DAVID BROOKER FINE ART

Pre-Raphaelite portrait of a lady picking bluebells in a landscape

Mary Elizabeth Harding

$39,500

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REF: 2352

Height: 109.18 cm (43")

Width: 109.18 cm (43")

Description

Mary Elizabeth Harding
(British, fl. late 19th century)

Picking Bluebells
Circa 1879
Oil on canvas
Signed lower left
43 inches diameter

A refined and poetic circular composition, Picking Bluebells reflects the late Victorian affection for pastoral subjects imbued with quiet sentiment and grace. Set within a tranquil woodland clearing carpeted in spring bloom, a young woman kneels among a sea of violet-blue flowers, gently gathering bluebells in a moment of contemplative calm. Her pale gown and soft rose-pink shawl fall in harmonious folds, the restrained palette echoing the filtered light that drifts through the tall trees beyond.

The tondo format lends the painting a particular intimacy and decorative elegance. Circular compositions were much admired in the nineteenth century, recalling Renaissance precedent while perfectly suited to the refined interiors of the period. Here, the curved frame encloses the scene like a private reverie, drawing the viewer inward toward the serene, almost devotional atmosphere.

Harding's handling is delicate yet assured. The woodland is rendered in soft atmospheric tones-fresh spring greens, lilac shadows, and gentle blossom whites-suggesting the fleeting beauty of early summer. The carpet of bluebells is observed with botanical sensitivity, but always subordinated to the overall harmony of colour and mood. Light dissolves softly across the glade, bathing the figure in a luminous stillness.

The subject speaks to Victorian ideals of innocence, purity, and communion with nature. Flower-gathering scenes such as this were prized for their evocation of an unspoiled English countryside and their gentle symbolism of youth and renewal. At an impressive 43 inches in diameter, this is a substantial and highly decorative example of late nineteenth-century British pastoral painting-both evocative of its age and timeless in its quiet, contemplative charm.

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