



GUSTAVE COURBET

(Ornans 1819–1877 La-Tour-de-Peilz)

La femme au missel (probably portrait of Zélie Courbet). Circa 1840-1849.

Oil on canvas.

Signed centre bottom: G. Courbet.

55.5 x 46.5 cm.

Expertise: Jean-Jacques Fernier, 6.3.2006. Provenance: - Collection of David Benador, Geneva. - Collection of Emile Chambon, Geneva (inscription verso on stretcher). - Auction of the collection of Emile Chambon. - Galerie Hugues Rosset, 2006 (according to the owner). - Swiss private collection. Literature: - Benador, Jacques: Courbet peintre et Communard, in: Plaire, No. 2, Paris 1945. - Hilbi, Georg M. : Transformation, Sublimation und Individuation im

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modernen Portrait. Fallstudien zu Albert Anker, Gustave Courbet und Hans Emmenegger, Diss. Universität Zürich 2013, pp. 46-60, fig. 13. This recently rediscovered striking portrait of a young woman was formerly in the collection of renowned Geneva gallery owner David Benador, and was later in the collection of another Genevan, the artist Emile Chambon (1905-1993), who was a great admirer of Courbet's work. The woman is depicted in three-quarters profile, dressed in black and holding a prayer book in her left hand. Her gaze is directed upwards, radiating a strong aura of devoutness. Her facial expression is friendly and gentle, and her complexion is nuanced with austere grey-blue and pink shading, typical for Courbet. Courbet was very close to his family and often depicted relatives in studies as well as in larger compositions, for example in the famous work "A Burial at Ornans", in which three of his sisters are included amongst the mourners. On the basis of her facial features, the woman depicted here can also be identified as a Courbet family member. Jean-Jacques Fernier conjectures that the subject was either one of the artist's sisters (possibly Zoé Courbet, born in 1824), or his cousin Clémentine. In this way the portrait can be dated to the early period of the artist's work, circa 1840. Georg M. Hilbi, who dates the present portrait to the late 1840s (circa 1848-49), also believes that the subject was a close relative of the artist, specifically his second sister, Zélie Courbet (1828-1875). Hilbi bases his identification on the resemblance to certain portraits made between 1845 and 1850. Other indications that this may be a portrait of Zélie are her delicate constitution, and her lifelong attachment to religion, both of which are evident in the present portrait. Hilbi also suggests that the present work may have served as a model for one of the figures in "A Burial at Ornans", the subject's black shawl with hood thus prefiguring a mourning dress. Courbet often first executed portraits of his models as single studies for his large-format works, whether or not he actually employed these figures in the final composition. In "A Burial at Ornans" there is an uncompleted face of a woman with a black hood directly behind the figure of Zélie, which bears a strong resemblance to the present portrait.

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