

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

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PAUL-CÉSAR HELLEU
1859 Vannes - Paris 1927

A Young Parisienne

Trois crayons (black, red and white chalk) on cream paper.
Signed in the lower left margin: *Helleu*, and bearing the number 5.
800 x 570 mm

PROVENANCE: William M. Chase – American Art Association – Simon Rothschild– Thence by descent (Estate of Phyllis Rothschild Farley)

As he drew he offered his model extravagant compliments, which would put her in a good mood and bring out the best in her.¹

Paul-César Helleu moved to Paris in 1876. He studied at the École des Beaux-Arts, training in the studio of Jean-Léon Gérôme.

He established his reputation at the Salons of 1885 and 1886 where he exhibited several large pastels. In the following year, Helleu came into contact with Robert de Montesquiou, who was to be his chief patron and who introduced him to the Parisian *haut monde*. A gifted portraitist, Helleu enjoyed considerable success throughout his career with his portraits of the elegant women of fashionable society. His works were greatly admired by his contemporaries and fellow artists, such as John Singer Sargent, with whom Helleu became close friend and who portrayed him several times [Fig.1]. He was a regular visitor to England and in 1902 began travelling to the United States. His artistic reputation is based on his output of drawings and prints – he produced over two thousand drypoints. They were in great demand in their time.

This large-sized impressive drawing was executed in the distinctive *trois crayons* [three chalks] technique.

Passionate about drawing, Helleu managed to find great freedom of expression, in a few lines of the tree chalks combined, to render his models' great *charme* and beauty.²

He was inspired to use this technique by eighteenth-century artists such as François Boucher and Antoine Watteau, who made figure, drapery and nude studies *aux trois crayons*. The technique was pioneered and popularised in the seventeenth century by the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens.

Sidney Redesdale reported: "Every day attractive elegant ladies would come aboard to have their portrait created in drypoint, which was Helleu's speciality. Generally women wore hats but if the model had exceptionally beautiful hair, headwear was dispensed with. It became the height of fashion to have one's portrait produced in drypoint by Helleu. As he drew he offered his model extravagant compliments, which would put her in a good mood and bring out the best in her."³

¹ Sidney Redesdale, cited in: *Into the Breach*, in: Frédérique de Watrigant, *Paul-César Helleu*, 2014, p. 85.

² Frédérique de Watrigant, *Intimacy*, in: op. cit., p. 160 ff.

³ Sidney Redesdale, op.cit., p. 85.

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Our beautiful drawing has a considerable provenance:

William Merritt Chase (1849 - 1916) was an American portrait and landscape painter. After a long stay in Europe, he began to develop his own American Impressionism and was very successful. During his lifetime he was known as "the American Impressionist" and was one of the most influential American artists of his generation.

The American Art Association was an art gallery and auction house with sales galleries, established in 1883. It was the first auction house in the United States and had a strong presence in New York during the period of American history known as the *Gilded Age*.

Simon Frank Rothschild (1861 - 1936) was an American merchant and philanthropist; he served as president of the Hebrew Educational Society, head of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum of New York and vice-president of the Brooklyn Federation of Jewish Charities.

The Association *Les Amis de Paul-César Helleu* has confirmed the authenticity of this drawing. It will be included in the forthcoming digital catalogue raisonné of the drawings by Paul-César Helleu and it has been registered in the archives of the Association under the number APCH DE1-8434.



Fig. 1: John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Paul-César Helleu*, c.1882-85, watercolour over graphite on paper, 235 x 373 mm. The Morgan Library & Museum, New York. Gift of Rose Pitman Hughes and J. Lawrence Hughes 2005.5