Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Sir Gerald Festus Kelly (London 1879 - Exmouth 1972)

Celestina del Pino of Trinidad

Circa: 1928

1928
oil on canvas
113 x 84.5 cm (44 ½ x 33 ½ inches)
Signed and dated ‘Kelly 1928’ lower right

Gerald Kelly was the only son of Frederic Festus Kelly, an Irish priest who became vicar of St Giles, Camberwell, where the young Kelly grew up and frequented the Dulwich Picture Gallery. He was educated at Eton and Cambridge and later studied art in Paris where he met many of the Impressionists, including Monet, Cezanne, and Renoir, with Rodin being a particular mentor. He became a portrait painter and kept a studio at the family home in Camberwell. Kelly travelled throughout Spain, America, South Africa, and Burma, the latter inspiring a series of paintings of Burmese dancers. In 1920 he married Lilian Ryan, who became his model for a series of portraits. Other sitters included T.S. Eliot, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Somerset Maugham. He became a favourite painter of the Royal Family which led him to paint both King George VI and Queen Elizabeth and spend much of WW2 at Windsor Castle.

In 1944 Kelly was appointed by the Royal Academy as its representative on the Dulwich College Picture Gallery committee (as the Dulwich Picture Gallery was then known). Kelly was knighted in 1945 and in the same year was made Surveyor of the Dulwich Collection. In 1949 he was elected President of the Royal Academy, and it was during his tenure that he introduced the idea of retrospective exhibitions of living artists. As a modest man, he himself took quite a lot of persuading to be acknowledged in the

same way, but when his own retrospective exhibition took place in 1957, 291 wonderful works were on display, lent by 67 owners including royalty, galleries, museums, private collectors, and Kelly himself. After Sir Frank Brangwyn, Augustus John and Sir Alfred Munnings, Kelly was only the fourth living member of the RA to be honoured with a retrospective.

The present portrait depicts the Trinidadian emigré, Celestina del Pino (1909-2007) who is known to have settled in North London by 1928, the year she was painted. It is not entirely clear how Kelly and del Pino came to meet, but he was undoubtedly struck by her beauty, elegance and sophistication. She is dressed in a black Spanish silk bridal gown and wears white gloves. Clutching a fan, her pose is demure but confident. A humble emigré, she is elevated to the status of a Lady, recalling the portraiture of one of Kellys's great artistic heroes, Diego Velazquez.

Provenance

The Artist

Sir Malcolm Sargent (1895-1967), loaned to

Christie's London, The Contents of the Studio of the late Sir Gerald Kelly, 8 February 1980, lot 174.

Private Collection, McLean, Virginia, USA, presumably acquired from the above, to 2025.

Exhibitions

London, Royal Academy, June 1928, no.413 and travelled subsequently to: Liverpool, 1928; Oldham, 1928, no.52; Southport 1929; Glasgow, 1929; Hull, 1930; Bristol, 1930; Bradford, 1931; R.H.A 1932; Aberdeen, 1933; Toronto, 1934; Doncaster, 1935; Paisley, 1935; Poole, 1936.

London, Royal Academy, Diploma Gallery, Sir Gerald Kelly: Paintings, Retrospective Exhibition, 1957, n. 20. Travelled to: Glasgow, 1958, no.23; A.E.B. 1958.

Literature:

Richard Shone, The Century of Change, British Paintings Since 1900, London, 1977.

Derek Hudson, For Love of Painting: The Life of Sir Gerald Kelly KCVO PRA, 1975. pp. 144-6.