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## ROBERT SIMON FINE ART

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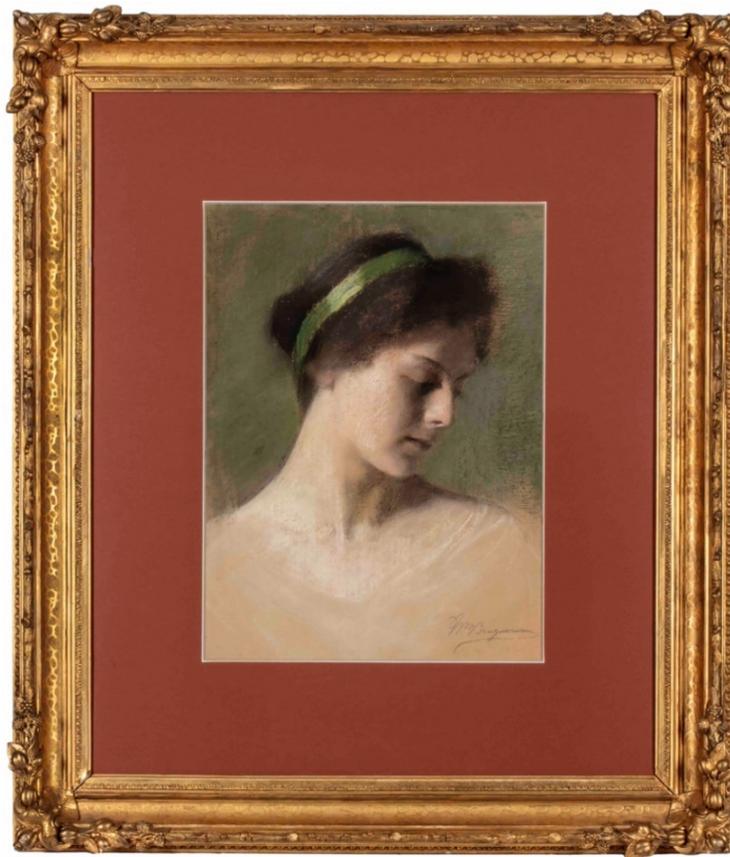
**William Adolphe Bouguereau**  
(La Rochelle, 1825 – 1905)

*Study of a Woman*

Signed, lower right: *Wm Bouguereau*

Pastel on paper, laid down on board  
19  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 15 inches (50 x 38 cm)

Provenance: with Galerie Percier, Paris  
with Galerie Drouant-David, Paris  
Private Collection, Chicago



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Bouguereau was the preeminent academic painter of the nineteenth century and one of the most celebrated artists of his day. Changes in taste caused him to fall out of popular favor for much of the twentieth century, but in the last fifty years appreciation of the artist, at times passionate, has brought about a revival both critical and commercial. Today his work is prized by collectors and museums and serves as a paragon for figurative artists worldwide.

Famously prolific, Bouguereau painted over eight hundred finished works. He would develop his compositions from drawings, then proceed to oil studies from models, before approaching the full-size canvas. His drawings were predominantly made with graphite and white or black chalk, with the occasional use of watercolor and gouache. Pastel, as seen in the present work, was not part of his normal creative process and is found only in two other works in the artist's output: an unelaborated color study dated 1848 for his *Saint Peter After his Delivery from Prison by the Angel* and a preparatory sketch (Private Collection) for his *Zenobia found by Shepherds on the Banks of the Araxes* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Our *Study of a Woman* is unique in Bouguereau's oeuvre as the only finished work executed entirely in pastel, and it is also singular in the use of a textured paper particular to the medium.

The artist produced countless head studies in oil throughout his career, most often in preparation for specific figures in his paintings. The treatment of the figure in our pastel, who is posed with her head turned to the side and slightly downcast, recalls that of several of the women found in Bouguereau's paintings of the 1880s and 90s, such as his *Blessures d'Amour* (Love's Wounds) of 1897 (Fig. 1). The motif of her headband also finds a parallel in the artist's painting *Irene* (Fig. 2) of the same year.<sup>1</sup> However, the fact that the subject of the pastel cannot be associated with any of the recognizable models that the artist regularly employed in his studio suggests that it was made for a collector or friend, whether on commission or as a gift.

The use of pastels, prevalent in eighteenth-century France, fell out of favor after the French Revolution, in part because of its association with the perceived frivolities of the *ancien régime*. But it was revived late in the nineteenth century in France, particularly by Edgar Degas and his fellow Impressionists. Whether the present work was in some way a challenge or a response to Bouguereau's aesthetic rivals is not known, but it clearly demonstrates the artist's mastery of the medium—something for which he was undoubtedly proud of, as indicated by his bold signature at the lower right.



Fig. 1. William Adolphe Bouguereau, *Blessures d'Amour*, oil on canvas, Private Collection.



Fig. 2. William Adolphe Bouguereau, *Irene*, oil on canvas, Private Collection.

In a written communication, the Association William Bouguereau has stated that “the great quality of the work and the presence of an authentic signature confirm Bouguereau’s authorship. While the work is not connected to any dated work by the artist, the figure presents similarities to the women found in Bouguereau’s paintings of the mid-1880s when the artist was at the peak of his career... The signature, rendered in cursive writing in pencil, is very similar to signatures found on many other drawings by Bouguereau. The artist employed this form of his signature—with his first two initials and last name—throughout his life, particularly in works dedicated to friends, collectors, and critics. Numerous well-known drawings reproduced in scholarly books and articles on Bouguereau are signed in the identical fashion.”

The early history of the present work is not known. A label on the verso is from the Galerie Percier of 38, rue La Boétie, Paris. The gallery was located at that address between 1923 and 1932. Another label documents the work’s presence at the Galerie Drouant-David in Paris, active from 1943 to 1961.

We are grateful to Dr. Louise D’Argencourt, Madeleine Beaufort, Michel Cabotse, Charles Pearo, and the Association William Bouguereau for their assistance in cataloguing this work.

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<sup>1</sup> Damien Bartoli and Frederick C. Ross, *William Bouguereau: Catalogue Raisonné of his Painted Work*, New York, 2010, p. 314, cat. no. 1897/01 and p. 317, cat. no. 1897/05.