Henri Caro-Delvaille (1876 - 1926) - Reverie and confidences in front of the ocean, Biarritz



Oil on canvas signed and dated 1909, lower left

Dimensions : H. 81 x W. 102 cm (with frame: H. 99 x W. 119 cm)

Henry Caro-Delvaille, a Frenchman of Spanish origin, was an important painter in the social life of the early 20th century. His real name was Delvaille ("de la Vallée" in Spanish) but he signed Caro-Delvaille because his mother, with whom he had a close relationship, was called Caroline. From childhood, Henry Caro-Delvaille was curious about art, observed his surroundings and drew. His mother, a writer and poet, was his first guide.

After studying from 1895 to 1897 at the Bayonne School of Fine Arts, Henry Caro-Delvaille became a student of Léon Bonnat at the Paris School of Fine Arts. He exhibited for the first time at the Salon de la Société des artistes français in Paris in 1899. A member of the Société nationale des beaux-arts from 1903, he became its secretary in 1904. In 1905, he won the great gold medal at the Munich International Exhibition. The same year, his friend Edmond Rostand entrusted him with the decoration of his villa in Cambo. He then made a name for himself as a portrait painter and received numerous commissions. He was made a knight of the Legion of Honour in 1910. His painting can be compared to that of Carolus Duran (1837-1917), a famous painter of the belle époque.

Henri Caro-Delvaille emigrated to the United States in 1913 and settled in New York, moving towards a more Art Deco style. He was a central figure in artistic, literary and musical circles on both sides of the Atlantic, from Paris to New York. Much of his work can be found across the Atlantic today.

Our painting is one of Caro Delvaille's key works, both in terms of the quality of the treatment and the subject matter. Most of the artist's paintings are family portraits and a few nudes that he was

commissioned to paint, but for this painting, the painter chose the place that was closest to his heart, the Hôtel du Palais in Biarritz. Born in Bayonne, Caro Delvaille dreamed of high society, wealth and splendour during his childhood. The Hôtel du Palais, which at that time attracted the great fortunes of Europe, was for him the most beautiful place in the world. Very close to his mother, Caro Delvaille was immersed in literature and poetry, which he portrays in this painting with three young and beautiful elegant women in front of a balustrade overlooking the infinite ocean. The graceful attitudes of the three figures are noteworthy: while the first young girl on the left of the composition seems to be pursuing a reverie, the other two are leaning slightly towards each other to exchange confidences. In this painting, the artist's talent is particularly evident: exquisite quality of drawing, purity of faces and napes, silky rendering of fabrics, transparent effects of sails and, in the background, the magnificent representation of the ocean on a windy day.

The provenance of a painting that has already crossed the Atlantic four times: Painted in Biarritz in 1909, this painting was found by a French collector in an important collection in Buenos Aires (Argentina) in the 1980s, and brought back to Paris. Acquired by the Delvaille Gallery in 1992, the painting was then sold to a private collection in the United States. Olivier Delvaille, the painter's great-grandnephew, was delighted to be able to buy the painting back 29 years after it was sold.