

ELLIOTT FINE ART

Nineteenth Century to Early Modern

Frank Dobson, R.A.
(London 1886 – 1963)

Head of a Girl

Signed and dated lower left: *F. Dobson / 15*

Pastel, coloured chalk, watercolour and gouache on paper
30.5 x 22.9 cm. (12 x 9 in.)

Provenance:

Redfern Gallery, London, 1989;

Thomas Agnews & Sons, 1989;

Where acquired by Sir Nicholas Goodison, April 1989;

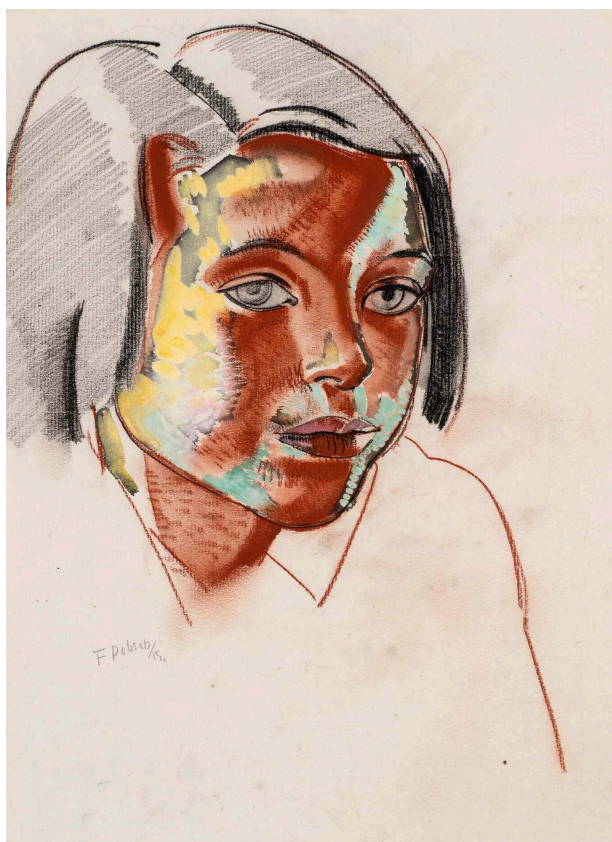
His posthumous sale, Christie's London, 12 May 2022, lot 212.

Literature:

Exhibition catalogue, *Spring Exhibition*, London, Redfern Gallery, 1989, p. 5, no. 11, illustrated.

Exhibited:

London, Redfern Gallery, *Spring Exhibition*, February – March 1989, no. 11.



Dating to 1915, this head study of a young girl is one of Frank Dobson's most beautiful portrait drawings, striking for its vibrant, expressionistic use of colour. Though best known as a sculptor today, drawings were always a vital part of the creative process for Dobson, holding their own as unique objects.

In general, Dobson did not produce drawings to stand alone: as Dobson himself explained in the late 1930s, 'my attitude to drawing has been governed by the fact that I was drawing to get information which would help me to make sculpture'.¹ That said, the present work was created at a time when Dobson had only just started making sculpture and, though it shows an interest in volume and three-dimensionality, is not related to the two wood carvings the artist made in 1915. As such, and like most of Dobson's graphic output prior to 1920 (fig. 1), the drawing was created as an end in itself. The outlook of a painter is revealed by the sheet's powerful chromatic richness and skilful use of pastel and chalk in combination, though the interest in solid form suggests Dobson's sculptural awakenings.

In his own day, Dobson was considered one of Britain's greatest sculptors, lauded by Roger Fry most others. Clive Bell considered *Cornucopia* of 1925 'the finest piece of sculpture produced by an Englishman since – since I don't know when'. And yet, from his death in 1963 until today, Dobson has to some extent been overshadowed by international titans such as Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Thankfully, in recent years the importance of his highly original vision has come to be increasingly recognised and lauded, with the strength and simplicity of his forms pleasing to the modern eye, as witnessed by the intense interest in Dobson's *Female Torso* (fig. 2) of 1926, which appeared on the auction market in 2021.



Fig. 1, Frank Dobson, *Head of a Man*, 1919, pencil, pastel and watercolour, 31.5 x 23.5 cm, Private Collection



Fig. 2, Frank Dobson, *Torso*, 1926, carved sandstone, H 41 cm, Private Collection

¹ Frank Dobson, 'Drawings for the Mural at the Canadian Pavilion' in *Empire Exhibition*, Glasgow, October – November 1938, n.p.