Portrait of Mary Morris

Gilbert Spencer R.A, R.W.S

£500



REF: 1137

Height: 33 cm (13")

Width: 24 cm (9.4")

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Framed Height: 57 cm (22.4")

Framed Width: 56 cm (22")

Description

When the Royal College of Art was evacuated to Ambleside in the Lake District in 1940, Spencer travelled too, and was eventually offered accommodation at his home, Ladywood, a substantial house between Grasmere and Rydal Water, by Professor Ernest de Sélincourt (1870–1943). De Sélincourt was an English literary scholar and critic, best known as an editor of William Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth, and was Oxford Professor of Poetry from 1928-33. In his 2024 biography of the artist (Yale University Press), Paul Gough describes how, after breakfast, de Sélincourt would retire to his study to work on Wordsworth and Gilbert would hurry upstairs to work on cycles of paintings in his makeshift studio. Gilbert served in the Home Guard while at Ambleside and was employed as an official war artist from 1940–43, commissioned to paint scenes of military training in England. Gough quotes a letter from the artist to Florence Image of 11 November 1942, in which he writes, "But I would love to be an independent painter again. I am no longer able to fit in with people as of yore, I am the yokel at heart. I get on best with yokels and I get on worst without showing it with E de S. However much I admire him I hate him. I hate the even keel on which his brain floats. I loathe the correctness of thought. I like fluctuating, he doesn't. I like to be capable of being upset. He does too but only if he is doing the upsetting ... But still, much as we hate him for his faults we admire him for his qualities and it is his qualities that have kept us here for much longer than many would have stuck." We can imagine that Gilbert, either a little guilty for his inner feelings towards de Sélincourt, or maintaining his polite front, or perhaps both, decided to draw his host's daughter as a gift for that Christmas.De Sélincourt's daughter, Mary, who would have been 40 or 41 when Gilbert drew her, had married Charles, Baron Morris of Grasmere, in 1923, and was awarded an OBE for her work in the voluntary sector in 1952. More than his brother, portraiture was at the heart of Gilbert's oeuvre, as was the making of finished portraits in graphite. The two drawings listed on this website, one made in his early thirties and the other in his late forties, illustrate the durability of this practice throughout his career.

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