

CUNO AMIET

1868 Solothurn - Oschwand 1961

Portrait of Rosa Suter

Coloured crayon on laid paper; c.1896.

Signed in black chalk at the upper right: C. Amiet. Framing line in blue.

445 x 236 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Zurich

EXHIBITIONS: *Jubiläumsausstellung Cuno Amiet 1868-1961. Giovanni Giacometti 1868-1933. Werke bis 1920*, Kunstmuseum Bern 1968, no.112 a (as *Mädchenbildnis* [Portrait of a Girl]) – *Cuno Amiet. Frühe Arbeiten auf Papier*, exhib. cat., Kunstmuseum Solothurn, 2005, Heidelberg 2005, p.15, no. 46, plate XXVIII

Amiet visited his friend and colleague Giovanni Giacometti (1868-1933) in Stampa in the summer of 1896. On the same trip he was to meet the Italian painter Giovanni Segantini (1858-99) in Maloja. Segantini's usual practice was to make a sketch of his finished paintings as a personal record, using the divisionist technique he employed in his paintings.¹ The present sheet by Amiet closely recalls Segantini's use of tiny, precise strokes and a delicate palette.²

The sitter is Amiet's wife's cousin Rosa Suter. Viola Radlach describes the drawing in great detail in her essay published in the catalogue of the 2005 Solothurn exhibition: *This undated portrait of Rosa Suter is executed in the elongated vertical format favoured at the turn of the [twentieth] century, particularly for female portraits. The portrait is set at a diagonal and fills the picture space. The figure of the sitter is cropped on three sides as if compressed into the image. This enabled Amiet to give the sitter a special presence with a note of fin-de-siècle decadence otherwise absent from his portraits. This is achieved by the choice of a view from below, the nonchalance of the sitter's pose and the overall pale greenish-pink tone. The banded waist, tucks and gathers of the dress with its long puffed sleeves and flounces enhances this effect. A delicate network of fine parallel hatching covers the entire image with the exception of the girl's face and hair. In the background the hatching strokes are applied vertically while on the girl's dress they are spaced at different intervals to model spatial relationships – indicating raised areas, hollows and areas of shadow to create an effect of plasticity. The subtle strokes of colour convincingly render the delicate texture and feel of the fabric. Amiet has come very close in this portrait to achieving his ideal – an evocative overall impression to which all detail is subordinated. This is further enhanced by his skilful orchestration of isolated touches of colour – as in the brilliant blue of the sitter's eyes. This is echoed in the strokes of blue-violet at her waistband and sleeves.*³

¹ For a discussion of Segantini's drawings see Beat Stutzer, *Giovanni Segantini. Zeichnungen*, exhib. cat., Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur, 2004. Compare *Haymaking*, 1889-90 (no. 27), *Brown Cow at a Drinking Trough*, 1891 (no. 31) and *On the Balcony*, 1892 (no. 41).

² The stylistic proximity to Segantini is particularly evident in Amiet's chalk drawing of c.1896-7 titled *Head of a Girl in Profile* (see *Cuno Amiet. Frühe Arbeiten auf Papier*, op. cit., p.16, fig. 8).

³ Viola Radlach, *Zeichnen heißt Proportionen suchen . . .*, in *Cuno Amiet. Frühe Arbeiten auf Papier*, op. cit., p.15.

LE CLAIRE

KUNST

SEIT 1982

In the present portrait Amiet avoids the use of clearly defined outlines and the composition achieves coherence through the choice of a uniform technique and careful balancing of the compositional elements. On these grounds it seems likely that the drawings of George Seurat (1859-91) played a role in influencing Amiet.

This drawing is registered with Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, Zurich (reg. no. 23220).