

Thomas GAINSBOROUGH (Sudbury 1727 - London 1788)

Wooded Landscape with Cattle and Goats

Black and white chalk, with stumping, on buff paper, backed.

Originally of oval format, and later made up, probably by the artist, at the lower left and right corners and the upper left corner.

229 x 294 mm. (9 x 11 1/2 in.)

This finished drawing, of remarkable richness of colour, may be dated to the late 1760s or early 1770s. At this time Thomas Gainsborough was living and working in Bath, and his landscapes, previously quite rustic in spirit, began to take on a more classical air, with echoes of the paintings of Claude and Rubens that the artist would have seen in private collections in the area. It was also at this time that Gainsborough was experimenting with various combinations of ink, chalk, watercolour and varnish in his landscape drawings.

The composition of the present sheet was further developed in a very large, varnished oil sketch of a Rocky Wooded Landscape with Drovers and Cattle, painted in oil and watercolour on six sheets of paper joined together and mounted onto canvas. Today in the Faringdon Collection at Buscot Park in Berkshire, the Rocky Wooded Landscape with Drovers and Cattle was probably exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1772, as one of 'Two Landscapes, Drawings, in imitation of painting'.

Gainsborough produced a number of other highly finished landscape drawings in the late 1760s and early 1770s, all of about the same size, which may be seen as part of his stated desire to imbue his drawings with the depth and intensity of his oil paintings. Indeed, the only landscape drawings that the artist exhibited in London in his lifetime were the 'Two Landscapes, Drawings, in imitation of oil painting' - one of which was, in all likelihood, the aforementioned large oil sketch at Buscot Park – and eight smaller landscapes, shown at the Royal Academy in 1772. These were described by Horace Walpole, in a note in his copy of the catalogue, as of 'very great effect, but neat, like needlework'.

In his 1970 catalogue raisonné of Gainsborough's drawings, John Hayes compares the present sheet,

on stylistic grounds, with a drawing of a Wooded Landscape with Figures and Cattle in a Stream, formerly in the collection of Lord Wharton in London. He points out that 'the treatment of the foliage and foreground detail, the hatching in the sky and the outlining of the clouds' are similar in both drawings. Hayes further notes that a painted copy of the present sheet by Thomas Barker of Bath (1769-1847), 'which varies only in the inclusion of a herdsman and dog and the omission of the birds', was sold at auction in London in 1964.

Exhibitions

London, Agnew's, 71st Annual Exhibition of Water-Colour Drawings, 1944, no.68; London, Agnew's, 116th Exhibition of Watercolours and Drawings, 1989, no.81 (priced at £30,000); London, Spink, Annual Exhibition of Watercolours and Drawings, 1995, no.4 (priced at £75,000); Denver, Denver Art Museum [on loan TL-17951].

Literature:

John Hayes, The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough, New Haven and London, 1970, Vol.I, p.168, no.258 (not illustrated); Hugh Belsey, 'A Second Supplement to John Hayes's The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough', Master Drawings, 2008, p.442, no.258.

Artist description:

The musician William Jackson, a close friend of the artist and an early biographer, wrote that 'If I were to rest his reputation upon one point; it should be on his Drawings...No man ever possessed methods so various in producing effect, and all excellent.' A prolific draughtsman, Gainsborough apparently never sold any of his drawings, although he is thought to have given away many of them as presents. As Susan Sloman has noted, 'During his lifetime Gainsborough's drawings were known to an inner circle of friends, artist and connoisseurs, but not to the wider public.'