

**Firmin Baes, *Jeune fille à la fenêtre***  
Saint-Josse-ten-Noode 1847 – 1943 Brussels

oil on canvas

13 ¾ by 24 ½ inches (35 by 61.5 cm.)

signed and dated lower left: '*Firmin Baes / Nov. 1894*' and annotated: '*à Emile Marée / affectueusement / 28 avril 1901*'

provenance: Emile Marée, Namur by 1901;  
Thence by descent in the family until 2019

note: Painted in 1894, *Jeune fille à la fenêtre* is an early work by Firmin Baes and clearly reflects the influence of his teacher, Léon Frederic. Baes is an artist of exacting technique who emulated the severity of the Flemish old masters and the cool sensualism of the Pre-Raphaelites. In this work, the artists' realism cloaks a strong orientation toward Symbolism. Like many Symbolist artist, Baes turned from the representation of tangible reality toward the evocative suggestion of an interior life of emotion and spiritual content. Baes explores a deeper meaning which lies behind the forms, lines, shapes and colors of his compositions. Surpassing traditional anecdotal or representational art, Baes expresses an inner psychological truth and the belief that behind the physical world lies a hidden spiritual reality – what Gauguin once termed “the mysterious center of thought.”

At first glance the present realistic composition, *Jeune fille à la fenêtre* appears straightforward. The paintings' quiet intimacy draws the viewer into the winter window. The mood and manner are quiet, and time seems suspended. Yet, the work conveys a feeling of vulnerable confinement. The nude young girl appears to be trapped by winter, her cold fingertips pressed against the frosted windowpane of her interior prison. Perhaps weary of awaiting spring, a sad expression colors her face. Through the window behind the girl lies a road, a frozen river, and a haunting forest of white, twisted trees.

The son of the decorative painter Henri Baes, Firmin Baes was active as a portrait painter and a painter of still life subjects, nudes, landscapes and interiors. He studied under Léon Frédéric at the Académie Royal des Beaux-Arts in Brussels between 1888 and 1894, and the elder artist's influence is evident in many of Baes's early paintings. Baes was superb draughtsman, adept at charcoal, chalk and pastel, and often worked on a large scale. Between 1899 and 1900 Baes and his father collaborated on the decoration of a hotel restaurant in Brussels. In 1900 his painting *The Archers* won a bronze medal at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, which brought the young artist to wider notice. (The English periodical *The Artist* noted that “M. Firmin Baes is a very young painter, admirably gifted who neglects no labour to realize his very personal

ideal. ...his skill borders on mastery.')

Baes exhibited annually at galleries in Brussels and elsewhere in Belgium, and Europe and in America. While at first he showed oil paintings and large charcoal drawings, as his career progressed he began to work mainly in pastel, producing highly finished portraits, still life subjects and nudes. He achieved much success as a portrait painter and pastellist.

In 1910 Baes built a large house and studio in Brussels which he filled with his collection of paintings and objects d'art, and where he would receive visitors and patrons. He worked to a strict schedule, with morning spent on portrait sittings and paintings from posed nude models, while the afternoons were devoted to the painting of still life subjects, interiors and landscapes. A member of the Belgian artist's association 'Pour l'Art' from 1898 onwards, Baes exhibited with the group almost every year for the rest of his career. He became a member of the Société Royal des Beaux-Arts in 1919, and between 1920 and 1921 painted a memorial to the Belgian army for Hôtel des Invalides in Paris. Baes's account book lists a total of 1,340 paintings sold to collectors, of which 212 were portraits and 264 were still life subjects, together with 152 nudes and 227 landscapes. The artist also produced a number of posters and decorative wall panels, as well as numerous drawings and smaller pastels, which were often given to various friends. Paintings and pastels by Baes are today in the collections of several museums in Belgium, and elsewhere.