PAN
AMSTERDAM

KUNSTHANDEL BOB SCHOLTE FINE ART

Self-Portrait with Painter's Palette

57 × 40 cm
Oil on canvas
Monogrammed and dated upper left "B.vH 1915"

Provenance:
Collection of van Grokom, The Hague; by descent in the family until at least 1966;
Collection Konter, Utrecht.

This self-portrait from 1915 is among the most significant self-portraits by Bertha van Hasselt. Seated behind her palette and holding her brushes, she presents herself as a painter. She wears a light blouse with a high collar, a small brooch and a double strand of pearls. Her gaze is direct and calm. There is little movement in the image, yet this very stillness gives her presence a striking intensity.

Van Hasselt painted the portrait with numerous small, clearly visible brushstrokes. In the face, clothing and golden-yellow background, different colours are placed alongside one another, giving the surface a subtle vibration. The brushwork is lively, while the composition itself retains a great sense of calm.

This sense of calm is characteristic of Van Hasselt's work and connects with the ideas of Henk Bremmer, with whom she was closely associated. Within Bremmer's circle, the outward appearance of a subject was seen as only a first layer. A painting could appear restrained or simple while still possessing great spiritual depth. What mattered was the essence, the soul of things, rather than outward display. That principle is particularly palpable in this self-portrait.

Bertha van Hasselt was born in Zwolle in 1878, the youngest child of an army officer. After the family moved to The Hague, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts. She developed into a painter and draughtswoman and throughout her life worked mainly with subjects from her immediate surroundings.

She painted family members and acquaintances, interiors, still lifes and animals, as well as portraits of several artists in her circle, including Julie de Graag, Anna Egter van Wissekerke H.P Bremmer and Sanne Bruinier. Her work is characterised by a high degree of technical mastery and a remarkable sense of calm. The almost objective way in which she approached her subjects is combined with a strong sensitivity to character and presence.

Henk Bremmer owned several of her works and held her portraiture in high regard. Cornelis Veth likewise noted the objective character of her portraits, describing them as fresh, unbiased and tasteful. In this self-portrait, these qualities come together in a particularly compelling way.