



Miss Maud Gonne

Date

1890

Primary Maker

Sarah Henrietta Purser

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

176.5 × 105.5 cm

Description

This life-size painting of Maud Gonne was exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1891 under the title *The New Pet* and at a price of £80.00, Purser's highest price yet but it did not sell. She later re-titled the work *Lady with a Monkey: a Portrait* and exhibited it at the Paintings Old and New exhibition in 1923, although it was not for sale. Maud Gonne (1866-1953) first came to Ireland in 1868, and stayed again during her father's second military posting here. After her mother's early death Maud lived

mostly in France where she made her home until about 1897. She was interested in political radicalism and became involved in French and Irish nationalist causes. In Ireland briefly in 1882, she returned to France where a protracted affair with the political activist and journalist Lucien Millevoye led to her involvement in the extreme Boulangist political faction, for which she made a secret mission to St. Petersburg in 1887. Millevoye and Gonne had two children, a son Georges Silvère (1890-91) and a daughter, Iseult Gonne (1894-1954). It was the English journalist Wickham Steed who brought current Irish agrarian conflict to her attention. In 1888, towards winter, she began her lifelong activity for Irish social and political causes by contacting Michael Davitt in Dublin. He may have arranged that she meet Sarah Purser who certainly had met her by Christmas of 1888. Maud entered Purser's circle, meeting Douglas Hyde on 16 December and being introduced by Purser's friend Charles Hubert Oldham (1860-1926) to John O'Leary. O'Leary gave Maud an introduction to John Butler Yeats whom she visited on 30 January 1889, when his son William first met her and was smitten by the unrequited passion which inspired much of his poetry. In W B Yeats's memoirs he recounts that Purser lunched with Maud and Millevoye in Paris; this was in 1890 before Maud left to winter on the Riviera. Maud wrote in February 1891 from St. Raphaël, Var: "Tell me if you sent my picture to the exhibition in Dublin and if anyone wanted to buy me" and again "about my picture, of course put a price on it. I always understood that is what you intended to do. It is very kind

of you offering to paint a little one for me some day.” By the turn of the century she had returned to Ireland where she founded a revolutionary women’s movement, Inghinidhe na hEireann (Daughters of Erin) and was involved in the establishment of the Abbey Theatre together with Lady Gregory and W B Yeats. In 1903 Maud Gonne married John MacBride and they had one son, Sean MacBride (1904-1988) but after the break-up of their marriage she returned to Paris until 1917. On her return to Ireland, her radical political stance caused her to be imprisoned for some time. Maud Gonne loved animals and was often accompanied by a large Irish wolfhound or as in this case her pet monkey “Chaperone” whose name allowed her to go out unescorted but still say truthfully that she was with her chaperone. This somewhat formally posed portrait is indicative of Purser’s academic training and professional portrait practice. MC