

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Berthe MORISOT (Bourges 1841 - Paris 1895)**

## **A Seated Young Girl**

Watercolour, over an underdrawing in pencil.

274 x 204 mm. (10 3/4 x 8 in.)

Drawings were an important part of Berthe Morisot's artistic process, and she often chose to display her works on paper alongside her paintings. As Marianne Mathieu has written of the artist, 'Throughout her short life, she took care to ensure that her drawings featured prominently in her exhibitions, as if to stress their importance in her work and her passion for graphic art...It is interesting to note that she was the only Impressionist to exhibit, at each edition, not only oil paintings but also watercolours, pastels and sometimes even drawings. Works on canvas and paper were shown together and championed with the same conviction.' Morisot's vibrant watercolours established her as a superb colourist, while her work in pastel was integral to the development of many of her figure paintings. Her drawings were acquired by a small group of enlightened collectors and connoisseurs, including Degas (who once proclaimed '[Morisot's] drawings are superb, I value them just as highly as [her] paintings') and the Impressionist patron Ernest Hoschédé, as well as the critics and art historians Arsène Houssaye, Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, Ernest Chesneau and Charles Ephrussi.

Throughout her career Morisot worked extensively in watercolour, a medium she was particularly fond of, and which appealed to many contemporary critics and collectors. One review of her exhibition at the Galerie Boussod et Valadon in 1892 praised 'above all, all those delicate watercolours, all those charming, light sketches of children, barely enhanced with pale blue and vermillion...' The early 20th century critic and art historian Claude Roger-Marx placed Morisot's watercolours, alongside those of Johan Barthold Jongkind, as 'the most triumphant watercolours of impressionism; she is alert, fresh, light, diaphanous...the attitude and the gesture are unobtrusively fixed with the happy unawareness of

the genius that laughs, without fear or fatigue, at the difficulties it ignores. Nowhere does Berthe Morisot appear more personal, more exquisite, and never, in fact, will there ever be so decisive an agreement, so close a correlation between the quality of the expeditious, instantaneous process, and the artist's very nature, all in the first stroke.' Some 240 watercolours by Morisot are known or recorded.

According to Morisot's daughter Julie Manet, this charming late watercolour, executed towards the end of the year 1894, depicts an unnamed, non-professional model who also posed for several other works by the artist, and who is here depicted in the dining room of Morisot's apartment at 10 rue Weber, in the 16th arrondissement of Paris. An earlier and much less finished watercolour sketch for the same composition is in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and both it and the present sheet are closely related to a small painting by Morisot of the same date.

A stylistically comparable watercolour by Morisot of the same approximate date, and possibly depicting the same sitter, is in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, while also similar is a watercolour of a seated Jeanne Pontillon of c.1893, in the Art Institute of Chicago.

The present sheet was included in the recent exhibition 'Berthe Morisot: Pittrice Impressionista' at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna in Turin in 2024-2025. As Denis Rouart has noted of such works as this, 'Pure in line, strong and solid, these drawings of young women and children in the fields, gardens or interiors of their homes, are a hymn to grace, as is all of Berthe Morisot's work.'

### **Exhibitions**

Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Cent oeuvres de Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), 1919, no.103; Paris, Galerie Marcel Bernheim, Réunion d'oeuvres par Berthe Morisot, 1922, no.74 ('Jeune fille assise dans un fauteuil'); Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Berthe Morisot 1841-1895: Malerier, Akvareller og Tegninger, 1949, no.84 ('Ung dame, der hviler. Jeune fille étendue. Sortkridt. 0.450 x 0.555. Stemple: B.M.', with incorrect dimensions); Los Angeles, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, The Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John Rewald, 1959, no.88; Turin, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Berthe Morisot: Pittrice Impressionista, 2024-2025, no.19.

### **Literature:**

Marie-Louise Bataille and Georges Wildenstein, Berthe Morisot: Catalogue des peintures, pastels et aquarelles, Paris, 1961, p.72, no.843, fig.807 ('Jeune fille au repos', with incorrect dimensions and dated 1894), and p.50, under no.405; Maria Teresa Benedetti and Giulia Perin, ed., Berthe Morisot: Pittrice Impressionista, exhibition catalogue, Turin, 2024-2025, pp.88-89, no.19.

### **Artist description:**

The daughter of a civil servant, Berthe-Marie-Pauline Morisot and her older sister Edma received lessons in drawing from the Lyonnais painter Joseph-Benoit Guichard and registered as copyists at the Louvre. The sisters also earned the support and encouragement of Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, a friend of the Morisot family, and through him continued their training with the landscape painter Achille Oudinot. They began to paint outdoors at Pontoise, as well as at Beuzeval in Normandy and in Brittany. Berthe showed her work for the first time at the Paris Salon of 1864 and continued to exhibit there until 1868. Through Henri Fantin-Latour she met Edouard Manet, who encouraged her in her work, although she was never a pupil of his. The Manet and Morisot families became friendly, and Berthe became one of Manet's favourite models, posing for such paintings as *The Balcony* and *Repose*. Manet also painted her portrait ten times between 1868 and 1874. In 1874 Morisot was invited by Edgar Degas to take part in the first Impressionist exhibition, where she was the only woman to be included. (Her decision to take part in the first Impressionist exhibition was taken against Manet's advice.) Although the exhibition famously attracted considerable critical and public derision, a number of art critics praised Morisot's

work.

In December 1874, Morisot married Edouard Manet's younger brother Eugène, and the following year the couple spent some weeks in England, at Cowes on the Isle of Wight and in London. Choosing to abandon the Salon, Morisot was to participate in seven of the eight Impressionist exhibitions - missing only the fourth, on account of the birth of her daughter Julie – and exhibited drawings in pastel and watercolour alongside oil paintings. Morisot adopted the freedom of handling characteristic of Impressionist landscape paintings, but applied it to figure paintings, portraits and domestic subjects. It was this fluidity of brushwork and sensitivity of colour that struck most observers. In a review of the second Impressionist exhibition, held in 1876 at the Galerie Durand Ruel on the rue le Peletier in Paris, the critic Paul Mantz wrote: 'The truth is that there is only one Impressionist in the group at rue le Peletier: it is Berthe Morisot. She has already been acclaimed and should continue to be so. She will never finish a painting, a pastel, a watercolor; she produces prefaces for books that she will never write, but when she plays with a range of light tones, she finds grays of an extreme finesse and pinks of the most delicate pallor.'

Morisot became friendly with several artists, including Degas, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet and Mary Cassatt, as well as the poet Stéphane Mallarmé. In May 1892 she had what was to be the first and only solo exhibition in her lifetime at the Galerie Boussod et Valadon in Paris. The exhibition included forty paintings and numerous drawings, watercolours and pastels, and received positive reviews. In 1893 Morisot exhibited two paintings at the Association pour l'Art in Antwerp and one at the New English Art Club in London, and the following year showed four works at Le Libre Esthétique in Brussels. In 1894 Mallarmé arranged to have one of her paintings acquired at auction by the State for the Musée de Luxembourg.

Following the death of Eugène Manet in April 1892, Morisot devoted most of her time to raising Julie, painting and drawing her as she grew into a teenager. Devoted to her daughter, the artist nursed her back to health after Julie was struck by the flu in February 1895, but in so doing became ill herself and died just a few days later, at the age of fifty-four. The day before her death, the artist wrote a letter to her daughter: 'My dearest little Julie, I love you as I die; I shall still love you when I am dead; I beg you, do not cry; this parting was inevitable. I had hoped to be with you until you married... Work and be good as you have always been. You have not caused me any chagrin in your young life. You have beauty, money; make good use of them... Do not cry; I love you more than I can tell you.'

After Morisot's death, the contents of her studio were not dispersed at auction but were retained by her family. A year later, in March 1896, a posthumous exhibition of her work, organized by Degas, Monet, Renoir and Mallarmé, was held at the Galerie Durand-Ruel in Paris. This large retrospective exhibition, which included 174 paintings, fifty-four pastels, sixty-seven drawings, sixty-nine watercolours and three sculptures by the artist, was a great critical success. Today, a large and significant group of paintings and works on paper by Berthe Morisot is in the collection of the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris; a posthumous bequest in 1996 made by the widow of the artist's grandson Denis Rouart.