



Paul César Helleu

1859-1927

Mme Helleu lisant debout

Oil on canvas signed lower right

Dimensions : 100 x 58 cm

Dimensions : 39.37 x 22.83 inch

Literature : Reproduced in "La peinture mondaine de 1870 ` 1960" by Patrick Chaleyssin, Editions Célia p.66
Exhibition : Bordeaux, Galerie des Beaux Arts, La femme et l'artiste de Bellini ` Picasso, 22 May-20 September 1964, p. 98, no. 163, as Portrait de Mme HELLEU. London, Colnaghi and The Clarendon Gallery, Society Portraits, 1850-1939, 30 October - 14 December 1985, pp. 120-121, no. 52, illustrated, as Portrait of Madame Helleu Reading a Letter. Vannes, La Cohue - Musée de Vannes, Paul Helleu 1859-1927, 15 June- 30 September 1991, pp. 17, 51, illustrated, as Femme ` l'ombrelle. Portrait de Madame Helleu. New York, Frick Collection, The Butterfly and The Bat: Whistler and Montesquiou, 14 November 1995 - 28 January 1996, n.p., unnumbered, as Portrait of Mme Helleu. "Belle `poque. - The Best Years of European Civilization (1870-1900)" to be held at Palazzo Blu in Pisa from October 14, 2025, to April 7, 2026

Origin : Provenance: Baron Edmond de Rothschild (1845-1934), Paris. Private collection, Paris



Dimensions with frame : 117,5 x 75 cm
Dimensions with frame : 46.06 x 29.53 inch

Biography

Paul-César Helleu was born in Vannes in 1859. From an early age, he wanted to become an artist. In 1876, he was admitted to the Fine Arts School in Paris, where he studied under the supervision of the painter Jean-Léon Gérôme. He became an apprentice of Théodore Deck, a ceramist who specialized in women's portraits.

In 1886, he met the Comte de Montesquiou who bought several engravings from him and introduced him to the Parisian aristocracy. He became one of the most popular portraitists of the Parisian and Londoner society (he made portraits of the Countess Greffulhe, the Duchess of Malborough, Queen Alexandra, the Princess of Greece, etc.). His drypoint prints representing female figures were very well-known in the United States.

His friend Marcel Proust took him as an inspiration for the character of the painter, Elstir, in "In Search of Lost Time". He was also very close to important artists such as James Tissot, Whistler, Claude Monet, John Singer Sargent, Rodin and Alfred Stevens, who all recognized his great talent and encouraged him to keep engraving.

Paul-César Helleu also painted bright and refined landscapes, influenced by his impressionist friends ("Autumn at Versailles", around 1897, Musée d'Orsay). In 1893, he became a member of the National School of Fine Arts. He was also an honorary member of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers of London and received the Legion of honor in 1904.

Helleu was one of the artists who best synthesized modern elegance in his paintings, etchings and drypoint prints. He represented with talent the feminine grace, giving us an important reflection of the society described by Marcel Proust in his books. His high-society figures, his feminine silhouettes, his sports scenes of the elegant world were among the most remarkable images of the "Belle Epoque". The simple and refined nature of his works was often compared by contemporary critics to that of the works of Lancret and Watteau.

Of all the women he painted, his wife Alice Guérin was the most represented. A unique intimacy and emotion can be seen in these family portraits.

Museums

Boston Museum of Fine Art
Musée Pouchkine, Moscou
Brooklyn Museum, New York
Musée du Louvre, Paris
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne

Bibliography

E. Bénézit, Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs, Editions Gründ, Paris, 1999
G. Schurr, Pierre Cabanne, Dictionnaire des Petits Maîtres du XIXème (1820-1920), Les éditions de l'amateur, Paris, 1996
Bellier de la Chavignerie et Auvray, Dictionnaire général des artistes de l'école française
Robert de Montesquiou, Helleu, Planche LXVI
Paul Helleu, Musée de Vannes, 1991
Nos bébés, par Helleu, H. Bouquet Editeur, p.30 et p.43
Catalogue de l'exposition Paul Helleu, Musée Eugène Boudin, Honfleur, 1993, p.97, n°103