

**Odilon REDON (Bordeaux 1840 - Paris 1916)**

**The Head of a Young Woman Looking Down (Tête de Femme Penchée)**
Watercolour and pencil.

Signed ODILON REDON in green ink at the upper right.

Several mountmaker's inscriptions in pencil in the lower margin.

210 x 173 mm. (8 1/4 x 6 3/4 in.) [image]

247 x 173 mm. (9 3/4 x 6 3/4 in.) [sheet]

Odilon Redon's work in watercolour reflects a more reserved side of his experiments with colour, and his work in this fluid medium seems to have been done largely for his own pleasure. His late watercolours were never exhibited in his lifetime, and seem to have been retained by the artist until his death, after which a number of examples were sold by his widow to private collectors. Redon's work as a watercolourist was first seen by the public only in posthumous exhibitions of his work, such as that held at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in 1917 or at the Galérie Barbazanges three years later, in 1920, in which the present sheet was shown for the first time.

This subject of this magnificent, glowing late watercolour - aptly described by the Redon scholar Alec Wildenstein as a 'woman, young and with a rebellious pout, her hair dripping with water, [who] seems to come out of the waves' - is depicted enclosed by a sort of colourful aura or nimbus; a motif found in a number of Redon's paintings, watercolours and pastels of the second decade of the 20th century. Like many of Redon's works, the subject of the present sheet remains enigmatic. Throughout his career Redon produced paintings, pastels and drawings of heads in profile; often idealized, sometimes

grotesque, and always somewhat mysterious. In remarkably fresh condition, this splendid watercolour once belonged to Redon's only son, Arï Redon (1889-1972), who inherited the bulk of the contents of his father's studio. (The present sheet has, in fact, occasionally been regarded as a portrait of Arï Redon as a child, but has more generally been identified as the head of a young girl, despite some superficial similarities with the appearance of Redon's son at the age of around ten or eleven.) In 1920 Arï Redon organized the retrospective exhibition of his father's work at the Galérie Barbazanges in Paris, which included this watercolour from his collection.

Most of the rich assortment of works by Redon inherited by his son Arï was presented to the Louvre, in accordance with his wishes, by his widow Suzanne in 1982, ten years after his death. This watercolour, however, was acquired directly from Arï Redon by the Parisian dealer and collector Mira Jacob (1912-2004). Jacob opened her gallery in Paris, called Le Bateau-Lavoir after the famous artist's studios in Montmartre, in 1955. Located on the rue de Seine, the gallery specialized in drawings and prints by artists of the 19th and 20th centuries, with a particular emphasis on Symbolist works. Apart from her activities as a gallerist, Jacob owned an impressive private collection of drawings and prints, dominated by the work of Odilon Redon and Paul Delvaux. She held two exhibitions of prints and drawings by Redon at Le Bateau-Lavoir, in 1969 and 1979, and translated the artist's memoirs A soi-même into English in 1986. Jacob assembled a personal collection of works by Redon of great breadth and variety, much of it acquired from Arï Redon.

**Provenance:**

The studio of the artist, and by descent to his son, Arï Redon, Paris
Acquired from him by Mira Jacob, Paris
The Mira Jacob - Galerie Le Bateau Lavoir sale, Paris, Drouot Montaigne, 23-24 September 2004, lot 50
Private collection, Brescia.

**Exhibitions**

Paris, Galerie Barbazanges, Exposition rétrospective d'oeuvres d'Odilon Redon (1840-1916), 1920, no.176 (as 'Copie de Decamps'); Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Odilon Redon: Exposition rétrospective de son oeuvre, 1926, no.164 ('Copie de Decamps'); Paris, Petit Palais, Exposition Odilon Redon, 1934, no.116 ('Profil'); Paris, Orangerie des Tuileries, Odilon Redon, 1956-1957, no.197 ('Femme a la tête penchée'); New York, The Museum of Modern Art and Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, Odilon Redon, Gustave Moreau, Rodolphe Bresdin, 1961-1962, no.73 (as Profile of a Woman).

**Literature:**

Klaus Berger, Odilon Redon: Phantasie und Farbe, Cologne, 1964, p.220, no.525; Klaus Berger, Odilon Redon: Fantasy and Colour, New York, 1965, p.220, no.525 (as Girl with Bent Head (after Decamps), and dated c.1904); Jean Selz, Odilon Redon réveillé, Paris, 1971, illustrated in colour p.85; Jean Selz, Odilon Redon, Lugano, 1971, illustrated in colour p.85 (as Inclined Female Head, c.1910); Alec Wildenstein, Odilon Redon: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint et dessiné. Vol.I: Portraits et figures, Paris, 1992, p.124, no.297 (as Tête de Femme Penchée').

**Artist description:**

At a very young age, Odilon Redon was sent to live with an old uncle at Peyrelebade, a vineyard and estate surrounded by an abandoned park in a barren area of the Médoc region, northwest of Bordeaux. Here the young boy, who suffered from frail health and epilepsy, was to spend much of his childhood in

relative solitude. Indeed, it was not until he was eleven that he was sent to school in Bordeaux, where at fifteen he began to take drawing classes. The most important influence on the young artist was Rodolphe Bresdin, whose studio in Bordeaux he frequented, and who was to prove decisive on his artistic development. It was from Bresdin, for example, that Redon learned the techniques of etching and lithography. Nevertheless, for most of his career Redon worked in something of an artistic vacuum, aware of the work of his contemporaries but generally preferring to follow his own path. His drawings and prints allowed him to express his lifelong penchant for imaginary subject matter, and were dominated by strange and unsettling images of fantastic creatures, disembodied heads and masks, solitary eyes, menacing spiders and other dreamlike forms. For much of the first thirty years of his career Redon worked almost exclusively in black, producing his 'noirs' in charcoal and chalk; the drawings he described as 'mes ombres', or 'my shadows'.

It was not until 1881, when he was more than forty years old, that Redon first mounted a small exhibition of his work, to almost complete indifference on the part of critics or the public. The following year, however, a second exhibition of drawings and lithographs brought him to the attention of a number of critics. Redon's reputation began to grow, and in 1884 he exhibited at the first Salon des Indépendants, which he had helped to organize. Two years later he was invited to show at the eighth and final Impressionist exhibition, and in the same year exhibited with Les XX, a group of avant-garde artists, writers and musicians in Brussels.

Towards the end of the 19th century Redon began to move away from working mainly in charcoal and black chalk in favour of a new emphasis on colour, chiefly using the medium of pastel but also watercolour, oil paint and distemper. Indeed, after about 1900 he seems to have almost completely abandoned working in black and white. Like his noirs, his pastels of floral still lives and portraits were popular with a few collectors, and several were included in exhibitions at Durand-Ruel in 1900, 1903 and 1906, and in subsequent exhibitions of his work in Paris and abroad. Despite this change in direction, however, Redon's work remained unpopular with the public at large, and it was left to a few enlightened collectors to support the artist in his later years. Nevertheless, an entire room was devoted to Redon at the seminal Armory Show held in New York in 1913, an honour shared by Cezanne, Gauguin, Matisse and Van Gogh.