Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Alexandre Thomas FRANCIA (Calais 1820 - Brussels 1884)

Loch Katrine, Scotland

Watercolour over pencil, heightened with bodycolour.
Signed ATFrancia at the lower right.
Further signed and inscribed by the artist Loch Katrine, en Ecosse. / Cette aquarelle, faite pour moi & vendue à / Monsieur Camille Dognin; Exposée à la / grande exposition de Vienne en 1873. / a obtenu, avec l'autre dessin la / médaille des aquarelles. Al. Francia on a label attached to the frame backing board.
711 x 1257 mm. (28 x 49 1/2 in.)

This large and impressive watercolour was exhibited, alongside another depicting The Old Pier at Calais, in the Belgian section of the Universal Exhibition in Vienna in 18732, where it won a medal. As noted by the artist on a label attached to the reverse, the watercolour was acquired by Camille Dognin, an industrialist from Lyon involved in the manufacture of silk.

Another watercolour view of Loch Katrine by the artist, of considerably smaller dimensions and possibly a preparatory study for the present work, was sold at an auction of paintings and watercolours by Louis and Alexandre Francia in Paris in 1876.

Loch Katrine, at Stronachlachar in the heart of the Trossachs region of Scotland, is eight miles long and averages around a mile wide. Renowned for its beauty, the loch and the surrounding Highland landscape of the Trossachs was celebrated by Sir Walter Scott in his Romantic poem The Lady of the Lake, published in 1810. At the time Francia painted this impressive watercolour, the loch was a popular spot for tourists, who would board a boat for a leisurely trip along the length of the lake.

A contemporary guidebook, published around the time of Alexandre Francia's visit to Loch Katrine, describes the setting, made famous by Scott's poem; 'On emerging from the wildering scene of mountains, rocks, and woods, which are everywhere displayed, Loch Katrine at length bursts upon the view, "With promontory, creek, and bay / And islands that, empurpled bright, / Float amid the livelier light, / And mountains, that like giants stand, / To sentinel enchanted land." Here, in a sheltered bay, a neat rustic pier has been erected for the use of the steamer...Embarking in the steamer, we sail close by the lovely island...Here we obtain our first complete view of Benvenue, which rises on the south to a height of 2386 feet, "throwing down upon the lake" "crags, knolls, and mounds, confusedly hurl'd, / The fragments of an earlier world." Few Scottish mountains can boast of an outline so nobly graduated, or combining such rich and singular beauty with alpine dignity. The corries and crags, softened by distance, are blended with the luxuriant herbage; and the deep vertical gash of Coir-nan-Urisken seems but a gentle opening in the sloping ridge. This remarkable specimen of Highland corry resolves itself, on nearer approach, into the dread Goblin's Cave, another of the scenes in the Lady of the Lake. Climbing up through the mighty debris, a sort of rock-surrounded platform may be reached, from which there is a beautiful view. On the other side of the hill from this is Bealach-nam-bo ("the pass of the cattle"), a magnificent glade overhung with birch-trees, by which the cattle, taken in forays, were conveyed within

the protection of the Trossachs.'

Provenance:

The vente Francia ('Tableaux modernes et aquarelles par Alexandre Francia et Louis Francia son père'), Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 22 February 1878, lot 23 ('Loch Katrine, en Ecosse. Haut., 1m. 20 cent. ; larg., 71 cent.')
Camille Dognin. Lyon and Cannes
Art market, Lyon, in c. 2004.

Exhibitions

Vienna, Prater, Universal Exhibition (Weltausstellung), 1873.

Literature:

Welt-Ausstellung 1873 in Wien: Officieller Kunst-Catalog, Vienna, 1873, p.55, no.247 ('Loch Katrine in Schottland, Morgens').

Artist description:

The son and pupil of the emigré French watercolourist François Louis Francia, who worked for some twenty-five years in England, Alexandre Francia was raised in his father's native city of Calais. Unlike his father, who after returning from London in 1817 worked in relative obscurity in Calais until his death in 1839, Alexandre travelled extensively throughout Europe, particularly in Scotland and the Low Countries, and eventually settled in Brussels. He specialized in marine subjects, notably views of ports, fishing scenes and storms. He made his Salon debut in Paris in 1835, and was to exhibit in Paris, London, Antwerp and Brussels throughout his career, receiving numerous honours and prizes.

His style was indebted to that of his father, although as one recent scholar has noted, 'Alexandre's fastidious drawing and brilliance of palette never quite compensate for what he has failed to grasp of his father's breadth of vision...For all that, the best early watercolours by Alexandre can come very close indeed to his father's work and, but for his obliging habit of signing nearly all his work, would pose some thorny problems for the collector.'