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Charles L'Eplattenier
Portrait of Judith L'Eplattenier, the artist's daughter

CHARLES L'EPLATTENIER

(Neuchâtel 1874 – 1946 Les Brenets)

PORTRAIT OF JUDITH L'EPLATTENIER, THE ARTIST'S DAUGHTER

Black and white chalk on paper

26 x 19.5 cm.; 10.24 x 7.68 in.

Signed upper left: *L'Eplattenier*

Signed lower right: *Ch. L'Eplattenier*

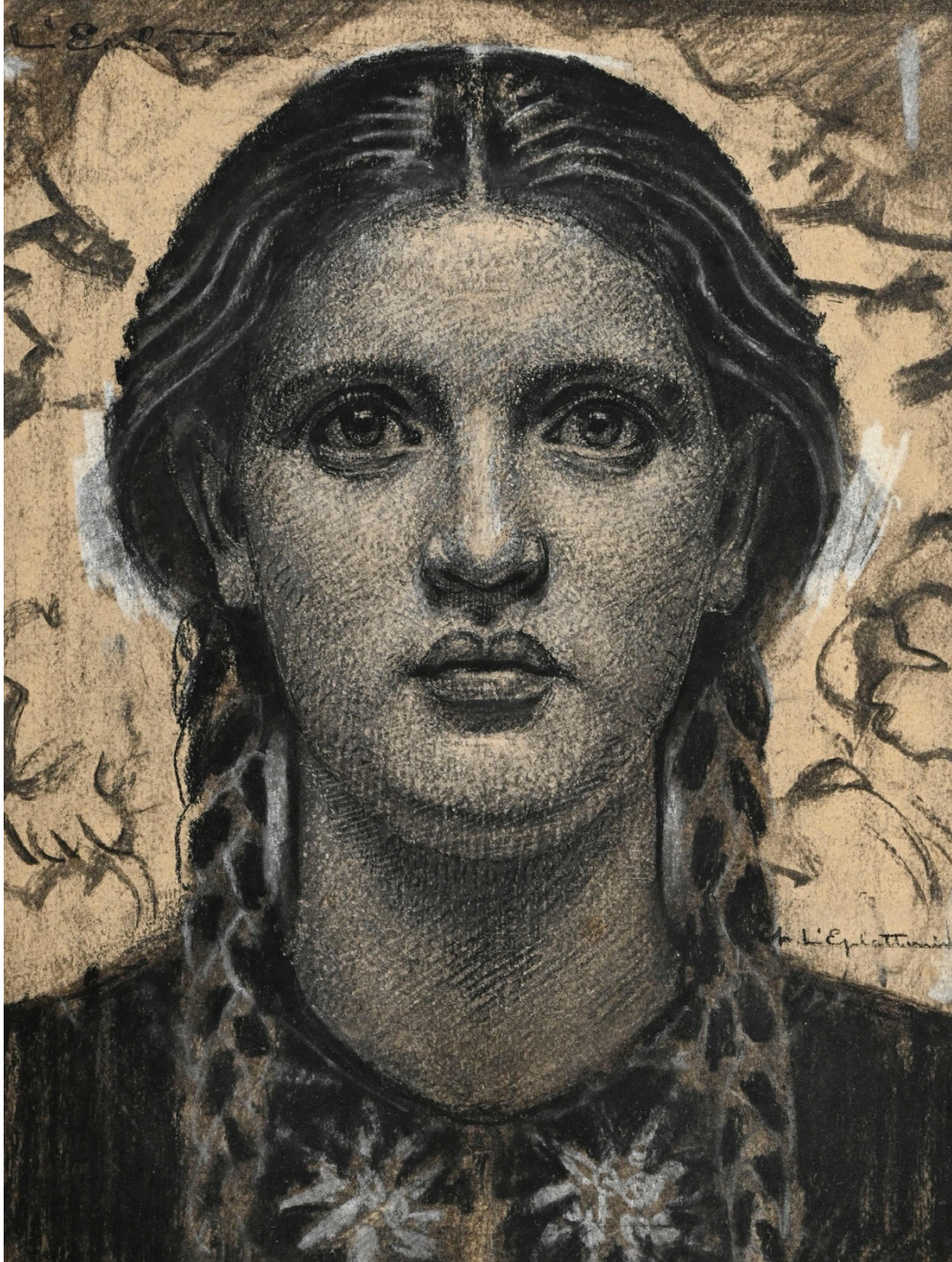
Provenance

Judith Schmid-L'Eplattenier;

By whom gifted in 1946;

Private Collection, Geneva, until 2026.

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Charles L'Eplattenier was one of the most important figures in Swiss art during the first half of the twentieth century. Painter, sculptor, designer, decorator and teacher, he was the founder of the *Style Sapin* movement, which sought to create a distinctly regional artistic language inspired by the flora and landscapes of the Jura. A formative influence on a generation of Swiss artists, he is perhaps best known internationally as the teacher and early mentor of the young Le Corbusier. His extraordinarily varied career encompassed painting, sculpture, mosaics, furniture design, illustration, tapestry cartoons, poster design and public monuments. Among his most important commissions were the decorative schemes for the Château de Colombier, the mosaics of the Crematorium at La Chaux-de-Fonds, and sculptural works such as the *Sentinelle des Rangiers*. Today, however, he is perhaps most widely admired for his evocative landscapes of the Jura Mountains (fig. 1), whose forests, cliffs and river valleys remained a lifelong source of inspiration. In 1946, shortly after completing the final stages of his monumental cycle on the origins of the Swiss Confederation for the Château de Colombier, he died following a fall from rocks overlooking the Doubs valley.

The present drawing depicts the artist's daughter, Judith L'Eplattenier (1908–1997), later Schmid-L'Eplattenier, who herself went on to become an artist. The identification is supported by comparison with a later portrait of 1927 inscribed "Judith", which displays closely comparable facial features, including the distinctive eyes, nose and mouth. Further evidence is provided by an inscription on the reverse recording that the drawing was gifted by Judith in 1946, suggesting that it remained in her possession and was regarded as a personal family portrait. The apparent age of the sitter, approximately twelve years old, supports a date of around 1920.

More than a simple likeness, the work exemplifies L'Eplattenier's distinctive fusion of Symbolist and Art Nouveau ideals. The young sitter is presented in a strikingly frontal and symmetrical manner, her broad forehead, elongated neck and unwavering gaze lending the composition an almost monumental quality. Although clearly based upon close observation, the portrait moves beyond naturalism towards a timeless and emblematic image of youth. In this respect, L'Eplattenier's work may be viewed alongside the broader current of Swiss Symbolism associated with Ferdinand Hodler. While retaining the decorative vocabulary of the *Style Sapin* movement, the portrait shares with Hodler a tendency towards simplified forms, frontal compositions and the elevation of the individual sitter into an archetypal presence (fig. 3).

The decorative foliage surrounding the figure functions less as a descriptive setting than as an ornamental framework, integrating the sitter into a stylised world of rhythmic natural forms. This synthesis of figure and nature, central to L'Eplattenier's artistic vision, is realised with remarkable economy in charcoal and white chalk. Dense passages of charcoal are balanced by subtle highlights and delicate tonal

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transitions, creating a strong sense of volume while preserving the immediacy of the medium. The large, luminous eyes and carefully articulated features become the focal point of the composition, conveying a mood of introspection and quiet psychological intensity.

Combining the intimacy of a family portrait with the formal ambitions of Symbolist art, the present work occupies a particularly appealing place within L'Eplattenier's oeuvre. At once deeply personal and highly stylised, it transforms the artist's daughter into a timeless image of adolescence while offering a compelling example of the decorative, symbolic and profoundly human qualities that define his finest work.



Fig. 1. Charles L'Eplattenier, *Temps de Mars*, 1907, pastel on paper, 105 x 195 cm, Musée des beaux-arts de La Chaux-de-Fonds



Fig. 2. Charles L'Eplattenier, *Judith L'Eplattenier*, 1927, coloured chalk on paper, 39.5 x 28.5 cm, Private Collection



Fig. 3. Ferdinand Hodler, *Käthe von Bach*, 1904, oil on canvas, 42 x 33 cm, Private Collection

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COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com