



Study of an Old Woman

Date

c. 1887

Primary Maker

Frank Joseph O'Meara

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

99.1 x 49.5 cm

Description

'Study of an Old Woman' ('Old Woman Burning Leaves') belongs to O'Meara's series of old women by the river Loing, or by a pool at the edge of the village. It is a study for 'October' (see Object Number 240) and is painted on exactly the same size canvas, but the figure of the old woman is larger and the forms, such as hands, leaves and sedges and the flames of the fire, are more broadly painted, with a blurred 'impressionist' edge. 'Study of an Old Woman' has a sketchy quality and spontaneity, which is lost in 'October'. The setting of the figure by water against a pale landscape and low wintry sun are all characteristic of O'Meara. The charming green and russet tones are similar to 'Towards Night and Winter' (see Object Number 26), which shows similar autumnal

activity. Similarly too, the wind-blown sedges and rising smoke give a sense of movement to the still composition. The old lady wears a tight scarf and is clad in a cloak. The setting is both literally and metaphorically evocative of that time of the year which represents a turning point between fruitful summer and its harsh winter counterpart, which always lies just beyond the horizon, posing as a constant threat to the livelihood of the country people. The backdrop for this study is the artist's colony of Grez sur Loing. Several artists including John Lavery and William Stott of Oldham spent time at Grez but O'Meara spent by far the longest amount of time in the area- from c. 1875- 1888- only returning to his native co. Carlow at the end of his young life. The landscapes and atmosphere clearly made a lasting impression on the Irish artist, who displayed a predilection for rural landscapes from an early age, as documented in his

early sketchbooks of the landscapes in and around co. Carlow. (Catalogue Entry [8]: Frank O'Meara 1853 - 1888 - Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, 1989, p. 47) Kenndy, B.P. 'Irish Painting'. Town House and Country House. Dublin, 1993.