

JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



Charles-Henri Contencin (1898 - 1955)

The Jungfrau seen from Mürren, Bernese Oberland, Switzerland

oil on panel

45 x 80 cm.

signed

Contencin came from northern France and having survived the First World War when only 17 years old, he trained as an architect and draughtsman. From an early age he began to visit the Alps where he would paint and climb especially in the Savoie and Bernese Oberland. Initially he was employed by the French railways to commission works of art for their respective companies. Although he was technically an amateur artist, he became an active member of the Paris based *Société des Peintres de Montagne* and painted abundantly throughout his career. His paintings were frequently displayed in regional and national exhibitions. Towards the end of his life, he was the President of the *Société*.

The Lauterbrunnen Valley, Grindelwald and especially the Wengernalp were some of his favourite places to paint and the fact that it was relatively accessible in the 1920s and 1930s via the railway perhaps explains the number of Jungfrau paintings by Contencin one comes across. In all its wintry splendour, this is a beautiful and serene view of the mountain painted from the Mürren side - in fact just to the north of the village towards Grütschalp. The sense of looking across the wide valley, over the abyss beyond the slope is palpable. Indeed, at several points along the west wall of the Lauterbrunnen Valley, the cliffs are over 3,000 feet high. The two hay barns (Speicher) made from larch planks add an important burst of colour to contrast with this realm of snow and ice. Over time the sun causes these farmers' buildings to darken and in many ways they are as much a feature of Contencin's pictures as his wide trails in the snow and the tell-tale treads made by ski batons.