Primary Maker: 
Title: **Study of a Female Nude**
Date: **ca. 1912-1919**
Medium: Graphite on beige paper
Dimensions: **Overall: 11 \times 8\ 1/2 in. (27.9 \times 21.6 cm)**
Credit Line: Gift of Alexander B. V. Johnson
Object Number: 2020.21

Classification: DRAWINGS

Curatorial Remarks:
Gaston Lachaise, an American modernist sculptor born in Paris, was the son of the cabinetmaker who designed Gustave Eiffel’s apartment inside the Eiffel Tower. At the age of 13, he entered the École Municipale Bernard Palissy, where he trained in the decorative arts, and later studied sculpture at the École des Beaux-Arts (1898–1904). Lachaise began his career as a designer of Art Nouveau objects for the French jeweler and glass designer René Lalique, an influence that can be seen in this later drawing. Around 1902 or 1903 Lachaise fell in love with Isabel Dutaud Nagle, a married American woman, who remained his muse throughout his life. After working for Lalique to earn funds for his passage, he arrived in America in 1906. In 1912, he began to assist the sculptor Paul Manship, association that lasted until 1921 and included a collaboration at Rockefeller Center. In 1913, Lachaise exhibited a sculptural statuette (no. 671) at the galvanizing Armory Exhibition—the watershed International Exhibition of Modern Art. In 1918 (eight months after he became an American citizen and married Isabel), Lachaise began his meteoric rise in the New York art world. Lachaise’s most famous sculptures were variations on the theme...
of the standing woman, with several monumental works modeled in the 1910s and 1920s and cast in the 1930s. Lachaise reworked this theme in many poses, all of which feature a voluptuous but simplified female nude with sinuous, tapering limbs, sometime defying gravity by standing on her toes. As a mature sculptor Lachaise worked mainly in bronze and continued to concentrate on massive nude figures that are dynamically voluptuous with exaggerated curves—like the one he drew on this sheet. They are twentieth-century versions of Neolithic steatopygus fertility figures, wherein the concept of “Woman” as a force of nature was based on his wife's image. In one letter to his wife he declared, “You are the Goddess I am seeking to express in all things.” Called by Art News the “greatest American sculptor of his time,” Lachaise played a critical role in the birth of American Modernism, pushing the boundaries of nude figuration with his innovative explorations. His drawings also reflect his new approach to the “eternal female.”

Signed: Signed at lower right in graphite: G. Lachaise
Related Objects: