

Dame Laura Knight RA



SOLD

No. 1 Dressing Room

Reference: 11035

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

Dimensions:

Height: 56 cm / 22 in
Width: 38 cm / 15 in

Signed l.r.: Laura Knight, watercolour over pencil 56 x 38 cm.; 22 x 15 inches

Provenance

Polak Gallery, London; Christie's, London, 23 June 1994, lot 9; Private collection U.K.; Sotheby's, London, 13 December 2018, lot 85, where bought by the present owner

Literature

Janet Dunbar, Laura Knight, 1975, ill. facing p. 104

The subject of this watercolour is Eileen Mayo (1906-1994) depicted as a ballerina. Mayo was an artist and a favourite model of both Laura Knight and Dod Proctor. The work combines Knight's frank depiction of the female form with her love of the stage and was drawn in the studio rather than at the theatre.

Knight's interest in ballerina's dressing rooms started in 1919 when she was invited to draw Lopokova, the star of Diaghilev's ballet at the Coliseum in No. 1 Dressing Room, which gives the present work its title. In her autobiography, Knight describes her fascination with the glow of the electric bulbs, the ballet shoes and the scent of powder and grease paint, and how she was allowed to sit and observe as much as she desired (L. Knight Oil Paint and Grease Paint, 1936, pp. 224-232).

Knight worked on an oil of Mayo as a ballerina in 1927, entitled 'Dressing for the Ballet' and it was exhibited at the Royal Academy that year. The work was included in Knight's touring exhibition of the United States in 1931 and was badly damaged, so she cut it down and completely repainted the original. The new composition called 'No. 1 Dressing Room', featuring Mayo topless in the identical pink tights and doing her hair in front of the mirror in an extended interior was re-exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1947 and bought by the Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool.

Excluded from the life room at Nottingham School of Art in 1891, she battled against the structural inequalities of the art world throughout her professional life and fought for greater recognition and status for women in the arts throughout her career.

In 1922 she wrote a pamphlet entitled Can Women Succeed as Artists where she identified inequality of opportunity as a major factor in the near-total exclusion of women from the arts in Britain. In 1936 Laura Knight was the first woman to be elected to full membership of the Royal Academy since its foundation in 1768. She was President of the Society of Women Artists from 1932 to 1968. While she became the first woman to join the selection committee of the Royal Academy in 1937, Knight was not invited to its annual banquet until 1967.