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BERTHE MORISOT

1841 Bourges - Paris 1895

Jeune fille cueillant des cerises

Red chalk on laid paper with watermark: MB / ARCHES; executed c. 1891
558 x 432 mm

PROVENANCE: Julie Manet (Mme. Ernest Rouart), Paris (until at least 1951) – Charles E. Slatkin Galleries, New York (by 1961) – Anon. sale, Sotheby's, New York, 14 November 1985, lot 105 – Acquired at the above sale by Achim Moeller Fine Art on behalf of John C. Whitehead – John C. Whitehead, New York

LITERATURE: Monique Angoulvent, *Berthe Morisot*, Paris 1933, p. 144, no. 510 – Marie-Louise Bataille and Georges Wildenstein, *Berthe Morisot, Catalogue des peintures, pastels et aquarelles*, Paris 1961, p. 42 – Achim Moeller Fine Art (ed.), *The John C. Whitehead Collection, A Collection in Progress, Late XIX and Early XX Century French Masters*, New York 1987, p. 72 (repr. in colour, p. 73) – Alain Clairet, Delphine Montalant and Yves Rouart, *Berthe Morisot, 1841-1895, Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint*, Montolivet 1997, p. 253.

EXHIBITED: *Berthe Morisot*, Galerie Durand-Ruel & Cie., Paris 1896, p. 35, no. 231 – *Quelques tableaux, études, pastels, aquarelles et dessins de Berthe Morisot*, Galerie Dru, Paris 1928 – *De Watteau à Cézanne*, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva 1951, p. 59, no. 178 (titled *Etude pour "Le Cerisier"*) – *Exposition Berthe Morisot*, Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi 1958, p. 40, no. 100 – *Berthe Morisot, Drawings, Pastels, Watercolors*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Charles E. Slatkin Galleries, New York; Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, California; and Institute of Fine Arts, Minneapolis 1960-1, p. 124 (repr. in colour, pl. XLV) – *Auguste Rodin and Berthe Morisot*, The Society of the Four Arts, Palm Beach 1965, no. 50 – *Berthe Morisot, Impressionist*, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth; The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley 1987-8, p. 222, pl. 92, repr. in colour – *Late XIX and Early XX Century French Masters, The John C. Whitehead Collection*, The Montclair Art Museum, 1989, p. 32, no. 51 – *The Whitehead Collection, Late 19th and 20th Century French Masters, A Collection in Progress*, Achim Moeller Fine Art, New York 1997, p. 48, no. 36 (repr. in colour, p. 49) – *From Daumier to Matisse, French Master Drawings from the John C. Whitehead Collection*, Achim Moeller Fine Art, New York 2010, pp. 10 and 12 (repr. in colour, fig. 2)

This drawing was executed in the early summer of 1891. It is one of a group of works preparatory to two large-format versions of Berthe Morisot's celebrated painting *Le Cerisier* [Figs. 5 and 6]. In these paintings she worked out an idea she had planned in Nice in 1888 – the idea of a decorative oil painting drawing on Botticelli's *Primavera*. In April 1891, she travelled with her fatally-ill husband, Eugène Manet (brother of the painter Eduard Manet) and their daughter Julie to 'La Blotière', a house near the village of Mézy in the Seine valley north-west of Paris. Here, they spent the summer months while Morisot worked on a number of decorative paintings – this despite the distress caused by her husband's illness.

Le Cerisier was almost certainly painted in the sunlit garden of 'La Blotière'. Julie Manet and her cousin Jeanne Gobillar were the models – Julie picking cherries on a ladder, with Jeanne holding up a basket.

A group of preparatory studies in different media preceded the two final, large-format versions of *Le Cerisier*. One of the earliest works in this group is very probably a vibrantly coloured pastel. It is completely free of figures and depicts a ladder positioned between two fruit trees in blossom [Fig. 1]. Morisot experimented with the composition adding figures in two watercolours (BW 79 and 792), two pastels (BW 572 and BW 571) and an oil sketch [Fig. 3]. These five studies show her modifying the position of Julie on the ladder and adjusting the angle of her raised right arm. The arm partly conceals her face in the earlier studies. The present drawing and a second red chalk drawing [Fig. 2] were executed at much the same time. Both drawings emphasize the delineation of the figure. They very probably served to help transfer the figure to canvas - a technique Morisot adopted from traditional methods of fresco painting. In the present drawing Julie's raised right arm has been lowered to expose a little more of her features, as is the case of the first [Fig. 5] of the two final, large-format versions. This first version was executed in the attic studio of 'La Blotière'.¹

All through this difficult period Morisot was counselled by Renoir. He visited Mézy in the summer of 1891 and must have seen her studies because he specifically urged her to complete the painting of the cherry trees. Back in Paris, he wrote to her on August 17: *I have been looking over my studies, and I think they will do. My model has just arrived. I am going to buy dresses, so will let you work. Above all, finish the canvas of the cherry trees. I shall send something to the Champs de Mars, so try to do the same. We must show our work. I send you all good wishes for success. Give my best to the young ladies and to Manet. A thousand good wishes.*²

Like Manet and Degas, who both constantly reworked their paintings, Morisot was continually very critical of her work. It would appear that she was quickly dissatisfied with the first large-format version in oil and started work on a second final version in her studio on rue de Villejust in Paris in the winter of 1891-2. Julie Manet was replaced by Jeanne Fourmanoir, a professional model. After the death of her husband, Morisot finished the painting in a new studio on rue Weber in 1892-3.

Stylistically, *Le Cerisier* is entirely characteristic of Morisot's final period, the years 1890-5. Here, in reaction to the preceding period of her work, the atmospheric element no longer dominates, although it is still in evidence. Her brushstrokes remain impressionist but are softer and more relaxed, underlining forms and giving greater weight to the composition.

Yves Rouart has confirmed the authenticity of the drawing.

¹ The present description of the genesis of *Le Cerisier* is based on Charles F. Stuckey, in *Berthe Morisot, Impressionist*, exhib. cat., 1987-8, op. cit., pp. 148-58.

² Cited after the English translation in Claret, Montalant and Rouart, 1997, op. cit., p. 253.



Fig. 1: *Study for 'Le Cerisier'*, 1891, pastel on paper, 45.7 x 48.9 cm. (BW 573)

The Reader's Digest Association, New York.



Fig. 3: *Jeune fille cueillant des cerises*, 1891, oil on canvas, 85.4 x 53.3 cm. (BW 277; CMR 278)
Private collection, France.



Fig. 2: *Jeune fille cueillant des cerises*, 1891, red chalk on paper, 74.3 x 50.8 mm.
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia.



Fig. 4: *Le Cerisier*, 1891, oil on canvas, 55 x 33 cm. (BW 274; CMR 279)
Private collection.



Fig. 5: *Le Cerisier*, 1891, oil on canvas,
146.5 x 89 cm. (BW 276; CMR 280)
Private collection, USA.



Fig. 6: *Le Cerisier*, 1891, oil on canvas,
154 x 80 cm. (BW 275; CMR 281)
Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, Fondation Denis
et Annie Rouart, 1993, [inv. 6020]