

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



René GRUAU (Covignano 1909 - Rome 2004)

Design for a Poster: A Man in a Suit Walking

Gouache and black (India) ink, with added strips of glossy striped paper inserted into the composition.

Signed *Gruau at the lower right.

646 x 498 mm. (25 1/2 x 19 1/2 in.)

From the late 1940s through the 1960s René Gruau produced drawings for covers of the men's fashion magazines Club and Adam, as well as for Sir: Men's International Fashion Journal, a quarterly trade publication devoted to male fashion published in Holland by the International Textiles group. Gruau produced many cover designs, as well as illustrations, for Sir magazine throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

In a text accompanying a recent exhibition devoted to the male image in Gruau's art, it was noted that 'On the surface, crafted in gouache and felt tip pen, Gruau's man is chiselled, groomed, suave and sophisticated. Suited and booted he is always dapper, sometimes depicted with a strategically dipped Trilby hat and occasionally accessorized with an umbrella or cigarette. He's the picture of simmering machismo. He's the man about town, a real-life James Bond in control of every situation he finds himself in.'

Artist description:

Born to an Italian nobleman and a French mother in Covignano, near Rimini, Renato Zavagli Ricciardelli, Conte delle Camminate, enjoyed a life of luxury as a child, living between Rimini, Milan, Paris and Monte Carlo. He displayed an innate talent as a draughtsman from an early age and,

adopting his mother's maiden name of Gruau, embarked on a career as an illustrator while still in his late teens. Settling in Paris in the early 1930's, he soon found employment providing drawings of the latest fashions for the newspaper Le Figaro and the fashion magazine Femina. He also recorded the collections of such Parisian designers as Pierre Balmain, Jacques Fath, Jeanne Lanvin, Jean Patou, Elsa Schiaparelli, Cristobal Balenciaga and, in particular, Christian Dior, who was a close friend. Gruau worked closely with the couturier, designing numerous advertisements and posters for the atelier. Indeed, Gruau may be said to have helped to shape, to a large extent, the public image of the house of Dior, particularly during the period of the fashion designer's brief independent career, between 1947 and his death ten years later.

By the end of the Second World War Gruau's reputation was firmly established, and had spread beyond France. He lived for several years in America, working for Harper's Bazaar and Vogue in New York in the late 1940's and in California for Flair. Although he had designed costumes and scenery for ballet companies in Paris, he declined offers to design costumes for Hollywood films. Following the death of Dior in 1957, Gruau largely abandoned the field of fashion illustration, and began providing designs for advertisements for such products as Martini, Lindt chocolates and Perrier, as well as theatre posters. In the 1980's he returned to fashion illustration, working in Paris for Vogue France, Elle and Madame Figaro. A retrospective of Gruau's work was held at the Musée du Costume in Paris in 1989, and at the city's new Musée de la Publicité in 1999, while the following year a permanent exhibition of his work was inaugurated at the Museo della Città in the artist's birthplace of Rimini.