

# Basic Detail Report



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## **Title: Study of Mrs. Hugh Hammersley**

Date: 1892

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3ee93

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: This study relates to the full-length "Mrs. Hugh Hammersley" (private collection, on loan to the Brooklyn Museum of Art) that was displayed at London's New Gallery in 1893. That portrait, together with "Lady Agnew", which was shown at the Royal Academy's summer exhibition the same year, established Sargent as one of British society's preeminent portraitists. In 1891 London banker Hugh Hammersley had asked Sargent to paint a portrait of his vivacious wife, Mary Frances, née Grant (ca. 1863-1902), whom he had married in 1888. It was not until the following year, however, that work actually commenced, with sittings at the artist's Tite Street studio throughout May and June.<sup>(1)</sup> Although theirs was a cordial relationship that lasted until Mary Hammersley's death, the sittings were not without tension. Sargent's biographer, Evan Charteris, cites a letter from the artist to the American expatriate artist Edwin Austin Abbey in which Sargent complained, "I have begun the routine of portrait painting with anxious relatives hanging on my brush . . . Mrs. Hammersley has a mother."<sup>(2)</sup> The study shows Mary Hammersley wearing the same rose magenta velvet "draped princess" gown and seated on the same Louis XVI sofa featured in the finished portrait.<sup>(3)</sup> While both works portray the wealthy young matron as personable, energetic, and direct, the study is far more intimate. Seen from above at close proximity, the figure is cropped and occupies a flattened compressed space, creating an overall effect of relaxed spontaneity. The fleeting nature of the captured moment is reiterated in the assured bravura brushwork that suggests, rather than delineates, form. As the inscription indicates, Sargent gave the study to English painter Henry Tonks<sup>(4)</sup>. Tonks had practiced medicine but turned to a full-time career as an artist in 1892, when he joined the faculty of the Slade School of Art in London. He frequented the informal Sunday gatherings held by Mrs. Hammersley in her Hampstead home, and it is likely that Sargent gave him the study as a souvenir commemorating their mutual friendship with the sitter as well as Tonks's decision to quit medicine, made at the time the portrait was underway. In addition to its obvious importance in relation to

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the finished work, the study has long held the reputation as one of the most successful demonstrations of the artist's ability to create an image that expresses likeness and personality without sacrificing artistry. BDG Bibliography: Evan Charteris, "John Sargent" (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927); William Howe Downes, "John S. Sargent: His Life and Work" (Boston: Little, Brown, 1927); Richard Ormond, "John Singer Sargent: Paintings, Drawings and Watercolors" (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) Carter Ratcliff, "John Singer Sargent" (New York: Abbeville Press, 1982); Marc Simpson, "Uncanny Spectacle: The Public Career of the Young John Singer Sargent", exhib. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press; Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1997). NOTES: 1. The formal portrait and the study are dated variously in the Sargent literature as 1892, 1892-93, and 1893. Based on notations dated March 30, 1893, by Mary Hammersley documenting the commission (private collection), the correct date for the formal portrait is 1892. The study was doubtless painted during the same May-June 1892 sittings she recorded in connection with the large portrait. 2. Quoted in Charteris, "John Sargent", p. 137. 3. A newspaper clipping annotated "Standard 1 May" contained in Mary Hammersley's 1893 scrapbook (private collection) refers to the style as "draped princess." 4. Sargent and Tonks probably began their long friendship in 1890. On Tonks, see Joseph Hone, "The Life of Henry Tonks" (London: W. Heinemann, [1939]).

Dimensions: 33 1/8 x 20 3/4 in. (41 1/8 x 28 3/4 x 4 in.)