

**GEORGE ROMNEY**

1734–1802

**FEMALE NUDE: POSSIBLY EMMA HART**

Pencil and dark brown ink  
12 x 9 ½ inches; 305 x 242 mm  
Drawn c.1785

Collections:

Dan Fellows Platt (1873-1937);  
Paul Magriel (1906-1990);  
James Lord (1922-2009);  
Private collection to 2023



This beautifully fluid ink and brush drawing was made by George Romney in the 1780s and may well relate to the powerful sequence of portraits of Emma Hamilton, in various mythological and allegorical guises, Romney was working on throughout the decade. First recorded belonging to the voracious American collector, Dan Fellows Platt, who owned a considerable body of drawings by Romney. The drawing has traditionally been paired with a similarly fluid brush drawing of a seated woman with hands clasped together, a drawing that was sold by Eugene Thaw to Henry P. McIlhenny and which is now in the Morgan Library and Museum. The Morgan drawing has always long been identified as a depiction of Emma Hart, later Lady Hamilton. Whilst it is difficult to make a direct link with a specific painting for either drawing, the unusually frank approach to the subject, being shown with exposed breasts, does call to mind the pervasive eroticism of Romney's treatment of Hart.

Romney's drawing practice was rarely linear, rather he viewed it as a contiguous forum for compositional exploration. Motifs appear in his drawings that never make it to canvas and successful ideas migrate from his exhibited works to the page, being endlessly tested, varied and elaborated. The boldest of Romney's drawings are in pure ink wash worked over rapid pencil outlines, as in the case of the present study. Romney has used a loaded brush of ink to explore the form of a nude woman leaning on a support, with her right hand over her head; where the ink has been exhausted the dry brush forms variegated, broken strokes giving the drawing remarkable tonal range. The immediacy of the pose does suggest that the drawing may have been made from life. The pose can be related to a painting of Emma Hart as Cassandra that Romney made for his friend and patron, the poet William Hayley.<sup>1</sup> Like Romney, Hayley was a great admirer of Emma Hart, writing that: 'her features, like the language of Shakespeare, could exhibit all the feelings of nature and all the gradation of

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Kidson, *George Romney: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, New Haven and London, 2015, vol.III.p.677, cat. no.1488c.

every passion with a most fascinating truth and felicity of expression.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the pose of the finished painting is similar, Emma's left hand is raised to clutch a laurel crown, the overall effect is different. The drawing captures a languid sensuality, with the figure shown in repose, rather than the anxious Trojan prophetess of Hayley's painting. This difference in no way discounts a relationship with Emma Hart, for Romney she was a object of almost obsessive sexual fascination and this unexpectedly frank drawing has all the immediacy of a life observation, rather than a fantastic figural experiment.

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<sup>2</sup> William Hayley, *The Life of George Romney Esq.*, London, 1809, p.119.