

JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



Edouard Vuillard (1868 - 1940)

Profile of a woman in a hat, c. 1890

pastel on paper

8 ⁵/₈ x 5 ¹/₈ in. (21.9 x 13 cm)

stamped *E.V* lower right

Provenance:

Jill Newhouse, New York;

Neffe-Degandt Gallery, London;

acquired from the above in 2002, thence by descent.

In 1890 Edouard Vuillard attended his first meeting of *Les Nabis* (The Prophets), a group of young artists in Paris who sought to reinvigorate the art of painting. Inspired by the example of Paul Gauguin, the Nabis consciously rejected academic traditions, intentionally painting in a non-naturalistic style, with bold flat areas of colour, emphasizing the two-dimensional and decorative qualities of their paintings.

Though the group shared common ideas and ideals about art, there was a great variety of styles amongst the members, with artists such as Maurice Denis and Paul Sérusier using religious and mystical themes to imbue their paintings with an other-worldly, symbolist aura, whilst the likes of Pierre Bonnard, Félix Vallotton and Vuillard chose to paint subjects based on observations of the world around them.

For Vuillard, the interiors of his family home provided the setting for his most compelling works in the 1890s. He grew up surrounded by women. His mother was a corset maker with the family apartment doubling as her workshop, and constantly filled with seamstresses, as well as his sister and grandmother. He made many small scale pictures of women going about their daily tasks, five of which were exhibited at the third *Exposition des peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes* in 1892 where they were praised for their perceptiveness and subtlety, earning him the label *intimiste*. The pictures of this period, such as the two illustrated here, were modern in style but part of an older artistic tradition that stretched back to the paintings by Dutch seventeenth century masters, whose modest subjects and clear arrangement of forms appealed to Vuillard.

Although his subjects were done from life, Vuillard created from memory, a working practice that had been encouraged by Gauguin. This deliberate distancing from the motif combined with a stylization lifted from Japanese prints and other so called 'primitive' arts, resulted in uncompromisingly modern works. Unlike the paintings of his more symbolist contemporaries Vuillard's *intimiste* pictures found an immediate audience. These two pastels from the early 1890s, reveal the influence of Japanese woodblock prints in their strong use of colour and silhouette.