

LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

SUZANNE VALADON

1867 Bessines - Paris 1938

Femmes à leur toilette

Black chalk and pastel on brownish cardboard.
Signed and dated at the lower right: Suzanne Valadon / 1909.
470 x 450 mm

PROVENANCE: Dr. Willi Raeber, Basel, with his inventory number: 62376.

Suzanne Valadon (her original name was Marie-Clémentine Valadon) was born in an impoverished village in the Limousin in 1865. As a child she was unruly and precocious. She had little schooling and by the age of fifteen was working as a circus acrobat. At sixteen she was an artists' model, her voluptuous beauty fêted in Montmartre artistic circles. Puvis de Chavannes used her as his model for almost seven years and she also posed for artists like Auguste Renoir, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Berthe Morisot, Jean-Jacques Henner, Federico Zandomenighi and Albert Bartolomé. She was married twice and had numerous affairs – one of her lovers was Eric Satie, the composer. Others included Paul Mousis and the Spanish artist Miquel Utrillo who gave his name to Valadon's son Maurice (Maurice Utrillo, 1883-1955). Valadon never divulged the true identity of the child's father. She dedicated much of her life to promoting her son's artistic career and keeping his alcoholism at bay.

Model, mistress, muse and demi-mondaine, Valadon already had contacts within Parisian artistic circles when she met Edgar Degas in the early 1890s. She always denied having posed for him and being his mistress but claimed to have been his only disciple and his closest confidante. Degas bought some of her early drawings and actively promoted her artistic talents, encouraging her to take up painting. Her first exhibition was at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts du Champ de Mars in 1894 – she was the only female exhibitor. Her early work shows the influence of Toulouse-Lautrec and Puvis de Chavannes but in terms of technique and subject matter Degas was her main model. A rebel and a free spirit, she was also charismatic and ambitious, successfully forging an artistic career as a woman in a male-dominated art world.

The present pastel is a fine example of Valadon's draughtsmanship and striking use of bold contours and flat areas of colour. Its theme recalls Degas's interiors of female nudes at their toilet.¹ The simplicity, intimacy and timelessness of the scene open the viewer's eyes to the grace and grandeur of ordinary life and underline Valadon's compassionate and unsentimental view of her subjects.

¹ For comparable drawings see Daniel Marchesseau, *Suzanne Valadon*, exhib. cat., Fondation Pierre Gianadda, Martigny 1996, nos. 112-18. *Valadon Utrillo. Au tournant du siècle à Montmartre – de l'impressionnisme à l'École de Paris*, exhib. cat., Pinacothèque de Paris, Paris 2009, nos. 8-12. – Paul Pétridès, *L'oeuvre complet de Suzanne Valadon*, Paris 1971. The catalogue lists 273 drawings. The earliest depictions of women at their toilet were executed in 1892, the latest around 1925.