Basic Detail Report



Auxiliary Fire Service Girl, City Fire Station, Wool Exchange

Date

c.1940

Primary Maker

Ethel L. Gabain RBA, ROI, SWA

Medium

Oil on canvas

Description

Ethel Gabain was born in Le Harve, France, and studied at London's Slade School of Fine Art and also at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Known for her portraits of actresses in character roles, on the outbreak of war Gabain was commissioned to record the effects and experiences of the war on Britons at home. In her role as an official war artist, Gabain often depicted women performing tasks which had, until then, traditionally been done by men. In these evocative portraits Gabain beautifully captures those emotions caused by uncertain and unfamiliar dangers then faced by many women in Britain. In this portrait of an Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) girl, Gabain captures those raw feelings of uncertainty and fear, as felt by thousands of women who suddenly found themselves in such dangerous and civic roles. During the Second World War, women joined the AFS to help minimise the levels of damage after enemy bombing raids. Women undertook extensive training but, oddly, often did not fight the fires. Instead they became fire-watchers, drivers, managers of communication networks, and runners of canteen vans. After the war, the majority of the AFS women were either discharged or persuaded to leave.

Dimensions

Object/Work: 787.4 x 660.4 mm