

J(ames) Carroll Beckwith (1852 - 1917)

The Nut Brown Maiden

signed upper left

titled and signed again on label, verso

oil on canvas

19 ½" x 14"

James Carroll Beckwith is an artist traditionally celebrated for his mural painting and his iconic portrait of fellow Hannibal, Missouri native, Samuel Clemens. Three years after the close of the Civil War, Beckwith traveled north to Chicago to study with Walter Sherlaw. In 1871, he headed east to New York to attend the National Academy of Design and, despite frequent trips and residencies overseas, he would retain ties to the city for the rest of his life. While in Manhattan, financial necessity drove Beckwith to portrait painting. As Pepi Marchetti Franchi has noted, Beckwith's portraits of women during this period took on a specific agency, and perhaps it is for these powerful and frequently sensual images that he ought to be best remembered (1). His subjects included Minnie Clark, the "Original Gibson Girl," and Evelyn Nesbitt, the scandal-haunted wife of Harry K. Thaw and former lover of Stanford White.

Sensuality and sexuality were themes that Beckwith recurrently explored, especially in his paintings of women. In *The Nut Brown Maiden*, however, Beckwith chooses to portray girlish innocence in a departure from his usual motif. The subject's brown hair is drawn up neatly and her expression communicates a contentedness that suggests a carefree adolescence. The viewer is also able to discern a rising womanhood, especially in the girl's parted lips, easily the most compelling feature of the portrait. The soft pinks that color the ornate blouse, reflected in the fairness of the subject's cheeks, help restrain this effect from becoming too sensual. *The Nut Brown Maiden* remains a reflection of idealized American girlhood.

Beckwith exhibited his work at the 1889 Paris Exposition and he won the Gold Medal at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition. After suffering two years of poor health during which he continued to paint, he died in New York in 1917.

Provenance: From a private Connecticut collection to the gallery.

Bibliography:

1. Pepi Marchetti Franchi and Bruce Weber, *Intimate Revelations: The Art of Carroll Beckwith (1852-1917)* (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 2000), 26, 53-54, 69.