Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Helen ALLINGHAM (Swadlincote 1848 - Haslemere 1926)

Study of Breaking Waves on a Beach

Watercolour.
Signed H. Paterson at the lower right.
Dedicated Mary Walen / with / H. A.'s love / April '97 on the verso.
132 x 175 mm. (5 1/4 x 6 7/8 in.)

Only a handful of early watercolours by Helen Allingham and signed with her maiden name of Paterson have survived. In the summer of 1872 the young Helen Paterson was invited by the artist Briton Riviere to join him and his family at St. Andrew's in Scotland, where she produced her first landscape watercolours. As a contemporary biographer noted of this summer, 'It was not, however, in the grey houses and uninteresting streets of this old northern university town, to which she first turned, that the true relations between tone and colour discovered themselves to her longing eye, but amongst the sandbanks, seaweed, and blue water which fringe its noted golf-links. For the first time the artist felt herself happy in attempting to work in any other medium than black and white.'

In its freedom of handling and vibrant colour, the present sheet is unusual among the artist's works; another watercolour of breaking waves, closely comparable in style and technique though somewhat smaller, was on the London art market in 1986. The present sheet may be also compared stylistically with a handful of similar watercolours by Allingham, such as a view of a sunset in Venice, recently sold at auction in London.

Provenance:

Given by the artist to Mary Walen in April 1897, according to a dedication on the verso.

Artist description:

The eldest of seven children, Helen Paterson was raised in Altrincham in Cheshire until the age of thirteen. Following the death of her father her family moved to Birmingham, where she began taking lessons at the Birmingham School of Design. Her success at the school, where she won a number of artistic prizes, led to her acceptance at the Royal Academy Schools in London in 1868, although by 1872 she had transferred to the Slade School of Art. To earn a living, she undertook commercial projects as an illustrator while painting watercolours in her spare time, and it was under her maiden

name that she first established a reputation as an artist. Helen Paterson's illustrations were to be found in several magazines and books, eventually leading to a position as an artist and journalist for the newly founded magazine The Graphic.

In 1874 she married the poet and writer William Allingham. The couple settled in Chelsea, and Helen was able to give up commercial projects and concentrate on her watercolours. She first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1874, and the following year was the first woman to be elected as an Associate of the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours, becoming a full member in 1890. In 1881 the Allinghams settled the village of Sandhills in Surrey, and there Helen began to concentrate on landscape painting and in particular the views of rural village life and traditional English cottages which remain her best-known work. She continued to paint such views after her return to London in 1888 and her husband's death the following year, and her success as an artist allowed her to support her family throughout the reminder of her career. Apart from brief visits to Venice in 1901 and 1902, Allingham's travels were confined to England. Her reputation was at its peak in the 1890's, and her work was exhibited widely in England and abroad.