

Scottish Paintings & Sculpture (508)

Thu, 7th Dec 2017, Edinburgh

Lot 90

Estimate: £30000 - £50000 + Fees

§ **STANLEY CURSITER C.B.E., R.S.A., R.S.W. (SCOTTISH 1887-1976) THE RED DRESS**

Signed and dated 1920, oil on canvas

86cm x 101.5cm (34in x 40in)

Note: Stanley Cursiter spent almost three decades at the head of the art-world in Scotland, acting as Keeper and then Director of the National Galleries of Scotland. The forward-looking measures he developed there, as well as at points in his own painting, have since tended to overshadow appreciation of the wider body of his work. In his own time, however, he was particularly known for his sumptuous portraits and conversation pieces.

The Red Dress dates from 1920, when Scotland's cultural landscape was still reeling from the shock of the war. In response (after a brief but highly effective experiment with the avant garde tendencies of the Vorticist movement), Cursiter returned his focus to these portraits and eternally popular conversation pieces, indulging in elegance, youth and beauty as a restorative balm to the horrors of war. They often feature family members, and have an intimate, cosy feel, with subjects engaged in charming domestic tasks, such as sewing and playing musical instruments. In the 1920s these paintings evoked a sense of nostalgia for the luxuries and leisure of the pre-war period and a tightly-held hope that the future world would once again return to pleasant domesticity and parties.

There is a masterful balance to the minimal composition of *The Red Dress*, with the elegant model and bright, shiny fruit set against a deep, sumptuous background. The sitter looks directly and straightforwardly at us, while her informal dress allows the artist to reveal his talent with paint, depicting the many gathers, folds, lights and shadows of the loose, cascading fabric. The success and ease of the composition does not reveal Cursiter's meticulous effort in preparing his paintings, painstakingly working through different arrangements and colour trials in his sketchbooks, before attempting to achieve the finished piece. In this painting, its process and subject, we can develop a sense of Cursiter's ideals; his joy in seeing and depicting beauty and elegance, and the celebration of a set of artistic skills well-utilised.

