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EST. 1817

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John William Godward (London 1861-1922)

A young woman in an ancient Greek dress

Signed and dated (upper left): 'GODWARD / 1906'; on the frame's reverse, a sale label: '10/ J.W. Godward/London/ideal head.'

Oil on unlined canvas

18 1/8 x 16 1/8 in. (46 x 41 cm.)



Provenance

Private collection, France, and thence by descent to the previous owner.

John William Godward is one of the last painters of the Victorian Neoclassical tradition who shared a penchant for creating works of art set in the classical period with his mentor Lawrence Alma-Tadema, as well as his contemporaries Frederic, Lord Leighton, Albert Joseph Moore and Sir Edward John Poynter. He quickly established a reputation for his paintings of young women in a classical setting and his ability to convey with sensitivity and technical mastery the feel of contrasting textures, flesh, marble, fur and fabrics.

By the late 1880s, Godward was exhibiting his paintings regularly at the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of British Artists—where he gained membership in 1889. He made his first visit to Italy in 1905, a year after his father died, where he travelled around the islands of Ischia and Capri, the Gulf of Naples, Sorrento and the historical site of Pompeii. The latter was one of his favourite places, and during this time he painted many oil studies.

He was heavily inspired by Greek and Roman civilization and his paintings of this period, such as the present work, contain no symbolic meaning or narrative, they are merely a celebration of timeless beauty, sumptuous surroundings and classically inspired fabrics which adorn the bodies of his subjects. In '*A Young woman in ancient Greek dress*', the model's tousled auburn hair cascades down her face, framing her

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languid almond eyes which appear lost in a reverie. The mauve background further accentuate her hair colour, and mirror her flushed cheeks and full red lips, infusing the painting with a sense of youthful passion and sensuality. The cool turquoise and white of her classical dress serve as a perfect counterbalance and lend the composition a beautiful softness and harmony.

Godward's full-length compositions of women in classical dress are typically framed by structured geometric lines, classical architecture and static landscape features constructed from marble. However, the head and shoulder studies of young women which he painted allow for a greater sense of intimacy. We are confronted with the classical Roman beauty close-up and face on, her languorous gaze meets ours and we are irresistibly drawn into her world, that of a bygone era.