

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Santiago ARCOS Y UGALDE (Santiago de Chile 1852 - San Sebastián 1912)

Absalam

Watercolour, over traces of an underdrawing in pencil.

Laid down.

Signed, dated and inscribed S. Arcos / 87 / Tangier. at the lower right, and titled Absalam. at the lower left.

314 x 192 mm. (12 3/8 x 7 5/8 in.)

This striking watercolour portrait was drawn, as the artist's inscription notes, in Tangier in 1887, and depicts a man by the name of Absalam. Santiago Arcos visited Morocco in 1887, perhaps under the influence of the Catalan painter Josep Tapiró i Baró, who lived and worked in Tangier. The light of Morocco had a profound effect on his paintings and watercolours, resulting in the artist adopting a brighter palette. Arcos painted a number of Orientalist pictures in Morocco, notably A Souk in Tangier, exhibited in 18902. These Moroccan pictures proved very popular when he exhibited them in Paris, and led to prizes at the Salon of 1888 and the Exposition du Cercle Artistique et Littéraire the same year, when one critic noted that 'M. Santiago Arcos goes from strength to strength. His types of Arabs, of Orientals, are captured on the spot. My sincere congratulations to this artist.'

The present sheet is typical of the handful of watercolour studies of Arab types by Arcos that are known, which tend to show the subjects in profile or in three-quarter view, and set against a neutral background.

Artist description:

Born in Chile, Santiago Arcos y Ugalde (sometimes Megalde) settled as a young child with his family in Argentina. Following the deaths of his mother and brother, he and his father moved to France in 1864, where the young Arcos became a pupil of the painters Léon Bonnat and Raimundo de Madrazo in Paris. He later studied in Madrid, where he is recorded as a copyist at the Prado in 1868, after which he completed his education in London and Florence. When his father died in 1874, Arcos inherited a considerable fortune, which he used to buy a large house and studio in Paris, part of which he rented to Raimundo de Madrazo and his brother Ricardo. A gifted painter, watercolourist and illustrator, Arcos divided his career between Madrid and Paris, exhibiting regularly in both cities, and also exhibited frequently in Pau, Bayonne and Biarritz. He worked mainly as a painter of mythological, religious and historical genre subjects, as well as producing portraits and small-scale plein-air landscapes.

Arcos was also a leading exponent of the 'costumbrismo' movement in 19th century painting, with its focus on Hispanic folklore and customs, and produced genre paintings of Andalusian and Basque subjects. By 1880 he was being praised by the journalist and writer Louis Énault: 'Compatriot of Madrazo and Fortuny, M. Santiago d'Arcos is today one of the most authoritative representatives of this contemporary Spanish school, so fine, so spiritual and so brilliant.'

Arcos exhibited regularly in Paris between 1879 and 1911, and won prizes in exhibitions in Madrid in 1881 and Paris in 1900. He became one of the leading Spanish artists working in Paris, and was much in demand among members of the Parisian society as a portrait painter. He counted among his patrons the former Queen Isabella II of Spain, for whom he illustrated a book of poems by Antonio Fernández Grillo, and such important foreign collectors as the American William H. Stewart, who was a major patron of several Spanish artists working in Paris. He was very active as an illustrator for numerous books published in both France and Spain - such as Achille Fouquier's *Chants populaires espagnols*, which appeared in 1882, and Gustave Becquer's *Légendes espagnoles*, published three years later - as well as such magazines as *Le Monde Illustré*, *La Vie Moderne*, and others. He also designed costumes and stage sets. Arcos spent much time in the Basque towns of Saint Jean-de-Luz in the south west of France and San Sebastián in Spain. The later years of his career were spent in San Sebastián, where he died of pneumonia in 1912.