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EST. 1817

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**Henriëtte Ronner-Knip** (Amsterdam 1821–1909  
Ixelles)

*An odd-eyed cat*

Signed and dated (upper left): 'Henriette Ronner  
94' and inscribed with the name of the cat (upper  
right): 'DUCHESS'

Oil on panel

8 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 7 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (22.5 x 19 cm.)



As a descendant of a family of artists it is not surprising that Henriette Ronner at a young age decided to dedicate her life to the arts. She received her first painter's easel from her father Josephus Augustus Knip (1777-1847) on her eleventh birthday. Her father, a gifted artist himself who specialised in painting cattle, noticed his daughter's talent already at an early stage and decided to tutor her. She worked from early morning till dark and was only allowed two hours of rest during the day which were spent in a dark room. Both Josephus Knip as well as his father Nicolaas Frederik Knip (1741-1808) were, at an older age, afflicted by blindness and he believed two hours a day in a dark room would prevent Henriette from this same fate.

Ronner was taught extensively by her father and he advised her to specialize in one genre which would surely attract buyers, but her most important teacher was nature itself. She decided to paint the animals around the farm where she lived which would prove a wise decision, especially since this genre became very popular in the 19th Century.

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Ronner's oeuvre can roughly be divided in three periods. The first period is characterised by rural subjects from her close surroundings. The second period dates after 1850 when Henriette moved to Brussels with her husband Feico Ronner and became a renowned dog paintress. In 1860 she executed a painting entitled *La mort d'un ami* which was highly acclaimed. For this painting she received a Gold Medal at the Levende Meesters exhibition in The Hague. In 1862 she exhibited the same painting at the World Art Fair in London, thereby establishing an international name for herself. From 1870 onwards Ronner's primary subject matter would become cats, and would remain so for almost forty years until her death. Ronner would portray her models as if they were all individual creatures with each their own expression. The artist's choice to change to this commercial subject could not have come at a better time. Throughout Europe the well to do middle class was taking a great liking to cats. But she continued to paint dogs too; notably lapdogs belonging to Marie Henriette of Austria and Princess Marie of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen.

In her later years, she had a house with a large garden, where she kept hunting dogs, cats and a parrot that she used as models. After observing them in her studio, she would make paper sculptures in the desired poses and set them together with props, such as furniture and fabrics. She occasionally collaborated with the genre artist, David Col.

The subject of the present painting is an odd-eyed cat with one blue, and one amber eye. This is a feline form of heterochromia, a condition that also occurs in humans. In many countries, such as Turkey, odd-eyed cats are highly prized with breeding programs to preserve pure white Turkish Angoras with blue and amber eyes. An attention to eyes is particularly interesting given the artist's family history of eye related diseases.