



Wife of the Artist

Date

c. 1903

Primary Maker

Sir William Orpen

Medium

Crayon, sanguine and chalk on paper

Dimensions

33.1 x 33.4 cm

Description

William Orpen met his future wife, Grace Knewstub, whilst holidaying with fellow artists, Augustus John (1878-1961)

and Charles Conder (1868-1909) at Vattetot-sur-mer, France, in the summer of 1899. Grace was the daughter of the minor Pre-Raphaelite figure, John Knewstub, and Orpen fell in love with her. They married in London in August 1901 and until 1907, the happiness of the marriage and family life is apparent in the many portraits of Grace and her three children, Diana, Christine and Mary. Orpen's contentment is perfectly articulated in this sensitive portrait of his wife. For a time, Orpen and his wife were close friends of Augustus and Ida John although relations cooled after Ida's untimely death at the age of thirty for which the Orpens held John largely responsible. The Orpens were also good friends with Hugh Lane who was Godfather to Diana, one of their three daughters. The years of domestic harmony, however, were not to last. In 1908 Mrs. Evelyn St George (1870-1938) became Orpen's mistress, and usurped Grace's role in the artist's life. Despite the fact that Orpen continued this affair and had a daughter with Mrs. St. George in 1912, he was prudishly protective of his wife's virtue but eventually, the couple became estranged. MC