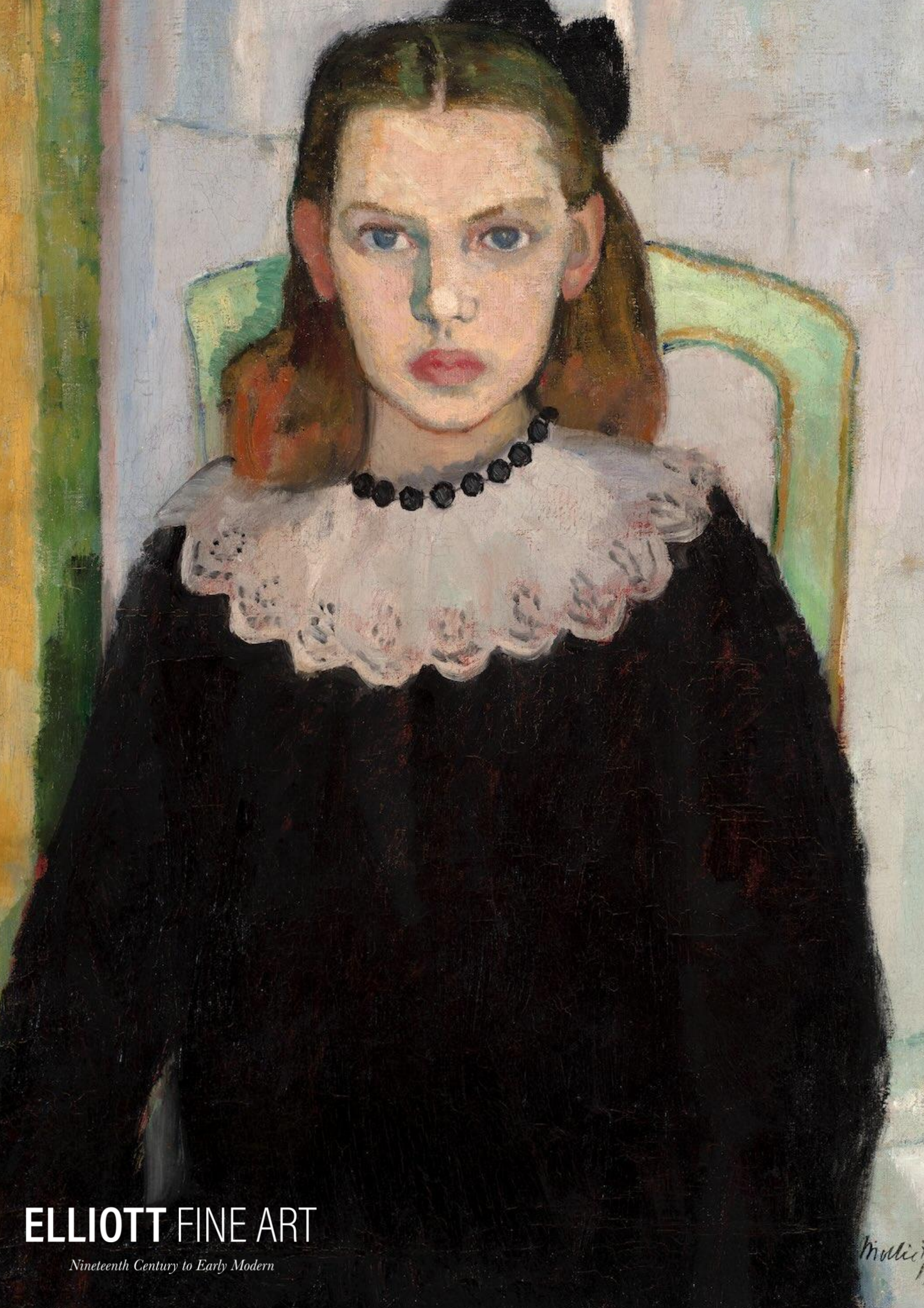




ELLIOTT FINE ART

Nineteenth Century to Early Modern

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Mollie Faustman
(Stockholm 1883 – 1966)

Portrait of a girl in black

Signed and dated lower right: Mollie Faustman / 1910
Oil on canvas
65 x 54 cm.

Provenance:
Wilhelm Käge, Fjällgatan, by 1942;
Thence by inheritance, until 2025.

Exhibited:
Konstnärshuset, Stockholm, 1942.



The present work was painted in 1910, a formative moment in the life of the Swedish modernist Mollie Faustman. That year, she was studying in Paris under Henri Matisse, having enrolled at the short-lived but influential Académie Matisse. Though later celebrated in Sweden for her journalism, political cartoons and books, Faustman always described painting as her primary calling. 'I make a point of being an artist,' she declared.

Born into a socially complex and culturally prominent family in Stockholm in 1883, Faustman grew up between privilege and marginalisation. Her mother was the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy baker; her father, the illegitimate son of *Aftonbladet*'s founder Lars Johan Hierta and the pioneering journalist Wendela Hebbe. Her parents' opposition to her artistic ambitions only intensified her resolve. After graduating school in 1901, Faustman studied at the Valand School of Art in Gothenburg before leaving for Paris, where she would intermittently train between 1908 and 1911.

It was during this Parisian period that Faustman joined the Académie Matisse, Henri Matisse's independent studio school, established as an alternative to the academic tradition. Rejecting classical draughtsmanship in favour of intuitive form and bold colour, Matisse encouraged his students to seek emotional clarity and structural harmony in their compositions. The school attracted a cosmopolitan group of students, including a notable number from the Nordic countries: Einar Jolin, Isaac Grünewald, Sigrid Hjertén, Henrik Sørensen (fig. 1), Axel Revold (fig. 2), Jean Heiberg and others. For these Northern artists, often raised in naturalistic or decorative traditions, Matisse's teachings offered a radical new language of expressive form and an entrée into modernism.



Fig. 1, Henrik Sørensen, *Variétéartist*, 1910, oil on canvas, Prins Eugen Waldemarsudde, Stockholm



Fig. 2, Axel Revold, *Italian Woman*, 1913, oil on canvas, Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo

Faustman's portrait displays an early synthesis of this modernist instruction. The sitter is presented frontally, her pose direct and unflinching, the architecture of the composition reinforced by the upright lines of her bright green chair, shoulders and collar. The face is stark, almost mask-like, with a vertical streak creating shadow down the nose and cheek. This is a conscious and slightly jarring chromatic intervention reminiscent of Matisse's own use of non-naturalistic colour in portraits of this time. But while Matisse frequently embraced dissonance, Faustman tempers hers, holding the palette largely in check. The rest of the canvas is harmonised in soft ochres, greys and murky greens.

What emerges is a portrait of quiet gravity and psychological charge. The sitter, whether a model or an acquaintance, meets our gaze not with sweetness but with a kind of sober self-possession. This is entirely in keeping with Faustman's later philosophy of child portraiture. Like other early modernists, she was drawn to children as subjects not for their charm or sentimentality, but for their truth. She was one of the first Swedish artists to reject the cliché of the innocent or idyllic child. Alongside Vera Nilsson, she is now recognised as one of the pre-eminent painters of children in her time, known for depicting them not as symbols of purity but as individuals capable of seriousness, solitude and inner complexity (figs. 2 and 3). The girl in this painting, reflective, dignified and self-contained, offers a clear early articulation of that approach.



Fig. 3, Mollie Faustman, *Lillan*, 1922, oil on canvas, Moderna Museet, Stockholm



Fig. 4, Mollie Faustman, *Blue and Red*, 1928, oil on canvas, Moderna Museet, Stockholm

The composition is compact and confident. The simplified blocks of colour, the slightly stylised forms and the frontal intensity recall Matisse's *Portrait of Marguerite* from 1910 (fig. 5) or the *Portrait of Greta Moll* of 1908 (fig. 6). Yet Faustman's painting remains unmistakably her own. Where Matisse leaned into abstraction and chromatic play, Faustman anchors her modernism in psychology. Her formal restraint, muted palette and compressed composition all serve to heighten the sitter's interiority. The green shadow that bisects the face reads not only as a formal experiment but also as a barrier or interruption,

something that both reveals and withholds. At the same time, the girl's posture, straight-backed and motionless, and her inscrutable expression suggest a self-awareness beyond her years. There is little attempt to charm or idealise; instead, Faustman seems intent on presenting a child absorbed in thought, conscious of being observed, yet unwilling to fully yield herself to the viewer. Her approach is internal, contained, and all the more powerful for its reserve.

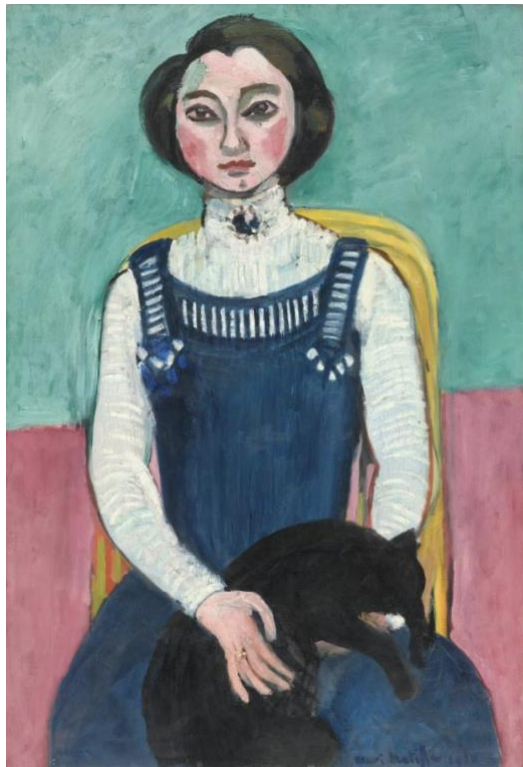


Fig. 5, Henri Matisse, *Marguerite au chat noire*, 1910, oil on canvas, Centre Pompidou, Paris



Fig. 6, Henri Matisse, *Portrait of Greta Moll*, 1908, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London

Although Mollie Faustman would go on to become a prominent cultural figure in Sweden, publishing novels, satirical cartoons and political commentary, this early canvas captures her at the moment she most fully considered herself a painter. It is not only one of the earliest surviving works from her formative Paris years, but also a deeply resolved and characterful portrait that places her securely among the Nordic artists shaped by the radical teachings of the Académie Matisse.