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Dame Laura Knight, RA, RWS (Long Eaton
1877-1970 London)

Study of a young woman

Signed (upper right): 'Laura Johnson'

Charcoal on paper

19 ½ x 15 ½ in. (49.5 x 39.4 cm.)

Drawn in the 1890s



Provenance

The Fine Art Society, London.

Private collection, UK (acquired from the above 30 March 1955).

Property of a Charitable Trust.

As a child Laura Knight, in her own words, 'had loved pencil and paper to be thrust through the bars of my cradle', and her mother, herself an art teacher, encouraged her to copy the work of nineteenth-century illustrators to be found in books about the house. At the age of thirteen, she enrolled at the Nottingham School of Art, and there her intuitive skill would have been nurtured by life drawing classes and, as she later readily admitted, sitting next to and copying a dashing student in pince-nez glasses called Harold Knight.

At the time, women were disadvantaged as they were not allowed to paint from life models, instead having to use plaster casts. Despite this, Knight's portraits were handled with bravura and sensitivity. She was the first woman to be elected to the Royal Academy in 1936. Drawn at some point before Harold and Laura married in 1903, the academic study presented here is an early indication of her exceptional draughtsmanship. Very much of its time, too, the sheet also bears out her teacher William Foster's emphasis on drawing with absolute attention to detail. It was drawings like this one which she sent to the national competition in London each year, and for which on one occasion she won a gold medal (which she then sold to support her mother and their household). *Self-portrait* executed c.1892-94, *Man in a Top Hat* from 1892-96 and *Girl's Head* executed c.1891 all bear resemblance in handling and medium to the present picture, illustrated in Caroline Fox's *Dame Laura Knight*, 1988, p. 10, 11 & 13 respectively.

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