

Serge Essaian
1939–2007
Two Trumpeters

Signed and dated 1975, watercolour
39 × 28 cm

Essaian was born in Moscow in 1939 and studied painting and scenography there before becoming editor of the prestigious journal *Decorative Arts of the USSR* in 1968. He emigrated through Vienna in 1979 and finally settled in Paris. A tremendously gifted and cultured man, Essaian was at home with art in all its aspects, be it music, literature or painting. Having grown up in Moscow, he was profoundly knowledgeable in a way that few people in the West were about Russian drawing and painting. This led him to be a teacher and advisor to a whole generation of Western specialists in Russian art and to be the unofficial curator of one of the greatest collections of Russian art put together in the emigration, that of Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya. However, this was not his main interest; he did not like to be categorised as a Russian artist, and although of the same generation as the Soviet nonconformists of the 1960s, his work stands quite apart from theirs and draws its influences not from politics or the banality of everyday Soviet life, but from the mainstream of European modernism. Paradoxically, of course, having received a Soviet artistic education, he was tremendously at ease with drawing and could turn his hand to anything. He used to joke with the Old Master Drawings Department at Sotheby's that should they be missing a top lot for their sale, he would willingly supply them with a Leonardo or a Michaelangelo...

This is from a series of trumpeters which he created created four years before he left Russia.

PROVENANCE
Studio of the Artist

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Serge Essaian, *Années Russes 1975-1979*,
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Self portrait: the artist and his creation

Signed with initials, watercolour and gouache
29.7 × 22 cm.

Essaian increasingly turned to sculpture and “the third dimension” towards the end of his life, producing some memorable works in wood, plaster and bronze. Many of his sculptures were on an avian theme. Self-portraits were another, more informal speciality; in this work the artist, who himself had a fine Armenian nose, depicts the magical moment when, dressed in philosophers’ robes, he and his creation contemplate one another.

