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EST. 1817

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**Victor Prouvé** (Nancy 1858-1953 Sétif)

*Portrait of Juana Romani*

Signed, dated, and inscribed (lower left): 'VProuvé  
a sa chère amie Juana 1884'

Black pen on paper

7 1/2 x 5 3/8 in. (19.1 x 13.5 cm.)

Label on the back of the frame: '*Juana Romani par  
Prouvé.*'



## Provenance

Private collection, France, until 2021.

A versatile and prolific artist, Victor Prouvé succeeded in many fields, including that of painting, of the decorative arts and, even, of bookbinding. His career and his work were strongly connected to his native city, Nancy. The artwork he exposed at the Salons of Paris and of Nancy enabled him to access a vast audience and to obtain a significant popularity. Our unpublished drawing displays Victor Prouvé's portrait of one of the most famous models of the time, Giovanna Carolina Carlesimo (fig. 1), better known as Juana Romani.<sup>1</sup> Born in 1867 in Velletri, Italy, Juana spent her childhood in Paris with her family. After having attracted the attention of Alexandre Falguière, she posed for many artists, including Jean-Jacques Henner, Ferdinand Roybet and Carolus-Duran. The young woman was described by Georges Derville as "tall, supple, with delicious curves throughout her whole body, (...) [she] looks like a Byzantine empress. With

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<sup>1</sup> 1. *Juana Romani (1867-1923): modèle et peintre, un rêve d'absolu*, Courbevoie, musée Roybet Fould, 5 May 2021 – 19 September 2021. Commission: Emmanuelle Trief-Touchard, Marion Lagrange & Gabriele Romani, Courbevoie, musée Roybet Fould, p. 199.

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her hair, that like a golden helmet, frames her forehead and reflect the tawny colours of the sunsets, and her glittering eyes of an unclear colour, she seduces with a peculiar attractive force”<sup>2</sup>.

The physiognomy of Juana Romani appears in many of Victor Prouvé’s compositions (fig. 2): for instance, she is perfectly recognisable in *The Young Woman Consulting a Drawing Pad* (fig. 3). Drawn in 1884, this work displays Juana as she carefully inspects a work on paper. Her genuine fascination for art is confirmed further by the artistic training she pursued in multiple workshops while she worked as a model. Juana Romani’s artistic practice, which mainly focused on portraiture, was generally positively received by her contemporaries. She won a silver medal at the Universal Exhibition of 1899 and regularly exposed her works at various Salons. Unfortunately, the emergence of serious psychiatric problems in 1904 interrupted her career as a painter. She was interned for long periods of time in several asylums in the French region of Île-de-France. She sadly died in 1923, at the nursing home at the Château de Suresnes, when she was only fifty-six years old.

Drawn long before the emergence of her sickness, our drawing offers a ravishing image of a young and healthy Juana Romani at the dawn of her promising artistic career. It also testifies to the friendship between the model and Victor Prouvé, since the two seem to have enjoyed a very long and solid friendship. Victor Prouvé’s posthumous studio sale indicates that Juana Romani owned several of Prouvé’s works,<sup>3</sup> amongst which thirteen drawings<sup>4</sup> and a painting of *Salome carrying the head of Saint John the Baptist*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Georges Derville, “Mlle Juana Romani”, in le *Noël des Annales*, ca. 15-20 December 1901, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> *Catalogue des tableaux modernes par Drammard, Henner, Lumière [...], dessins modernes par Delacroix, Henner, Prouvé [...] dessin au lavis [...] dépendant de la succession de madame Juana Romani*, specialist: Félix Gérard, 20 June 1923, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, room 7, Paris, G. Petit, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> From lot n° 39 to n° 46.

<sup>5</sup> Lot n° 81.

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Fig. 1: Pierre Lanith Petit, *Juana Romani*, c.1900, photograph, 7.4 x 4.2 cm, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



Fig. 2: Victor Prouvé, *Portrait of Juana Romani*, 1884, oil on canvas, Saint-Dizier, Musée municipal.

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Fig. 3: Victor Prouvé, *Young woman consulting a portfolio of drawings*, 1884,  
Pen and Indian ink, 32 x 37.1 cm,  
Nancy, musée de l'École de Nancy.