

Josef Engelhart, *Lady in a White Dress*
1864 - Vienna - 1941

oil on canvas
23 5/8 by 12 5/8 inches (60 by 32 cm)

provenance: Konrad and Marie Widter (née Engelhart), Vienna;
Wolfgang Widter (director of the Schwechat brewery), Vienna, 1945;
by descent in the family, Private collection, Vienna

note: Josef Engelhart (figs. 1a-b) was a leading figure in the lively art world of turn of the century Vienna. He was both a painter and a sculptor as well as an illustrator and chronicler of the city's life. He studied in the art academies of Vienna and Munich (1883-87) and travelled widely through Europe and also to Egypt. He was one of the original members of the Vienna Secession founded in 1897 by a group of artists, designers, and architects, including Gustav Klimt, Kolomon Moser, and Josef Hoffmann, who in opposition to the prevailing conservatism of the city's art institutions sought to introduce new artistic trends like French Impressionism and present their own inventive and varied styles. While some of the other founding members eventually broke away, Engelhardt remained steadfast and was President of the Secession from 1899-1900 and again from 1910-11. Although he did produce some works in the decorative, patterned style of Klimt, like those for the frieze shown at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 (figs. 2a-f), and occasionally depicted historical or literary figures, like Salome (fig. 3), or painted portraits of well-known personalities, like the opera singer Richard Mayr (figs. 4a-c), Engelhart was best known as the *König der Strasse* (King of the Street), for his vivid studies of Vienna's street life – both the everyday characters of high and low society and the political and social activities that he observed (figs. 5a-f). During the First World War, even though he was in fifties, Engelhart served on the eastern and Italian fronts as an official war artist for the Imperial War Press Bureau and chronicled in detail some of the tragic events he witnessed (fig. 6).

As with Klimt and so many of the other Viennese artists of his period, Engelhart's chief interest was women. He did both formal portraits (figs. 7a-d) and more sketchy studies (figs. 8a-d). In all he displayed, as here, great attention to the fabric and texture of their garments. Given the provenance of this rather noble looking woman shown in profile, one wonders if it may represent the painter's wife.