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**Kathleen O'Connor (1876-1968)**

**Still Life with Lamp c.1921-1928**

signed 'K.L. O'Connor' lower right

tempera on heavy card

74 x 96.5cm (29 1/8 x 38in).

AU\$80,000 - 100,000

PROVENANCE:

Sir Ernest & Lady Lee-Steere, Perth

Thence by descent

Private Collection, Perth

EXHIBITED:

Possibly *Salon d'Automne* of 1921, titled '*Bonne Chance*' (see page 221 of *Kathleen O'Connor: Artist in Exile*).

*Kathleen O'Connor*, West Australian Art Gallery, Perth,

22 February - 19 March 1967, cat. 39 (label attached verso)

LITERATURE:

P.A.E. Hutchings and Julie Lewis *Kathleen O'Connor: Artist in Exile*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987, p. 253 (illustrated cover).

Janda Gooding, '*Chasing Shadows: The Art of Kathleen O'Connor*', Art Gallery of Western Australia, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1996. fig 26. p. 40 (illus).

The early twentieth century saw a great flowering of Australian women artists working in the modernist manner. Names like Margaret Preston, Grace Cossington Smith and Grace Crowley readily come to mind, together with an extraordinary gifted group of expatriates, such as Agnes Goodsir and Kathleen O'Connor. Although New Zealand born, O'Connor lived and studied art in Perth before continuing her studies in England. Apart from her final years in Perth, she spent most of her time in France, exhibiting at the Salon d'Automne and holding her first solo exhibition in Paris at the Galerie J. Allard in 1937. Her Australasian friends in France included Frances Hodgkins, Rupert Bunny and Roy de Maistre.

O'Connor painted mainly in oils, her tempera paintings being described as an 'interlude' of the 1920s. It was a highly creative and successful one, Patrick Hutchings continuing, 'The temperas are, indeed, among the best of her pictures, and constitute what may be called the works of her middle period.'

<sup>1</sup> In 1921, four of her tempera paintings, mostly still lifes, were accepted for showing at the Paris Salon d'Automne. Another was illustrated in the December 1928 number of *Les Artistes d'Aujourd'hui*. O'Connor described her fascination, 'Tempera painting took hold of me and I soon put form and pattern colour compliments and outlines [in] almost everything'<sup>2</sup> Full of modernist confidence, they delight in their flat, decorative appearance in which patterns of form and colour create visually rich surfaces. Significantly, it was during this same time that O'Connor was involved in the decorative arts, making fabric designs for the big fashion houses of Galeries Lafayette, Poiret,

and les Trois. This interest is apparent in her still life paintings of the twenties, especially in their strong patterns and vivid colours. While the decorative has a striking presence in these paintings, she combined a blend of Cubism and naturalism to give them their distinctive appeal. *Still Life with Lamp* c.1921-1928 is a typical and excellent example. It is thought that it was exhibited in the 1921 Salon d'Automne under the title of 'either *Jeu de cartes (nature morte)* or *Bonne chance (nature morte)*', as suggested by Janda Gooding. <sup>3</sup> Some order is given to the lively confusion of objects by the use of dark outlining. And the table is 'draped with one of her own hand-painted textiles', which appear often in her paintings of this time. <sup>4</sup> Gooding also identifies the interior as her studio on the avenue du Maine, 'with the stairs leading off to the right, ...'. <sup>5</sup> The high viewpoint used for *Life with Lamp* is ideal for the presentation of such an array of things. Likewise the choice of tempera gives its characteristic clarity to forms high in colour, and cool. *Still Life with Lamp* presents O'Connor at the height of her creative powers, at her best.

David Thomas

<sup>1</sup>Hutchings, op. cit., p.217

<sup>2</sup>The artist, quoted in *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup>Gooding, op. cit., p.39

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, p.40

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*

