



ROSA BONHEUR

(Bordeaux, 1822 - Château de By, Fontainebleau, 1899)

Studies of a lioness

signed with atelier stamp, lower right: *Rosa Bonheur* (recto); the artist's studio sale red wax seal on the stretcher; indistinctly incised: 45 (verso)

oil on canvas

535 x 635 mm

Provenance:

The artist's studio sale; Galerie Georges Petit, Paris: 5–8 June 1900, no. 45.

Private collection, USA

Bonhams, London: 26 March 2025, lot 14

Literature:

Atelier Rosa Bonheur, Tome I (Tableaux), Georges Petit, Paris, 1900, p. 13, no. 45

Rosa Bonheur was one of the most famous female artists of the 19th century and widely regarded as the greatest *animalière* (animal painter) of her generation. At the start of her career, living in Paris, she studied the animals at the zoo in the Jardin des Plantes and also observed the dissection of the animals in slaughterhouses. Her fame spread across the Atlantic: her reputation became well established in the United States in the 1840s. She was the first woman to be appointed Officer of the Legion d' Honneur, France's highest award.

In 1860 Bonheur moved to the Château de By in the forest of Fontainebleau, where she lived with her partner Nathalie Micas and kept her own menagerie which included lions and a lioness named Fatma, possibly the model for the present sketch. There she was able to draw the animals regularly, up close and with great scrutiny, after those in her menagerie were tamed and could roam freely on the grounds.

A comparable study, of similar size, currently on loan to the Musée National du Château de

Fontainebleau from the Musée d'Orsay, is another illustration of the artist's passion and interest in the animal world, and her fascination with felines. Another sketch of similar dimensions was recently acquired by the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, from Sotheby's, Paris.