

SA466284

Portrait of a Lady, 18th Century
French; Follower of François
Hubert Drouais (1727–1775)

Price

Sold

Item Reference: SA466284

Date of manufacture: 18th Century

Dimensions

Height = 92 cm (36.2")

Width = 90 cm (35.4")

Depth = 6 cm (2.4")

Description

Oil on canvas. It was not uncommon to depict portrait sitters in the guise of a vestal virgin: many young women were shown in this guise when they were about to marry. In ancient Rome, the Vestals or Vestal Virgins were priestesses of Vesta, goddess of the hearth. The College of the Vestals and its well-being were regarded as fundamental to the continuance and security of Rome. They cultivated the sacred fire that was not allowed to go out. The Vestals were freed of the usual social obligations to marry and bear children, and took a vow of chastity in order to devote themselves to the study and correct observance of state rituals that were off-limits to the male colleges of priests. These Roman guardians were chosen for their youth and purity. The Vestals were used as models of female virtue in allegorizing portraiture of the later West. Elizabeth I of England was portrayed holding a sieve to evoke Tuccia, the Vestal who proved her virtue by carrying water in a sieve. In the libertine environment of 18th century France, portraits of women as Vestals seem intended as fantasies of virtue infused with ironic eroticism. Later vestals became an image of republican virtue, a...

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