

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Marguerite Dubois
(1883 - ?)

Head study of a man in Algerian costume

Monogrammed and dated: *MD / 1906*

Inscribed lower right: 26

Pastel on paper

54 x 45 cm. (21 ¼ x 17 ¾ in.)

Provenance:

By descent in the family of the artist until 2023.



Very little is known about Marguerite Dubois. Born in 1883, she is listed in the rolls of the Académie Julian, where she studied under Henri Royer, Marcel Baschet and Adolphe Déchenaud. From the paucity of information regarding her life, one can assume that Dubois' promising career was halted by marriage, an all too familiar story amongst many of the talented female students at the turn of the 20th century. Beyond its obvious quality and the strength of the image, this head study of a bearded man is of interest because of its connection to the Académie Julian and its insight into the life class at this famous and pioneering school. The sitter's identity and costume also pose intriguing questions.

Founded in 1868, the Académie Julian was a private art school which offered a program and level of teaching comparable to those of the École des Beaux-Arts. Unlike the École, which excluded women until 1897, the Académie Julian gave women artists the same opportunities as men, notably in giving them access to the life class and the chance to depict the nude. In fact, the Académie was the pre-eminent art school for women on an international level, achieving a reputation for excellence in academic figure studies, attracting students from across the western hemisphere.



Fig. 1, Photograph from circa 1892 depicting a life class at the Académie Julian, with a series of bust-length head studies on the walls behind

As extant works and turn of the century photographs of the ateliers of the Académie Julian confirm (fig. 1), bust-length head studies were a mainstay of the educational program at the school. Many of these studies show sitters in non-Western attire, offering the students the chance to depict different fabrics and volumes (fig. 2). Here, Dubois' model wears Algerian costume consisting of a long, hooded cloak, called a *burnous*, and a turban (fig. 3). The sitter

himself is quite possibly Algerian, in which case the costume may well be his own, rather than a studio prop. Perhaps his name appears in the archives of the Académie.



Fig. 2, Berthe Burgkan, *Head study of a man in a fez*, 1898, oil on canvas, 46.5 x 38 cm, Private Collection



Fig. 3, Unknown photographer, *Portrait an Algerian man*, late 19th century