Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



William Rothenstein (Bradford 1872 - Far Oakridge, Gloucestershire 1945)

Landscape with Trees in Blossom

Pastel on buff paper.
Signed with initials and dated W.R. 1902 at the lower right.
235 x 343 mm. (9 1/4 x 13 1/2 in.) [sight]

William Rothenstein often worked in the medium of pastel, mainly for portraits but also occasionally for landscapes. Dated 1902, this fine and lively pastel landscape would appear to have been executed during the artist's visit to Germany that year. In January 1902, an exhibition of Rothenstein's work was mounted at the Eduard Schulte Gallery in Berlin. Although the exhibition was well received by critics, it did not result in many sales, apart from some drawings and prints. It was in Berlin in March 1902 that Rothenstein met the German playwright Gerhart Hauptmann, who invited the artist to stay with him in Silesia, in the mountain range known as the Riesengebirge (today the Krkonoše mountains) straddling what is now the border between Poland and the Czech Republic.

As Rothenstein later recalled of Hauptmann in his memoirs, 'An immediate sympathy sprang up between us…He pressed us to come to the Riesengebirge, in Silesia, where he lived; I would find the landscape inspiring, he promised…We took train to Hirschberg, and from there drove up to Agnetendorf. It was early spring, and the orchards were in full flower, the grass bright emerald; behind were the Riesengebirge, ringed by dark pine woods. The sun was shining; it was our first sight of the snow-covered mountains, and the higher we got the higher our spirits rose too…Agnetendorf, with its beautiful little farmhouses, low, thatched, with small gay-coloured shuttered windows, each with its orchard, was ideal for a painter. What a happy change it was from Berlin!'

The artist's son John Rothenstein has noted that, in the early years of the 20th century, his father's work developed 'a sudden preoccupation with daylight, with a consequent intensification of his palette. Its chief cause was probably his increasing interest in landscape. He worked, almost always, in front of his subject rather than from studies, which at once brought him up against the problems of the representation of open-air light. Another cause was the delayed influence of Impressionism, from which he had been temporarily immunized by Whistler's advocacy of low tones. Rejection of Whistlers dandyism, I surmise, led naturally to the end of this immunity, and his eye was gradually filled by dazzling light.'

Remaining in Germany, the present sheet was one of two landscape pastels by William Rothenstein, each of similar dimensions, acquired by the Berlin banker and art collector Julius Stern (1858-1914). Dispersed at auction in 1916, Stern's collection included paintings, drawings and prints by such artists as Maurice Denis, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Max Liebermann, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch and Emil Nolde, among others.

Among other pastels of this period in Germany is a view of a street in Hildesheim, signed and dated 1902, in the collection of the Manchester City Art Galleries.

Provenance:

Julius Stern, Berlin
His posthumous sale, Berlin, Galerie Paul Cassirer, 22 May 1916, lot 157 ('Landschaft mit blühenden Bäumen').

Artist description:

Born in Yorkshire, William Rothenstein entered the Slade School of Art in London in 1888, studying there with Alphonse Legros, from whom he gained a thorough grounding in the principles of academic draughtsmanship. The following year he enrolled at the Académie Julian in Paris, where he remained for four years. His time in Paris found the young Rothenstein befriending such artists as James McNeill Whistler, who was to be a dominant influence for several years, as well as Edgar Degas and Camille Pissarro. Rothenstein's growing status as a portrait draughtsman in Paris led to a commission for a set of twenty-four portraits of Oxford academics, and on his return to England he continued to develop a reputation and market for his portraits. Indeed, throughout his career, portraiture – whether in the form of drawings, paintings or lithographs – formed by far the largest part of his output. In 1893, through Oscar Wilde, Rothenstein met the printmaker, draughtsman and illustrator Charles Haslewood Shannon, and the following year the two artists shared a joint exhibition of their drawings and lithographs at E. J. van Wisselingh's Dutch Gallery in London. This was to be Rothenstein's first major London exhibition, and included thirty-one of his works, mostly portrait lithographs as well as some drawings and pastels. Rothenstein later served as Principal of the Royal College of Art between 1920 and 1935.