



Mrs Lucy de Laszlo

Date

1902

Primary Maker

Philip Alexius de László de Lombos

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

120.6 x 81.3 cm

Description

Lucy Madeline Guinness (1870-1950), the daughter of Henry Guinness of Burton Hall, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin and his wife Emelina Brown of Edinburgh, was born on 22 December 1870. She was part of the Guinness banking family. She first met the Hungarian-born artist Philip de László (1869-1937) in Munich and he described her in his journal as "the tall, lovely golden-haired Irish girl with the

blue eyes on the threshold of life." At the time, Lucy was on a Grand Tour with her sister Eva and when they left for Paris, de László followed them, borrowing the money for the fare. Such was the unsuitability of the match, that Lucy's father forbade them to meet and they did not see each other again for seven years when de László's circumstances were much improved. They met again and married in St. Brigid's Church, Stillorgan on 1 June 1900. Family pictures of the event show de László in traditional Hungarian dress - dark green velvet suit, high boots and hat trimmed with fur and an eagle's feather, beside the more traditionally dressed Guinnesses. Together they had six children, five sons, Henry, Stephen, Paul, Patrick and John, and a daughter, Eva, the second child, who died in infancy. Philip de László was born in Budapest, the son of a tailor. From these humble beginnings he became the most successful court painter in Europe, painting members of almost every royal family of his day and four US Presidents. De László's new wealth enabled him to build a magnificent home for his bride next to the Városliget Park in Budapest. This gothic villa contained three purpose-built studios and an apartment for his mother, to whom he was devoted. In 1907, after four years in Vienna, they settled in England. John Singer Sargent had virtually retired, apart from a handful of special commissions, leaving the path to success clear for de László. Lucy Madeleine Guinness was an accomplished violinist and this is the first of a number of paintings and sketches that de László made of her either playing or holding her violin. Through her talent and wide repertoire, the artist got to meet many renowned musicians. At parties, Lucy would play the violin and Philip would sing Hungarian songs. A large portrait, this is one of the first of his works in which de László used a landscape as

background. Despite the conscious debt to English eighteenth-century portraiture, the picture was conceived in Rothéneuf, near St Malo, Brittany, in August 1902, during a holiday de László and his wife were taking with two of Lucy's sisters and the artist's friend Gábor de Térey. It was de László's first holiday since his honeymoon two years earlier, and the first opportunity he had had for some time to indulge in landscape painting. In her diary, the sitter wrote: "He [de László] has begun a portrait of me/ with violin, for which I've sat about 9 times - in the afternoons for about 1 ½ to 2 hours, sometimes more. Position v. successful. But I wonder will he really finish it." Lucy de Laszlo's diary reveals that there was some tension in the marriage and that there had been several outbursts of bad temper by the artist during the sittings. She remarks "I sometimes take little, notice, sometimes through a turn in the conversation, or perhaps laughing at him, I put a break to the temper [...] but it is hard to suppress one's own rising temper sometimes, when adjectives are being flung at one recklessly." However, the present portrait may be presumed to be almost entirely a studio work and the background is painted as a carefully constructed counterbalance to the figure of Lucy in the foreground. From Rothéneuf de László travelled to the Loire valley to embark on two important group portraits of the de Gramont family, to be painted "un peu à la façon des tableaux anglais du dix-huitième siècle", showing the sitters in a landscape setting. It would seem likely that in undertaking the present portrait of his wife, de László was preparing himself for these forthcoming commissions. De Laszlo would certainly have designed and commissioned this frame for this portrait as he did for all his works, usually painting the picture in its frame on his easel. Thus it is completely integral to the work. MC LITERATURE Lucy de László's diary, 1902-1911, The de Laszlo Archive Trust, pp. 35-36 Owen Rutter, Portrait of a Painter, 1939, Duff Hart-Davis in collaboration with Caroline Corbeau-Parson, Philip de László, His Life and Art, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010. This painting's restoration was kindly funded by the de László Foundation. "De Laszlo would certainly have designed and commissioned this frame for this portrait as he did for all his works, usually painting the picture in its frame on his easel. Thus it is completely integral to the work and this is a matter of no little importance." - extract from email from Dandra de Laszlo, Director and Editor , the de Laszlo Catalogue Raisonné, 11 June 2007.