

113 Frederick Horsman Varley

ARCA G7 OSA 1881 – 1969

Green and Gold, Portrait of Vera

oil on canvas, signed and with the artist's thumbprint and on verso titled on the gallery labels and titled *Green and Gold* on the Laing Galleries label and stamped with the Varley Inventory #293, circa 1933 – 1934
24 × 20 in, 61 × 50.8 cm

PROVENANCE

Sold by the Artist to Alice Lane, Ottawa, circa 1940s
By descent to her daughter
Laing Galleries, Toronto
Private Collection, Toronto
Sold sale of *Canadian Art*, Joyner Fine Art Inc.,
May 20, 1987, lot 69
Galerie Walter Klinkhoff Inc., Montreal
Sold sale of *Canadian Art*, Joyner Fine Art Inc.,
May 15, 1990, lot 85
Neil J. Kernaghan, Toronto
Private Collection, Winnipeg

LITERATURE

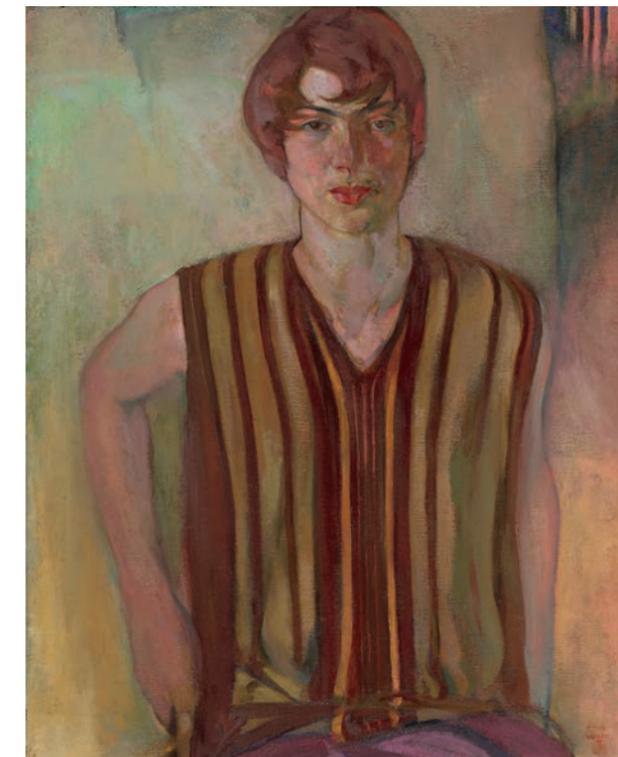
Robert H. Stacey, *Varley: A Celebration*, Art Gallery of Markham, 1997, reproduced figure 5, page 10
Katerina Atanassova, *F.H. Varley: Portraits into the Light*, 2007, reproduced plate 40, unpaginated

EXHIBITED

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Painting*, September 1936, catalogue #197
James Wilson and Co., Ottawa, *Frederick Varley*, November 1937
Art Gallery of Markham, *Varley: A Celebration*, May 31 – August 10, 1997, catalogue #34
Varley Art Gallery, Markham, *F.H. Varley: Portraits into the Light*, May 25, 2007 – June 29, 2008, catalogue #54, traveling in 2007 – 2008 to the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton; Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton; Kelowna Art Gallery; and the National Portrait Gallery, Ottawa

WHEN FREDERICK VARLEY moved to Vancouver in 1926 to become head of painting at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts (now Emily Carr University of Art + Design), he was already established as Canada's leading portraitist. His *Portrait of Vincent Massey* (1920, Hart House) and portraits *Mrs. E.* (1920–21) and *Margaret Fairley* (1921, both collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario) all demonstrate his great mastery of the formal portrait. He also proved a master of the more intimate and casual portrait, such as that of his son John (1920–21, National Gallery of Canada). These two strands of portraiture define the whole of Varley's career—the commissioned formal portraits and the more intimate images of his family and friends.

The arrival of Varley and his colleague Jock Macdonald in Vancouver marked a major shift in teaching at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts. The school was still young, having only opened in 1925, and Varley was teaching the first class of students. His approach to both landscape painting and portraiture changed the teaching of art in British Columbia. Varley's students included a group of remarkable young women:



FREDERICK HORSMAN VARLEY

Vera

oil on canvas, circa 1929
32 ¼ × 26 ¼ in, 81.8 × 66.7 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, acquired 1930
Photo: NGC

Not for sale with this lot



FREDERICK HORSMAN VARLEY
Vera
 oil on canvas, 1931
 24 x 20 in, 61 x 50.6 cm
 Collection of the National Gallery of Canada
 Photo: NGC

Not for sale with this lot



FREDERICK HORSMAN VARLEY
Portrait of Vera
 oil on canvas, circa 1935
 35 ¾ x 27 ¼ in, 90.8 x 70.5 cm
 Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario
 Photo: AGO

Not for sale with this lot

Beatrice Lennie (1905–1987), Lilius Farley (1907–1989), Irene Hoffer (later Reid, 1908–1994) and Vera Olivia Weatherbie (1909–1977). All of these women overcame considerable obstacles to have careers as artists, but Varley had a particularly close relationship with Hoffer and Weatherbie. Their paintings show his strong influence, and with Weatherbie, it seems clear that the influence was not one way.

In Katerina Atanassova’s study of Varley’s portraiture, *F.H. Varley: Portraits into the Light*, some 11 images of Vera are reproduced, more than any other subject.¹ One of Varley’s earliest images of her is a drawing that dates from 1926 to 1929, but this is soon followed by a series of sketches and canvases, which includes four magisterial portraits: *Vera* (circa 1929); *Vera* (1931, both collection of the National Gallery of Canada); *Green and Gold, Portrait of Vera* (circa 1933–34); and *Portrait of Vera* (circa 1935, Thomson Collection at the AGO). Vera is also the subject of one of Varley’s most celebrated paintings, *Dharana* (1932, collection of the AGO), although this is not, strictly speaking, a portrait.

A strikingly beautiful woman, Weatherbie was an important model for the photographer John Vanderpant, as seen in his famous 1930 image (lot 114 in this sale), and for Varley, Vera

became a muse. As suggested above, their influence was mutual, and Vera’s influence on Varley seems to have been particularly strong. Although Varley left British Columbia in 1936, he remained in contact with Vera and in 1939, wrote to her:

I learnt more of Art, true Art in those years than at any other period—You taught me. I am afraid I did not give you 50-50—The most precious moments of work & understanding were then—& always I have kept the belief that soon I can prove how much your comradeship has meant to me—I have not yet acquired the art of getting over all the snags. Whether I have or not I treasure the many things you did for me or by your influence made me do.²

Christopher Varley notes that Weatherbie’s sense of colour may have caused Varley “to lighten his own touch and colour.”³ Indeed, Varley himself later said that “she made me see colour in new lights.”⁴

Weatherbie veiled was a subject to which Varley returned several times. It stemmed from her performance as the Virgin Mary in the art school’s Christmas play in 1928. Vanderpant

photographed her soon afterwards and Varley apparently depicted her veiled as well, but the location of this first image is unknown. *Green and Gold, Portrait of Vera* is a remarkable image in many ways. It recalls the Vanderpant photograph and is related to *Head of a Girl* (circa 1933, collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) but it is a more hieratic, more frontal image. As Atanassova has noted, the image continues the depiction of Vera as a Madonna, but here “Varley employs some of his favourite stylistic devices: framing the image in an enclosed space and playing with the background, in an attempt to achieve compositional harmony.”⁵

The other way that Varley moves towards “compositional harmony” is through his use of colour. This is alluded to in the title of the work—*Green and Gold*. Varley saw people as having specific colours, and for him green had a “spiritual value.” He believed that each person had “a unique aura that could be expressed through a specific colour.”⁶ Tellingly, Varley saw Vera as a “green person.”⁷ This belief is evident in the National Gallery’s *Vera* from 1930, as well as in *Green and Gold, Portrait of Vera*.

Here she is draped in green and her dress is highlighted in gold or orange. There is only minimal effort to place her figure within a larger spatial context—most clearly seen in the framing element at the right of the image. The background is painted quite freely, and in contrasting colour to the subject in the foreground. This sense of bringing Weatherbie to the fore is also emphasized by Varley’s decision to crop the image so that her headdress is not complete, something that gives the image more immediacy and, of course, recalls the Vanderpant photograph and his own *Head of a Girl*. Varley has devoted most of his attention to her face and neck, delicately delineating shadow and form to give her dimension and, despite her enigmatic expression, life. There is a touch of sensuality in the bright redness of her lips, but she is above all a woman of confidence and presence. The formal and the intimate are brought together in a powerful and memorable image.

We thank Ian M. Thom, Senior Curator—Historical at the Vancouver Art Gallery from 1988 to 2018, for contributing the above essay.

1. Katerina Atanassova, *F.H. Varley: Portraits into the Light / Mise en lumière des portraits* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2007).
2. Quoted in Christopher Varley, *F.H. Varley: A Centennial Exhibition* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1981), 96.
3. Ibid.
4. Quoted in McKenzie Porter, “Varley,” *Maclean’s*, November 7, 1959, 66.
5. Atanassova, *F.H. Varley*, 85.
6. Ibid., 86.
7. Ibid., quoting Peter Varley.

This work is #293 in the Varley Inventory listing and titled as *Green and Gold*.

ESTIMATE: \$500,000 – 700,000



114 John Vanderpant

RPS 1884 – 1939

Portrait of Vera Weatherbie

vintage silver bromide print, signed, 1930
 6 x 4 in, 15.2 x 10.2 cm

PROVENANCE

Private Collection, Toronto

LITERATURE

Charles C. Hill, *John Vanderpant: Photographs*, National Gallery of Canada, 1976, a similar photograph entitled *Vera* reproduced on the cover and plate 21, page 53
 Sheryl Salloum, *Underlying Vibrations: The Photography and Life of John Vanderpant*, 1995, a similar photograph entitled *Vera* reproduced plate 17, unpaginated
 Katerina Atanassova, *F.H. Varley: Portraits into the Light*, 2007, reproduced figure 37, page 85
 Audrey Wang, *Artist in Our Collection: Vera Weatherbie (1909–1977)*, May 31, 2020, a larger print reproduced titled as *Photograph of Vera Weatherbie*, <https://emagazine.aggv.ca/artist-in-our-collection-vera-weatherbie-1909-1977/>, accessed September 17, 2020

JOHN VANDERPANT WAS one of Canada’s leading modernist photographers in the 1920s up until his death in 1939. Vanderpant was an influential figure in the Vancouver arts scene; he was friends with Jock Macdonald and Frederick Varley, to name a few. Though working in a different medium, Vanderpant, like his friend Varley, was known for his skill in portraiture. This small-format photograph is a strong example of the soft-focused pictorial aesthetic employed in his earlier works. In this sensual and ethereal portrait of Vera Weatherbie, we find a strong example of the artist’s innovative lighting techniques and his sensitive capture of the sitter. The combination of the lighting and the use of soft focus serves to highlight Weatherbie’s striking features, and it becomes clear how the young art student became a muse for both Varley and Vanderpant in the 1930s. This sensitive portrait has an enduring quality and adds to the eternal mystery of the muse.

Please note: the dimensions of the card are 7 x 9 ½ inches.

ESTIMATE: \$3,000 – 5,000