

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

VINCENZO GEMITO

(NAPLES, 1852 - 1929)

Portrait of Mathilde Duffaud, 1872

Terracotta, 21 $\frac{5}{8}$ in (55 cm) high

Signed and dated on the back of the shoulders: "GEMITO / 1872"



PROVENANCE

Naples, with Duhamel (?); London, private collection; Sotheby's sale, London, 3 July 2012, lot 186; Monte Carlo, private collection.

LITERATURE

-Tiziana Casola, in *Gemito, Mancini e il loro ambiente. Opere giovanili*, ed. by Cinzia Virno-Manuel Carrera (exh. cat., Rome, Palazzo Antonelli, 19 May – 16 June 2017), pp. 37, 90-91, no. 7;
-F. Mazzocca and L. Martorelli, *Da De Nittis a Gemito. I napoletani a Parigi negli anni dell'Impressionismo* (exh. cat., Naples, Gallerie d'Italia – Palazzo Zevallos Stigliano, 6 December 2017 – 8 April 2018), p. 170.

EXHIBITIONS

- Gemito, Mancini e il loro ambiente. Opere giovanili*, Rome, Palazzo Antonelli, 19 May – 16 June 2017;
- Da De Nittis a Gemito, I napoletani a Parigi negli anni dell'Impressionismo*, Naples, Gallerie d'Italia – Palazzo Zevallos Stigliano, 6 December 2017 – 8 April 2018;
- Gemito*, Naples, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, 19 March – 14 June 2020 (forthcoming).

This rare terracotta by Gemito is a portrait of his first muse and love of his life, Mathilde Duffaud (c. 1843-1881), a Frenchwoman he met in 1872. She had come to Naples in 1870 and started to work with the dealer Duhamel on the Capodimonte hill, posing for a number of artists; ultimately, she left Duhamel's studio for that of Gemito, who was nine years her junior. The young artist executed numerous drawings of Mathilde, a standing figure in terracotta (private collection) and a bronze *Head of Mathilde on a Cushion* (Naples, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte).¹

The couple stayed together for many years, through his Parisian period (1877-1880) and up to Mathilde's premature death, after frequent illnesses, in 1881.

Vincenzo Gemito's favourite medium was clay, which was best suited to his spontaneity. The sculptor excelled in the representation of the human head and the description of expressions, often focusing on melancholy. Portraiture is truly the genre that defines Gemito, and he practiced it until he died; yet his oeuvre contains few original terracottas. Our sculpture is technically very close to his first works in this medium, such as the *Young Veiled Girl* and the *Young Moor* in the Museo di San Martino in Naples, which reflect his precocious talent. In 1872, the date of this *Portrait of Mathilde Duffaud*, he was just twenty, and the bust – swiftly modelled and marked by his fingerprints – reveals his masterful confidence in rendering his beloved's face, as well as details such as her ear-rings and pendant.

Note:

1 - *Gemito. Le sculpteur de l'âme napolitaine*, ed. by Jean-Louis Champion (exh. cat., Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, 15 October 2019 – 26 January 2020; Naples, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, 15 March – 16 June 2020), p. 16, fig. 3, p. 71, fig. 13, pp. 83-85.