



## Miss Anstruther Thomson

### Date

1889

### Primary Maker

John Singer Sargent

### Medium

Charcoal on paper

### Dimensions

34.4 x 23.5 cm

### Description

In July 1889 John Singer Sargent had been in Paris for l'Exposition Universale with his mother and two sisters. They returned to the vicarage at Fladbury, Pershore on the River Avon in England and there he was visited by Clementina "Kit" Anstruther-Thomson (1857-1921) and the British writer Violet Paget who wrote under the pseudonym Vernon Lee. It was at Fladbury that this

sketch was made in 1889. Beginning in the 1890s, Anstruther Thomson and Lee formed a permanent lesbian relationship and lived together for six months of every year in Florence. Both women were interested in art and aesthetics and they spent time experimenting with the psychological aspects of colour and art. Lee published a variety of non-fiction - travel, literature, memoirs, religious essays, aesthetics and literary criticism as well as supernatural and historical short fiction in the 1880s. In 1912 Anstruther-Thomson and Lee published "Beauty and Ugliness and other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics" which had first appeared in journal form in the Contemporary Review of 1897. It introduced a new aesthetic to a British tradition still controlled by Walter Pater's work. In a volume entitled Art and Man consisting of essays and fragments by Anstruther-Thomson with an introduction by Vernon Lee, published in 1924 (John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd, London) this work is reproduced and described as 'Miss Clementina Anstruther Thomson in the costume of one of the ladies in Titian's Sacred and Profane Love.' There are some similarities in the voluminous sleeves but not in the neck area. Also reproduced in the same volume is part of a full length portrait of the same lady by Sargent, which is described as "a large oil painting of Kit against a dusky garden background, which was exhibited under the title Arbor Vitae." A mark of Sargent's exceptional talent was his ability to reveal his subject's character, especially the women who posed for him. Thomson, engrossed in the art of sketching and set against an architectural background, almost projects towards the viewer with a determined intensity. MC (Notes from Hugh lane Gallery file on painting dated 1948.)