Sleeping

Paul-César Helleu

Sold



REF: 358787

Height: 46.99 cm (18.5")

Sarah Colegrave Fine Art
London & Oxfordshire
+44 (0)77 7594 3722 sarah@sarahcolegrave.co.uk

Width: 67.31 cm (26.5")

Description

Paul César Helleu was born in Vannes, Brittany, France. His father, who was a customs inspector, died when Helleu was in his teens. Despite opposition from his widowed mother, he then went to Paris and studied at Lycée Chaptal. In 1876, at age 16, he was admitted to the Ã‰cole des Beaux-Arts, beginning academic training in art with Jean-Léon GérÃ´me. Helleu attended the Second Impressionist Exhibition in the same year, and made his first acquaintances with John Singer Sargent, James McNeill Whistler, and Claude Monet. He was struck by their modern, bold alla prima technique and outdoor scenes, so far removed from the studio. To survive following graduation, Helleu took a job with the firm Théodore Deck Ceramique FranÃ§aise hand-painting fine decorative plates. At this same time, he met Giovanni Boldini, a portrait painter with a facile, bravura style, who became a mentor and comrade, and strongly influenced his future artistic style. When he was 18 years old, Helleu established a close friendship with John Singer Sargent, four years his senior, that was to last his lifetime. Already becoming established, Sargent was receiving commissions for his work. Helleu had not sold anything, and was deeply discouraged almost to the point of abandoning his studies. When Sargent heard this, he went to Helleu and picked one of his paintings, praising his technique. Flattered that Sargent would praise his work, he offered to give it to him. Sargent replied, I shall gladly accept this, Helleu, but not as a gift. I sell my own pictures, and I know what they cost me by the time they are out of my hand. I should never enjoy this pastel if I hadnt paid you a fair and honest price for it. With this he paid him a thousand-franc note. On a trip to London with Jacques-Ã‰mile Blanche in 1885, Helleu met Whistler again and visited other prominent artists of the age. His introduction to James Jacques Tissot, an accomplished society painter from France who made his career in England, proved to be a revelation. From Tissot, Helleu saw, for the first time, the possibilities of drypoint etching with a diamond point stylus directly on a copper plate. Helleu quickly became a virtuoso of the technique, drawing with the same dynamic and sophisticated freedom with his stylus as with his pastels. His prints were very well received, and they had the added advantage that a sitter could have several proofs printed to give to relations or to friends. Over the course of his career, Helleu produced more than 2,000 drypoint prints. In 1904, Helleu was awarded the Légion dhonneur and became one of the most celebrated artists of the Edwardian era in both Paris and London. He was an honorary member in important beaux-arts societies, including the International Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers, headed by Auguste Rodin, and the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts.