

Basic Detail Report



Seated Female Nude

Date

c. 1881

Primary Maker

Pierre Puvis de Chavannes

Medium

Charcoal on paper

Dimensions

31.4 x 46.4 cm

Description

This pastel sketch is undated but it was probably made in the early 1880s when Puvis was working out ideas for the painting of 'The Vision of Antiquity' for the stairwell of the museum at Lyons. All the figures in this large painting are deliberately based on well-known antique poses. The Roman statue of Ariadne, which Puvis had seen in the Vatican, inspired the semi-draped, reclining figure in the foreground in that composition and the drawing here, also based on the classical statue, may relate to the same project. However, it is much closer to a painting entitled 'Tamaris', dated to 1885-86, which is now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. It was Puvis' practice to make a series of lightning sketches to plan his compositions. He followed these by making preliminary studies for each individual figure, which he then worked up to a more finished state before transferring it to canvas for painting. 'Seated Female Nude' represents a very early stage in that image-making process. The artist develops the motif of the upraised left arm from the merest outlines on the right to a more emphatic and convincing pose, correcting his own tentative line and adding light and shade as the final solution emerges. The right hand and arm are still very awkward and disturbingly disproportionate to the rest of the figure but, even at this early moment in the development of Puvis' idea, the modelling of the right breast, thigh and abdomen is marvellously subtle and sensuous. The drawing is done in pastel, a medium not usually favoured by Puvis de Chavannes but its crumbly texture is exploited to particularly good effect in the modelling of the lower half of the body. (Extract from 'Images and Insights', Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, 1993, p. 198)