



**ROSA BONHEUR**

French, 1822-1899

*Study of a Cow*, n.d.

Oil on canvas mounted on wood

City of Davenport Art Collection

Gift of C.A. Ficke, 1925.28

## Study of a Cow



**Rosa Bonheur** (1822–1899) Bonheur was the oldest of four artistic children born to the French landscape painter Raymond Bonheur. Rosa began sketching and sculpting animals at an early age and used her interest in animals to help her learn to read and write. She would sketch an animal for each letter of the alphabet and perfected her form by visiting butcher shops and cattle markets in Paris to achieve anatomically correct likenesses. Her 1853 masterpiece, *The Horse Fair*, brought her worldwide recognition, and she was the first female artist to be awarded the cross of the Legion of Honor in France. She retired at the edge of the Fontainebleau Forest with a menagerie that included gazelles, lions and other exotic animals.

### A product of its time

Bonheur became the most celebrated female artist of the 19th Century. Her family encouraged her to seek equality with her male counterparts, which was an uncommon practice at that time. She was even given permission to wear men's clothing in public!

### Take a closer look

This naturalistic painting is the equivalent of a sketch. Studies of this type are preparatory work done before a painting is started in order to give the painter familiarity with the subject.

### Did you know?

Bonheur was commercially successful during her lifetime. Her 16-foot oil painting *The Horse Fair* was the sensation of the Paris Salon in 1853. The painting sold for the very high sum of 40,000 francs in 1855 (around \$160,000 today). It was eventually purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

### On your own

Rehs Gallery: [http://www.rehs.com/rosa\\_bonheur\\_couching\\_lion.html](http://www.rehs.com/rosa_bonheur_couching_lion.html)

"Women Artists in Nineteenth-Century France": [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/19wa/hd\\_19wa.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/19wa/hd_19wa.htm)

The Art History Archive: <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/realism/Rosa-Bonheur.html>