Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



William Fraser GARDEN (Gillingham 1856 - Huntingdon 1921)

River Landscape near St. Ives, Huntingdonshire

Circa: 1897

Watercolour.

Signed and dated W. F. GARDEN: '97. at the bottom centre.

Inscribed Near S. Ives, Hunts. - 30/- on the verso.

195 x 285 mm. (7 5/8 x 11 1/4 in.)

William Fraser Garden's watercolour views of his native Huntingdonshire and along the river Ouse in Bedfordshire are masterpieces of clarity and detail. As Christopher Newall has written, 'Garden's watercolors are a manifestation of the late-century revival of interest in the representation of landscape subjects in minute and painstaking detail. He chose picturesque but unremarkable subjects in his immediate locality – decrepit mill buildings and riverside inns along the banks of the Great Ouse, as well as pure landscapes…His works of the late 1880s and early 1890s are extraordinary in their pellucid clarity of light and their exact delineation of architectural and landscape detail.'

Provenance:

The Broderick family, Lytham St. Annes, Lancashire.

Artist description:

Born into a family of artists, Garden William Fraser changed his name to William Fraser Garden so as to distinguish himself from his six brothers, all but one of whom were also active as landscape artists. Arguably the best of the so-called 'Fraser Brotherhood', Fraser Garden exhibited his watercolours at the Royal Academy, the Royal Scottish Academy and the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-Colours. The subjects of his watercolours were by and large views of the fen villages along the river Ouse, such as Holywell, Hemingford Grey and St. Ives, characterized by a remarkable attention to detail and crisp, cool lighting. Throughout the 1880's Garden was represented by the Dowdeswell Gallery in New Bond Street in London, who sold a number of his works. By 1890, however, he seems to have given up exhibiting in London, and from then on relied on a small number of local collectors in Huntingdonshire. He was never, however, a very prolific artist.

As Charles Lane has noted of Garden, ‘His apparent lack of ambition and the consequently few watercolours which he painted each year, even when at his busiest, resulted naturally enough in his failing to come to the notice of all but a local audience.’ Although he was the most successful of the Fraser brothers, Garden was very poor for most of his life, and was declared bankrupt in 1899. He lived at in the village of Hemingford Abbots and in a room at the Ferry Boat Inn in at Holywell, where in his old age he is said to have paid his bills with drawings instead of bank notes. Long unknown to scholars and collectors, Garden’s body of work has only fairly recently been rediscovered, and his reputation as among the finest Victorian landscape watercolourists firmly established.