

DAME LAURA KNIGHT

1877–1970

A STUDY OF A BABY

Watercolour and charcoal

18 5/8 x 25 inches; 475 x 635 mm

Signed 'Laura Knight' (lower right)

Drawn 1956



Collections:

Laura Knight;

'The Contents of Laura Knight's Studio', sold by her executors, Sotheby's, London, 22 July 1971;

Abbott & Holder, London, 1972;

Private Collection, Australia;

Bonhams, 9th September 2024, lot. 26;

Lowell Libson & Jonny Yarker Ltd.

This tender drawing, an ad vivum study of a sleeping baby, was used by Laura Knight in preparation for a painting she exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1956. Knight wrote in 1965, conjuring an evocative image of her studio with 'every drawer, every shelf, every cupboard' stuffed with drawings from fifty years ago sitting alongside those made 'only so long ago as yesterday.' This accumulated visual archive is shown in a portrait photograph taken by Yevonde on 19th September 1967 in which Knight is shown standing in front of the present drawing.

Laura Johnson was trained at the Nottingham School of Art, where she met Harold Knight, a fellow student. The pair were married in 1903 and spent time living and painting in Staithes in North Yorkshire before moving to Newlyn in Cornwall. Knight achieved considerable success exhibiting breezy coastal landscapes at the Royal Academy. Made an Associate Academician in 1927, In 1937 Knight was made the first female Royal Academician since Angelica Kauffman. Throughout her career Knight was fascinated by observing and drawing marginalised communities. During the 1920s Knight produced a remarkable sequence of drawings and paintings of circus performers, observing acts from the wings or preparing in the dressing room, capturing with remarkable humanity the complex transient world of the itinerant performer. Knight

produced an acclaimed series of studies of Black patients in one of the segregated wards of Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore in 1927. In the decades after the war Knight produced a series of powerful studies of the Romany Gypsies.

It is this candid and unflinching quality that Knight brings to the current work. Knight has drawn rapidly in charcoal, capturing a child of about eight-months of age, wrapped in a series of blankets, sucking on its fingers. Watercolour wash has been added to the sinuous charcoal line to produce a very complete image of the child. The informal naturalism of Knight's study was subsequently translated into the exhibited oil *Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park* which was shown at the Royal Academy in 1956. The finished painting loses something of the power and spontaneous quality of the drawing, showing the baby in the arms of an older sibling asleep on the grass. The painting – and its preparatory study – can be associated with Knight's interest in observing people at leisure, such as her sequence of paintings depicting spectators at Ascot and the Derby. The drawing is unusually large and finished and was almost certainly intended for independent exhibition, this explains why it appears framed hanging in Knight's studio in the 1967 portrait taken by Yevonde.



Dame Laura Knight
Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park
Oil on canvas
30 x 25 inches; 762 x 635 mm
Exhibited: Royal Academy, 1956, no. 143.
Private collection



'Madame Yevonde' (Yevonde Middleton)
Dame Laura Knight in her studio, 1967
Bromide print
14 ³/₈ x 11 ¹/₄ inches; 364 x 286 mm
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