

# COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Armand Rassenfosse  
(Liège 1862 – 1934)

*Sapphic Couple*

Artist's monogram lower right  
Red chalk on paper  
27 x 19.5 cm. (10 ½ x 7 ½ in.)

Provenance:  
Claude Van Loock (Lugt 3753), Brussels.



A self-taught graphic artist and painter, Armand Rassenfosse was deeply influenced by Félicien Rops, who he met for the first time in Paris at the age of 25. This was the start of a

long friendship between the two men, who shared a common search for technical mastery in etching.

Like Rops, his fellow Belgian Symbolist, Rassenfosse was most interested in the erotic and the macabre. The present drawing, demonstrating the artist's technical proficiency and ease, of course falls into the former category. Depicting two females in a Sapphic embrace, the drawing is entirely in keeping with a subject of great interest to many other fin-de-siècle, decadent and early modern artists, from Rodin (fig. 1), Klimt and Toulouse-Lautrec, to of course Rops.



Fig. 1, Auguste Rodin, *Two Women Embracing*, pencil and watercolour on paper, 1908, 32 x 24 cm, Musée Rodin, Paris.



Fig. 2, Armand Rassenfosse, *Couple Sapphique: illustration for the Fleurs du Mal*, pencil on paper, King Badouin Foundation

The subject derived no doubt in part due to a desire to shock, and like so much else in the Symbolist movement, was catalysed by Baudelaire's *Le Fleurs du Mal*, which was originally entitled *Les Lesbiennes*, and described women as '*femmes damnées*', with disordered souls, suffering in a 'hypocritical world'. Rassenfosse himself illustrated *Les Fleurs du Mal* between 1899 and 1901, and the resulting work can be considered not only the artist's magnum opus but also a highlight in the field of book illustration (fig. 2).

The present sheet, which likely dates to around these years and was probably related to the *Fleurs du Mal* project, was owned by Claude van Loock, a Brussels-based bookseller, art dealer and editor, notably of the catalogue raisonnés of the engraved works of both Rops and Rassenfosse.