

Louis Welden HAWKINS (Esslingen 1849 - Paris 1910)

Portrait of the Actress Jeanne Silvain

Pastel, coloured chalks, watercolour and touches of gouache, with a framing line in pencil.

Signed and dated *LOUIS. WELDEN. HAWKINS – 09-* at the bottom.

In a carved gilt frame with a laurel wreath design, with the artist's monogram at the bottom.

338 x 315 mm. (13 1/4 x 12 3/8 in.)

A fine example of Louis Welden Hawkins's refined draughtsmanship, this drawing in pastel, gouache and watercolour is a portrait of the French actress Jeanne-Louise-Pauline Silvain (1892-1983). Born into a theatrical family, she was the daughter of Eugène Silvain and Louise Silvain, both of whom were actors at the Comédie-Française, and the sister of the playwright Jean Silvain. In 1916 Jeanne Silvain married the theatre director and Resistance fighter Edmond Roze, and after his death in 1943 was wed to Alvin David Laidley, a UNESCO official.

A similar oval pastel portrait by Hawkins of the present sitter's mother, Louise Silvain (1874-1930), dated March 1906, was on the art market in Paris. A similar oval pastel portrait of the present sitter's mother, the actress Louise Silvain (1874-1930), dated March 1906, was recently on the art market in Paris.

Artist description:

Born in Germany to an English father and an Austrian mother, Louis Welden Hawkins studied at the Académie Julian in Paris between 1873 and 1876, under the painters William Adolphe Bouguereau,

Jules Lefebvre and Gustave Boulanger. He entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1876 and made his public debut at the Salon des Artistes Français in 1881, where his painting Les Orphelins won a third-class medal and was purchased by the State for the Musée du Luxembourg. Hawkins exhibited at the Salons of the Societé des Artistes Français between 1881 and 1891, and from 1894 onwards showed his work at the Societé Nationale des Beaux-Arts. He also participated in the exhibitions organized by the Rose + Croix movement in Paris in 1894 and 1895, at La Libre Esthétique in Brussels in 1894, 1896 and 1898, and at the Royal Society of British Artists in London in 1880 and 1881. He exhibited mainly landscapes, sentimental genre scenes and refined portraits, all of which earned him a considerable reputation.

Although Hawkins worked in a range of styles, perhaps the most interesting is a form of refined Symbolism, reflecting the artist's interest in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and his friendship with writers such as Stephane Mallarmé (who noted of a painting given to him by the artist, 'talisman de longues heures, que nul regard ne peut épuiser'), Paul Adam and Jean Lorrain, as well as painters like Eugène Carrière and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. Hawkins, who took French nationality in 1895, at the age of forty-six, was also friendly with the painter James A. McNeill Whistler and the sculptor Auguste Rodin, whose portrait he painted. Despite the fact that he worked for his entire career in France, only a handful of paintings by Hawkins are to be found in French museum collections, notably a remarkable portrait in the Musée d'Orsay of the feminist, socialist and journalist Caroline Rémy, known as Séverine. A striking self-portrait by the artist, dated 1906, is in the collection of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, which mounted a retrospective exhibition of Hawkins's work in 1993.