Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Andrew NICHOLL (Belfast 1804 - London 1886)

A Distant View of Derry Through a Bank of Wild Flowers

Watercolour, with pen and brown ink and brown wash, over an underdrawing in pencil.
Signed A. Nicholl. RHA. at the lower right.
366 x 534 mm. (14 3/8 x 21 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA.

Andrew Nicholl developed a speciality of views of coastal towns in Ireland - Fairhead, Howth, Ramelton, Dunluce Castle, Bray, Carlingford and elsewhere - seen through a bank of wild flowers; a combination of the genres of landscape and botanical still life. The present sheet is a particularly fine and large example of this distinctive genre. The view of Derry in the distance at the left is dominated by the Georgian bridge across the river Foyle, built by the 4th Earl of Bristol in 1790. Nicholl has also depicted a variety of shipping in the river, marking Derry's importance as one of the main ports of embarkation for Irish emigrants to North America in the 19th century. Although Nicholl rarely dated his work, this large watercolour may probably be dated to the 1830's1. A watercolour of this type 'represents a fresh quality in the observance of nature...[the artist] often utilized wild flowers painted in the foreground to form a screen through which we dimly perceive a landscape. It is as if we are lying on our stomachs, like hares, watching as the world marches by. The paintings have a sharpness of vision and naïveté that is entirely captivating.'

Among comparable watercolours is A Bank of Flowers, with a View of Bray and the Valley of the Dargle, Co. Wicklow, in the Ulster Museum and Wildflowers with Downhill, Co. Derry, formerly in the collection of Bruce Chatwin, while other examples are in the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin. As such works have been described by Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, these 'near-surrealist watercolours of wild flowers, poppies and daisies, with land and seascapes in the background...[have] an originality which makes them among the most haunting...Irish paintings of the early nineteenth century. These are his masterpieces.'

Provenance:

John O'Sullivan
Sale, Dublin, Adams, 29 March 2000, lot 83
Private collection.

Literature:

Peter Raissis, Victorian Watercolours from the Art Gallery of New South Wales, exhibition catalogue,

Sydney, 2017, pp.148-149, and a detail illustrated on the cover.

Artist description:

Lacking any formal training as an artist, Andrew Nicholl began his career as an apprentice in a printing firm in Belfast. His earliest paintings are scenes along the Antrim coast, and by his early twenties he had established a local reputation as a landscape painter, becoming a founder member of the Belfast Association of Artists. Among his first important patrons was the newspaper publisher Francis Dalzell Finlay, who promoted Nicholl's work in Belfast, Dublin and London. First and foremost a topographical painter, Nicholl published 101 Views of the Antrim Coast in 1828, and provided illustrations for Henry O'Neill's Fourteen Views of the County of Wicklow, published in 1835, and Samuel Carter Hall's Ireland: its Scenery, Character, etc., published between 1841 and 1843. Nicholl first exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1832, and in 1837 was elected an Associate Member of the Royal Hibernian Academy.

Around 1840 Nicholl settled in London, where he supported himself by working as an art teacher, as he had in Belfast. In 1846 he was appointed as a teacher of landscape painting and drawing at the Colombo Academy in Ceylon, where he remained for three years. There, under the auspices of his most significant patron, the Belfast MP and Colonial Secretary James Emmerson Tennent, Nicholl produced a number of views of local scenery and also provided illustrations for Tennent's book Ceylon: an account of the island, physical, historical and topographical, published in 1860. He must have returned from Ceylon by 1849, as he exhibited some views of the island at the Royal Academy that year. He divided his time between London and Belfast, and exhibited at both the Royal Academy and Royal Hibernian Academy. In 1870 he offered twelve watercolours of views of Ceylon to Queen Victoria, who bought two of them. Shortly after his death, a retrospective exhibition numbering over 280 works was held in Belfast. The largest collection of Nicholl's work - numbering over four hundred watercolours and drawings, as well as a handful of paintings - is today in the Ulster Museum in Belfast.