Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



David COX (Birmingham 1783 - Harborne 1859)

A Coastal Landscape in North Wales, with an Approaching Squall

Pencil and watercolour.
A sketch of fishing boats moored by Conway Castle drawn in pencil on the verso.
276 x 380 mm. (10 7/8 x 14 7/8 in.)

This wonderfully loose but controlled watercolour is typical of David Cox's late work of the early 1850's, when he was at his most confident and impressionistic. (Indeed, Cox's studies of seashores of this period have been likened to the work of Eugène Boudin.) Scott Wilcox's comments on a stylistically similar watercolour of the same period in the Yale Center for British Art may be equally applied to the present sheet: 'it would seem to belong to a group of watercolors from the late 1840s and early 1850s in which Cox, aiming to satisfy himself and a group of knowledgeable and sympathetic friends – if not a broader public – put aside notions of conventional finish. Taking up one of his favorite compositional types, he has treated all its standard elements...with great freedom and economy. Most impressive is the sweep of the cloud-filled sky, achieved with a vigorous but marvelously controlled touch.'

This watercolour is likely to have been executed on one of the artist's yearly visits to North Wales. Cox made his first visit there in 1818, and became a regular visitor to the area, eventually contributing illustrations to Thomas Roscoe's Wanderings and Excursions in North Wales, published in 1836. From the mid 1840's onwards Cox spent part of almost every year in North Wales, based in Betws-y-Coed in the Conway valley. The pencil sketch of Conway Castle and Thomas Telford's Conwy Suspension Bridge, completed in 1826, on the verso of this watercolour would suggest that the recto may depict a view on the Welsh coast, or perhaps on the estuary of the river Conway.

Provenance:

The studio of the artist, and by descent to his granddaughter until 1904
Walker's Galleries, London, in 1960
John Appleby, Jersey
Thence by descent until 2010.

Exhibitions

Possibly London, Walker's Galleries, Drawings by David Cox, Purchased from the Artist's Grand-Daughter in 1904, 1960.

Artist description:

Among the finest watercolourists in England in the first half of the 19th century, David Cox was trained as a theatrical scene painter in Birmingham before settling in London in 1804 and establishing himself as a watercolourist. Much influenced by the work of John Varley, with whom he may have briefly studied, Cox exhibited for the first time at the Royal Academy in 1805. Between 1809 and 1812 he showed his work at the Associated Artists in Watercolours, and in 1812 was admitted to the Society of Painters in Water-Colours, where he exhibited almost every year for the remainder of his long and productive career. Almost all of his sketching trips were in England and Wales, and he only rarely travelled abroad. A celebrated teacher and drawing master, Cox published several technical manuals for amateur watercolourists, including A Treatise on Landscape Painting and Effect in Water Colours, Progressive Lessons on Landscape for Young Beginners and The Young Artist's Companion.

Cox enjoyed a successful career which lasted over half a century, exhibiting numerous watercolours and the occasional oil painting in London each year. Between 1844 and 1856 he spent part of every summer or autumn in the small village of Betws-y-Coed in the Conwy valley in North Wales, which he used as a base for sketching expeditions, sometimes in the company of younger artists such as George Price Boyce. A stroke, suffered in 1853, left him temporarily paralyzed, and although he recovered, his eyesight began to suffer and by 1857 had started to fail completely. While his output lessened considerably following his stroke, he continued to be well represented - usually with earlier works - at the annual exhibitions of the Society of Painters in Water-Colours in London. Shortly after his death, an account of his career described Cox as 'pre-eminent among landscapists, and the founder of a school of landscape painting purely English, but new to England itself when he created it.' Two large posthumous retrospective exhibitions of Cox's work, each numbering several hundred works, were held in Liverpool in 1875 and Birmingham in 1890.