Portrait of Gustav Stresemann

Augustus John O.M, R.A

£1,900

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REF: 1088

Height: 42.5 cm (16.7")

Width: 33 cm (13")

Framed Height: 61 cm (24")

Framed Width: 50.5 cm (19.9")

Description

This significant drawing was made when, from March to May 1925, Augustus John stayed at the British Embassy in Berlin with Eve Fleming, a wealthy and glamorous widow, and the mother of James Bond creator Ian Fleming. Their daughter, the concert cellist Amaryllis Fleming, was conceived during their stay. Berlin was a meeting place for famous and talented people from many nations in the mid-1920s, and given a key to the Embassy side door, Augustus took full advantage of what the city had to offer, including its hedonistic nightlife. He was there to paint a portrait of the German Foreign Minister, Gustav Stresemann, the German Foreign Minister, at the request of the British Ambassador, Edgar Vincent, 1st Viscount d'Abernon, of whom John also painted two portraits. Vincent was involved in negotiations over the Treaty of Locarno with Stresemann and American colleagues, and the expressive and verbose Stresemann was in the habit of dominating the discussions. Vincent calculated that the irascible John would not put up with such behaviour while Stresemann sat for a portrait, so he commissioned the artist to paint the Foreign Minister's portrait during the tripartite meetings. The negotiations were highly secretive, but were conducted in German, a language John did not have.The finished portrait, which John found a struggle to complete, is now in the Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo. John, no doubt, made several studies associated with the painting, although only two have been traced. One of these one is these is a caricature in German expressionist style. The other, present work, is closer but not identical in pose to the painting, and seems to have been executed with ease by comparison with the difficult painting. Executed with great economy and dash in sweeping charcoal strokes, it has the look of a finished drawing which could have been presented or exhibited.

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