



Portrait of Lady Charles Beresford

Date

c. 1906

Primary Maker

John Singer Sargent

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

73.5 x 60 cm

Description

Lady Charles Beresford, née Jeromina (Mina) Gardner (d. 1922), was the daughter of Richard Gardner, MP for Leicester, and his wife, Lucy Comtesse de Mandelsloh W? rtemberg. In 1878, she married Lord Charles Beresford, a

prominent admiral, an ebullient socialite and an intimate friend of the Prince of Wales. Known as 'The Admiral and the Painted Lady' they were members of the Marlborough House set. Her husband, a notorious adulterer, made no secret of the fact that he was not entranced by his wife, who was ten years his senior. He also was not of a kindly nature stating that he enjoyed making women cry, because "it was such fun to hear their stays creak". Lady Beresford was an eccentric, the subject of numerous anecdotes and apparently the author of a scurrilous poem *The Babbling Brooke*, that concerned one of her husband's conquests, Daisy Brooke (Lady Warwick), who was also a lover of Edward VII. Her husband's affair with Daisy Brooke was without the knowledge of Edward VII, and when he discovered that she was also involved with Lord Charles, Edward VII tried to recover an alleged compromising letter that she had written to Beresford, and which was supposedly in the hands of Lady Charles. The quarrel lasted until Prime Minister Lord Salisbury interfered and both parties reached an agreement. Nevertheless, the relations between Edward VII and Lord Charles remained weak for the remainder of their lives. The inscription on the canvas and the extraordinary freedom of handling suggest that this may have been a gift from the artist rather than a commissioned work. Lady Beresford is shown in a loose dress decorated with bows, perhaps a tea gown, which is no more than indicated by strokes of white, pink and green pigment with splashes of white as highlights. The background is fluid, textured and buff coloured: the red of her lips and the red ribbon in her hair provide the only colour notes. Lady Beresford was famous for the extravagance of her dress and make-up. Her eyebrows, in particular, were fabled and feature in a story, which Nellie Melba, in her memoirs, relates about Sargent's portrait: "A wonderful story was running around London at this time concerning Lady Charles Beresford, and as far as I know it is true. She had long wished to have her portrait painted by Sargent, and when the picture was actually finished, she was infuriated. For

Sargent had given her, as plain as Punch, two sets of eyebrows - those with which she had been endowed by nature, and those which she put on herself. But nobody likes to be reminded of their idiosyncrasies, and so the picture was hidden away." (Cargher 1980, pp. 156-7). The portrait was acquired by Sir Hugh Lane before 1913. In a letter to Lane (15 May, the date 1910 added in pencil by an unknown hand), Sargent wrote: "I am delighted to hear that you persuaded Lady Charles to give up that sketch which she always hated" (Lane letters, national Library of Ireland MS 27, 749). In a card headed 'Thursday' (1913 added in pencil by an unknown hand), he notes 'I am delighted to hear that you have got my Lady Charles' (Lane Letters, National Library of Ireland MS 27, 749). Lady Charles Beresford was included in an exhibition of modern art organised by Lane in Belfast in the autumn of 1913. MC