



CHALLENGING  
THE DAVIDIAN  
TRADITION:  
A SALON PORTRAIT  
BY ADÈLE KINDT

**COLNAGHI**

**ELLIOTT FINE ART**

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Malika M'rani Alaoi and Naomi Bisping  
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## INTRODUCTION

Adèle Kindt's full-length portrait of a fashionable young woman in a landscape is a significant reappearance in the context of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Belgian painting. With the ongoing and profound changes in scholarship, this is true now more so than ever.

Painted in 1829, three years after her career launching First-Class medal at the Salon of Ghent, the portrait comes from a moment when Kindt, still only twenty-five, was already the most highly respected and successful women artist in Belgium, after having trained with Jacques-Louis David, Sophie Frémiet and François-Joseph Navez. The painting was almost certainly exhibited at the 1830 Brussels Salon, under the title '*Portrait en pied de Mlle D.M.*'<sup>1</sup>

The portrait is undoubtedly Kindt's most impressive and would have served as a strong advertisement for her artistic practice, helping her to become one of

the pre-eminent portraitists in Brussels in the late 1820s and 1830s. Kindt consciously, and successfully, competes not only with fellow Salon exhibitors but more generally with fellow alumni of the Davidian School, many of whom specialised in this type of monumental full-length portraiture.

Indeed, Kindt herself enjoyed directly challenging her contemporaries and was confident in doing so. In a world where women artists were often looked down upon, 'Kindt did not shy away from confronting an artistic establishment dominated by men'.<sup>2</sup> In her correspondence with exhibition organisers, she is full of self-assurance, not hesitating to promote her own interests. In a letter to the commission behind the 1835 Salon of Ghent, Kindt demanded that her painting depicting the Count of Egmont be hung in an appropriately favourable place, reminding them of her membership to the academy and the fact that a painting of the same subject had previously won the First Prize.<sup>3</sup>

Her confidence was well-founded and Kindt's talents were recognised by the critics of her own time. *L'Indépendant* called her 'a highly distinguished artist',<sup>4</sup> whilst Louis Alvin described Kindt as an 'artist of incontestable talent'<sup>5</sup> and admired the diversity of her output, whether portraits, genre scenes or history painting. Though she was best known for the latter, Kindt was also commended for her portraiture, as should be no surprise. Alvin again, discussing the Salon of 1836, relates that Kindt's portraiture was not easily matched.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this contemporary praise, comparatively little has been written about Kindt in more recent times.<sup>7</sup> The following essay attempts to add to the literature in a modest way, exploring this extraordinary artist's significant place with the Davidian tradition, as well as bringing to life an important and impressive portrait.

Will Elliott  
London December 2023

## NOTES

1. There is no other known full-length portrait of a female sitter prior to 1830. Besides, the sitter, wearing no wedding band, is clearly unmarried, as is the case for Mlle D.M.
2. K. van der Stighelene et al, *A chacun sa grâce. Femmes artistes en Belgique et aux Pays-Bas 1500-1900*, Brussels 1999, p. 238.
3. *Ibid*, p. 238.
4. *L'Indépendant*, Brussels, 13 January 1832, p. 49.
5. L. Alvin, *Compte rendu salon d'exposition de Bruxelles*, Brussels 1836, p. 40.
6. *Ibid*, p. 61, 'Il y au Salon peu de portraits plus vrais et peints avec plus de talent que ceux de mademoiselle Adèle Kindt'.
7. Thankfully though this is now changing: Naomi Bisping is currently working on an article focussing on Kindt's historicising and political works, whilst Malika M'rani Alaoui is researching Kindt as part of her PhD thesis on the Belgian Salons.



ADÈLE KINDT

(Brussels 1804 – 1893)

*Full length Portrait  
of a Woman in a Landscape  
(Portrait en pied de Mlle. D.M.)*

Signed and dated lower right: ADELE KINDT 1829

Oil on canvas

176 x 132 cm. (69 ¼ x 52 in.)

PROVENANCE

Christie's New York, 25 May 1984, lot 86;

Sotheby's London, 25 March 1987, lot 152;

Sotheby's London, 16 November 1994, lot 164;

Private Collection, UK, until 2023.

LITERATURE

*Explication des ouvrages exposés au salon de 1830*, Brussels 1830, p. 27, no. 256;

D. Mascetti and A. Triossi, *Earrings, from antiquity to the present*, London 1990, p. 71;

*Benezit Dictionary of Artists*, vol VII, Paris 2006, p. 1249.

EXHIBITED

Salon de Brussels, 1830, no. 256, 'Portrait en pied de Mlle D.M.'







FIG. 1, ADÈLE KINDT, SELF-PORTRAIT, CIRCA 1820, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 16 X 15 CM, RIJSMUSEUM.

## ADÈLE KINDT: FROM DAVID'S ATELIER TO SALON SUCCESS, AND BEYOND

Marie-Adélaïde Kindt, better known as Adèle, was born in Brussels on 16th December 1804. Her parents were Charles Kindt, a high-ranking city official, and Marie Anne Buttos.<sup>1</sup> Artistic endeavours were supported and encouraged in the Kindt household, with both of Adèle's sisters, Laurence and Clara, going on to have professional careers as painters.

From a young age Kindt received instruction in drawing from Antoine Cardon. A friend of her father and Professor of Drawing at the Academy of Brussels, Cardon 'nurtured her love of art'.<sup>2</sup> A precocious talent, Kindt exhibited a portrait drawing at the Brussels Salon of 1818 at the remarkably young age of fourteen. Though her extant graphic work is extremely rare, Kindt's self-portrait in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 1), aged around sixteen, aptly demonstrates her confidence and skill in this medium.

Most important for Kindt's artistic development was her relationship with Jacques-Louis David and two artists of his school, Sophie Frémiet and François-Joseph Navez. David arrived in Brussels

in 1816, in self-imposed exile after the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. He opened a studio in his new home, teaching Frémiet, herself a French exile, alongside other French émigrés and local artists. Kindt does not seem to have officially entered his studio but instead received some informal instruction from the great Neoclassicist over the course of two years.<sup>3</sup>

By 1821 Kindt had joined the studio of Frémiet, herself based at David's premises, an imposing townhouse on rue Guillaume.<sup>4</sup> At this stage in her career, Frémiet was painting portraits (fig. 2) and history scenes in a late-Davidian Neoclassical idiom. Only seven years older than Kindt, Frémiet was an artist then very much in vogue, exhibiting to great acclaim at the Salon of Ghent in 1820, where her *La Belle Anthia* won the second prize for history painting, opening the way for Kindt's first prize six years later. In 1821, Frémiet in a letter to a friend, described the seventeen-year-old Kindt as 'very advanced' and explained that her paintings, which had been well-received at the Salon of that year, were 'infinitely better than those of other masters here'.<sup>5</sup>





FIG. 2, SOPHIE FRÉMIET, *Portrait of Victorine van der Haert*, 1818, oil on canvas, 162 x 118 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon.

Finishing her education, Kindt transferred to the studio of Navez in 1822, upon his return from Rome. Navez had studied under David in Paris between 1813 and 1816 and remained close to the master back in Brussels. Whilst in Rome, the Belgian had come under the influence of Ingres, himself of course a former student of David. The head of the Belgian school of painting, Navez's output from the 1820s demonstrates a transitional style, moving away from Neoclassicism towards a more Romantic idiom.

Kindt's first major success, the Count of Egmond (fig. 3), was a troubadour subject, displaying the influence of Ingres mediated via Navez, though painted on a monumental scale. The painting won her the First Prize at the Salon of Ghent in 1826. Still aged only twenty-two, Kindt's career had been launched and the years to follow were crowned with further successes in exhibitions across the low countries, France and Germany. She obtained medals in the Salons of Brussels, Ghent, Douai, Liège and Kamerrijk in the 1820s and 1830s and, over this same period, the Dutch and Belgian States both purchased several works by her. Kindt became an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Amsterdam in 1827 and the Ghent Academy of Arts in 1835. By the mid 1830s, Kindt was one of the most decorated and well-known artists in Belgium, eclipsing the not inconsiderable achievements of Frémiet, who had returned to France in 1827.



FIG. 3, ADÈLE KINDT, *The Count of Egmond, Taking Leave of His Wife*, 1826, oil on canvas, 163 x 213.5 cm, Museum of Fine Arts Ghent.

Unmarried, the remainder of Kindt's life was dedicated to art, both teaching and painting. She continued to exhibit right up to 1884, the year of her death at the age of eighty. Never resting on her laurels, Kindt continued to update

her artistic style, successfully transitioning away from Romanticism and towards a more Academic approach from the 1850s onwards. By any measure, her career had been extremely successful.





FIG. 4, ADÈLE KINDT, *Portrait of Isabelle van Assche*, circa 1825, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, location unknown.



FIG. 5, FRANÇOIS-JOSEPH NAVEZ, *Portrait of Henri van Assche*, 1823, oil on canvas, 75 x 63 cm, Musées Royaux de Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.

*Portrait en pied de Mlle. D.M.*: CHALLENGING FELLOW EXONENTS OF THE DAVIDIAN TRADITION

Monumental in stature, Kindt's full-length portrait depicts a fashionable young woman in a landscape, known to us for now only as Mlle D.M. As Kindt's largest known portrait, this was clearly an important commission for the artist. Perhaps the sitter was keen to support a fellow member of her sex, though by this time Kindt was no longer an up-and-coming portraitist but rather a fashionable and sought-after artist in her own right, whose work would have brought prestige to any patron.

Confident and appraising, Mlle D.M. casually leans against an earth embankment, with a landscape of rolling hills receding in the distance. With its grand dimensions and Romantic, outdoor setting, Kindt's painting derives from a type made fashionable at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

by Davidian artist, such as Antoine-Jean Gros or, above all, François Baron Gérard. No doubt acutely aware of these illustrious precedents, Kindt consciously attempts to emulate and even surpass these most talented proponents of the Davidian school.

Daffodils, daisies and other flora can be seen at the sitter's feet. That both these elements and the backdrop are painted with skill is no-surprise: Kindt's sisters were professional landscape painters, as was her sister-in-law Isabelle van Assche (fig. 4). Isabelle's uncle, Henri van Assche (fig. 5) was the leading landscapist of his day. Kindt was therefore close to several specialists in this genre and anyway would have learned to paint topographical details under Navez.





FIG. 6, FRANÇOIS-JOSEPH NAVEZ, *Portrait of Madame de Wylder and her son*, 1825, oil on canvas, 75 x 63 cm, Musées Royaux de Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.

Mlle D.M.'s sumptuous silk dress, with wide gigot sleeves, is typical of the fashions of the late 1820s, moving away from Empire silhouettes and Neoclassical influences towards a more exuberant style. Her hair is worn in an Apollo knot, consisting of loops of hair rising straight up from the crown, with curls arranged at the temple. The long pendant earrings, set with semiprecious gemstone drops, 'counterbalance the side expansion of the elaborate hairstyle'.<sup>9</sup>

Kindt's sitter holds a pair of white roses, as well as, under her arm, a bonnet with fluttering ribbons, a modish accoutrement at the time, as can also be seen in Navez's tender portrait of Mme de Vylder with her son (fig. 6) or Frémiet's portrait of Juliette dan der Haert (see fig. 2). A bonnet also hangs from the music stand in David's portrait of Juliette de Villeneuve of 1824 (fig. 7), one of only two full-length portraits the French artist painted in Brussels. Kindt likely saw the portrait in David's studio and his work may have loosely influenced her own painting. That said, there is a stiffness and formality with Juliette de Villeneuve, in keeping with David's ideas of dignity and grandeur, that contrasts with the natural pose of Kindt's sitter.

The sensation of an effortless spontaneity, encapsulated by Mlle D.M.'s ostensibly unposed attitude aligns Kindt more closely with Gérard, the painter par excellence of female full-length portraits. Though it is not known whether they met, Kindt would potentially have seen Gérard's work first-hand on one of her visits to Paris. Despite being a favourite of Napoleon and the Empress Joséphine, the French painter remained prominent during the Bourbon Restoration, named first painter to both Louis XVIII and Charles X. Whilst David invariably placed his sitters inside, Gérard favoured verdant and Romantic outdoor settings for many of his female sitters, delighting, like Kindt, in detailed descriptions of foliage and fauna, set under dramatically cloudy skies.



FIG. 7, JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID, *Portrait of Juliette de Villeneuve*, 1824, oil on canvas, 197 x 123 cm, Musée du Louvre.



Three of Gérard's portraits from the opening decade of the century bear close comparison to Kindt's: his portrait of the Countess Katarzyna Starzénka (fig. 8), from 1804; Marie Laczinska, Countess Walewska (fig. 9), from 1810; and Giuseppa Carcano, marquise de Visconti di Borgorata (fig. 10), also from 1810. Gérard's originality is to make his sitters look natural in their bearing, removing any artificiality or affectation.



FIG. 8, FRANÇOIS BARON GÉRARD, *Portrait of Katarzyna Starzénka*, 1804, oil on canvas, 215 x 131 cm, National Art Gallery, Lviv.



FIG. 9, FRANÇOIS BARON GÉRARD, *Portrait of Marie Walewska*, 1810, oil on canvas, 241 x 162 cm, Musée de l'Armée.

Everything is conceived to give an impression of spontaneity, as if the sitter, midway through a stroll, has stopped for a momentary pause. Kindt follows suit in her depiction and, like the Countess Starzénka, Mlle D.M. breezily leans against an earthen outcrop, her yellow silk shawl flung nonchalantly to her side, like the bonnet dropped at Starzénka's feet.



FIG. 10, FRANÇOIS BARON GÉRARD, *Portrait of Giuseppa Carcano*, 1810, oil on canvas, 226 x 146 cm, Musée du Louvre.





FIG. 11, FRANÇOIS-JOSEPH NAVEZ, *Portrait of Théodore Jonet and his daughters*, 1832, oil on canvas, 145 x 120 cm, private collection.

Unsurprisingly, Navez was also a direct point of reference for Kindt. Whilst his full-length works tended to depict family groupings, rather than lone female sitters, many of them display a relaxed manner and graceful poise. The portrait

of Théodore Joseph Jonet and his two daughters (fig. 11), or the portrait of the Moermans family (fig. 12), both from the early 1830s and both taking place in parkland settings, are cases in point.



FIG. 12, FRANÇOIS-JOSEPH NAVEZ, *Portrait of the Moermans family*, 1831, oil on panel, 223 x 163 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Art.

By not only placing herself within the Davidian tradition but also by setting herself against its most prominent components, Kindt rivals both Gérard and Navez as a painter of effortless female elegance on a monumental scale. The portrait of

Mlle D.M., the most significant within Kindt's oeuvre, demonstrates why this remarkable artist, with such a long and successful career, was so highly admired in her own time. And why she should be in ours too.





## NOTES

1. J. Immerzeel, *De levens en werken der Hollandsche en Vlaamsche kunstschilders*, vol I, Amsterdam 1841, p. 112.
2. *Ibid*, p. 112.
3. *Ibid*, p. 112.
4. Now known as rue Léopold.
5. Y. Arasa, *Davidiennes. Les femmes peintres de l'atelier de Jacques-Louis David (1768-1825)*, Paris 2019, p. 21, citing correspondence between Sophie Frémiet and Cécile Moyne, 12238, western manuscripts NAF, BnF.
6. Navez had three separate studios connected to his home address,

one above the other: at top a studio for male painters; below one for female painters; and at the bottom, his own (D. Coekelberghs, A. Jacobs and P. Loze, *François-Joseph Navez. La nostalgie de l'Italie*, Brussels 1999, p. 97).

7. In the Belgian Salons alone, Kindt exhibited forty-eight works across her life.
8. A talented and successful artist, Isabelle van Assche took First Prize at the 1829 Salon of Ghent.
9. D. Mascetti and A. Triossi, *Earrings, from antiquity to the present*, London 1990, p. 71.







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