundee publisher Randal Valentine, she continued to remain close to the artist throughout his life, and corresponded with him until his death.

Provenance:

Given by the artist to Greta Sequeira Valentine, in 1939.

Artist description:

Born in Cheshire, Samuel Birch was early in his life introduced to the pleasures of fly-fishing, which he soon combined with a talent for drawing by making landscape sketches. While working as an industrial designer he continued to draw and paint, soon developing a modest local reputation as a landscapist. In 1889 he visited the Cornish town of Newlyn, attracted by the work of the artists who had settled there, such as Stanhope Forbes and Frank Bramley. Apart from a brief period of study at the Atelier Colarossi in Paris in 1895, Birch was largely self-taught as an artist. On his return from Paris he settled in Cornwall and in 1902 moved to a studio near the coastal village of Lamorna, where he was to live and work for the rest of his career. The river valley and cove of Lamorna, not far from Penzance, was to become an area from which he derived lifelong inspiration. (Indeed, he soon added the name 'Lamorna' to his own, to distinguish himself from a local Newlyn painter named Lionel Birch.) His presence in Lamorna attracted other artists to the area, notably Laura and Harold Knight and Alfred Munnings. Since 1893 he had exhibited his work at the Royal Academy and the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, and from 1906 onwards enjoyed a number of one-man exhibitions at the Fine Art Society in London. In 1926 he was elected as Associate of the Royal Academy, rising to full membership in 1934. Birch travelled widely in England, Scotland and throughout Europe, usually combining his favourite pastimes of fishing and painting, but was always drawn back to his studio in the Lamorna valley.

Birch was a superb watercolourist, and worked in the medium to the end of his life. In a review of an exhibition of watercolours by Birch held at the Fine Art Society in 1911, one critic noted that 'This artist is becoming one of our best watercolourists with a quite personal method and habit of looking at things.'