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Robert Fishko, *Director*

JOHN SINGER SARGENT
(1856 – 1925)

Alice, Lady Lowther (née Blight), c. 1905
charcoal on paper
24 5/8 x 18 3/4 inches
signed lower right: "John S. Sargent"

A certificate of authenticity has been provided by
Elizabeth Oustinoff for the John Singer Sargent
Catalogue Raisonné



Provenance

The Artist

Private Collection, France

By descent in the family

Private Collection, Long Island (since 2010)

Richard Schillay Fine Art, Inc., New York

Forum Gallery, New York (acquired directly from the above, February 7, 2017)

Exhibited

Loan Exhibition of Works by the Late John S. Sargent, R.A., City Museum and Art
Gallery, York, England, March – May, 1926, no. 82

Winter Exhibition: Works by the Late John S. Sargent, R.A., Royal Academy,
London, England, 1926, p. 66, no. 437 [exhibited in Gallery # 7 as *Alice, Lady
Lowther*]. [Upon Sargent's death, major commemorative exhibitions were held at
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the
Royal Academy of London, and the Tate Gallery, London.]

Literature

Mount, Charles Merrill. *John Singer Sargent: A Biography*, New York, NY, 1955, p. 299

Note

According to Richard Louis Ormond (grandson of the artist's sister and current Project Director of the John Singer Sargent Catalogue Raisonné), the American socialite Alice Blight Lowther (1873-1939) was the daughter of the attorney Atherton Blight of Philadelphia and granddaughter of the esteemed sculptor Richard Saltonstall Greenough (1819-1904). Her sister Evelyn Blight was married to the secretary of the American Free Trade League, Mahlon Sands, whose mother, Mary Morton Hartpence, was painted by Sargent in 1893-94. On February 28, 1905, in Newport, Rhode Island, Alice Blight married the English diplomat Sir Gerard Augustus Lowther (1858-1916), then secretary of the British Embassy in Washington, D.C. Alice Blight's altruistic legacy during World War I includes her involvement in the American Women's War Relief Fund, the War Relief Fund for Refugees in Constantinople, and the Belgian Prisoners of War in Germany Relief Fund, for which she received the Order of Queen Elizabeth of Belgium and Star of the Turkish Order of Shefakat (Mercy). A consummate traveler, Alice Blight's illustrated volume on British India, Land of the Gold Mohur was released in 1932. On page 107 of his 1956 monograph titled Sargent's Boston David McKibbin suggests that Blight was the model for the beautiful Lily Bart character in Edith Wharton's 1905 novel The House of Mirth.

Essay

For John Singer Sargent the years 1904-1909 were particularly productive in portraiture. He had recently returned to London from Boston (the American city he claimed as home) where, in 1903, the Museum of Fine Arts held an exhibition of his recent work. During his Boston sojourn Sargent painted portraits in the Gothic Room of the recently completed Fenway Court, the establishment of his dear patron Isabella Stewart Gardner. He also continued to labor on his mural cycle, *The Triumph of Religion*, a commission awarded him in 1890 as part of the McKim, Mead and White project for the Boston Public Library. Acknowledged by King Edward as the foremost portraitist of the British Empire, back in England portrait commissions continued to pour in for Sargent. During these immediate years prior to 1910 he executed dozens of them in oil and many more in graphite -- pencil portraits which he skillfully dashed off mostly for British society ladies who longed to have their likeness immortalized by the international artist superstar. Nevertheless, this marked the final great chapter to Sargent's portraiture, the artform he singlehandedly raised to new heights.

From the shadows of his adored Diego Velázquez (the Spanish painter of two centuries prior) Sargent had resurrected the "silhouette" as a viable artistic feature which he developed into its own masterful expression, subtly catering and refining its pertinence to each of his sitters. With delicate tracing and bold contours, the Sargent silhouette detached model from environment, simultaneously instilling immediacy, intensity, and intimacy. It would be one of Sargent's hallmarks, which he successfully extended to his pencil portraits. As with his drawing of *Alice Blight, Lady Lowther*, Sargent selected his pictorial areas cautiously, deliberately excerpting the quintessential: a less than formal coiffure or a fleeting smile past the intransigence of social etiquette.

By the time Sargent returned to Boston in 1916 to finally install his library murals, he had left portraiture for good. He moved on to the brilliance of watercolor, another medium on which he would break novel ground and another sensibility he would explore to the fullest. Still, portraiture remains Sargent's greatest singular achievement, an exercise which he single-handedly liberated from a predetermined technique and fashion. He drew on the gestural versus the meticulous as he saw fit, melded academism and Impressionism into his own idiom and, in so doing, created the most animate portraits in generations, dating back to the Dutch masters. Only Homer, Whistler, and Chase approach Sargent's preeminent position in 19th century American art. Born in Tuscany, claimed by England, Italy, and America alike, always an expatriate while at heart a Bostonian of the elegant age, John Singer Sargent remains the paragon of portraiture.

“In essence, then, Sargent's genius was the ability to form new correlations, bringing together factors previously existing as wholly separate phenomena. Everything that came within his grasp was revived by the life-giving factor of his own tremendous vitality. It was the same skill that Rafael and Tintoretto had in such great measure. Combining the styles of their great predecessors and contemporaries, the qualities of many schools, they, too, formed a newer, more nearly perfect art, fusing this correlated eclectic mass by the sheer force of genius into greatness.”

(Mount, Charles Merrill. John Singer Sargent: A Biography, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1955, pps. 292-3)



Photo Source: The Library of Congress
Bain News Service, Publisher. Lady Lowther.
Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of
Congress,
<<https://www.loc.gov/item/ggb2005013070/>> .

PHOTO OF ALICE BLIGHT, Lady Lowther

Summary

Photo shows Lady Lowther, formerly Miss Alice Blight of Philadelphia and wife of the British Ambassador at Constantinople (Istanbul). (Source: New York Times archive and Flickr Commons project, 2009)

Contributor Names

Bain News Service, publisher

Created / Published

1913 May 27.

Format Headings

Glass negatives

Notes

- Title and date from data provided by the Bain News Service on the negative.

- Forms part of: George Grantham Bain Collection (Library of Congress).

- General information about the Bain Collection is available

- at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.ggbain>

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Medium

1 negative,glass ; 5 x 7 in. or smaller