

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Charles Nicholls WOOLNOTH (London 1815 - Glasgow 1906)

Highland Mountain Landscape at Coire Gabhail, Glencoe

Watercolour and gouache.

Signed C. Woolnoth at the lower right.

495 x 768 mm. (19 1/2 x 30 1/4 in.) [sheet]

This very large watercolour is a view of Coire Gabhail, also known as the Lost or Hidden Valley, at Glencoe (or Glen Coe) in the Scottish Highlands. The Gaelic name Coire Gabhail means 'Corrie of the Bounty' or 'The Hollow of Capture', from the Scottish word 'corrie'; a steep-sided hollow at the head of a valley, formed by glaciation. The name of the glen derives from the fact that the valley was used by members of the lawless Clan MacDonald of Glencoe to hide their cattle, which was often stolen from others. Woolnoth exhibited views of Glencoe at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1852, 1857 and 1864, as well as two watercolours at the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts in 1865.

Writing in 1856, the Scottish author and poet George Gilfillan described Glencoe: 'I consider it the most awfully magnificent scene...my eyes have ever rested on. It is a scene which, strange to say, has seldom been sung, and never adequately, by poet...we hurried up the banks of the river, to reach the Pass. The name of the stream is Cona – truly the most musical and romantic name that was ever borne by river. In its two simple sounds, the Italian and the Gaelic tongues seem to meet and embrace each other. What famous river – Tiber, Thames, Danube, Ilissus, Rhine, Rhone, Tay, Clyde, Forth, Amazons, &c – can compare in beauty of sound, aye, or in grandeur of scenery, with the Cona?...Further on, the valley widened, and the path rapidly ascended, till we came to a somewhat elevated point, whence the whole broad prospect of the Glen burst upon us. The valley is not a narrow and confined one, as some tourists, who seem to have passed through it blind, assert; it is, as Talfourd more truly says, "a huge valley, between mountains of rock, receding from each other till a field of air of several miles' breadth lies between their summits." But these summits, who can describe? Conceive two streets of a city, which had been ruined by an earthquake, or blasted by a storm of fire, suddenly enlarged and exalted into mountains, three or four thousand feet high; or conceive two ranges of mountain-waves, when the sea was at its wildest, arrested and stiffened into eternal granite, and you have some conception of Glencoe; and of the spirit of terrible sport in which Nature seems to have worked while making it. It is a divine ruin. But what sublimity mingles with the desolation! Here hills are piled on hills...Here, sharp and dizzy ridges rise; and there, black ravines yawn. Here, two mountains seem to have been torn from each other by one rude grasp; there, several seem to have been melted by fire into one mural precipice; and

yonder, behind the jagged foreground of the ruined Glen, stand up some proud peaks, which look as if they had escaped the wave of wrath, which had blasted, twisted, shattered, and torn all around... We said that this scene has never been sung; and the reason of this seems to be, it has never yet been seen by the eye of a poet fully capable of singing it.'

Among stylistically comparable large exhibition watercolours by Woolnoth are The Pass of Glen Lyon and a View in Carradale, Kintyre.

Artist description:

Born in London and a student of the Royal Scottish Academy Schools in Edinburgh, Charles Woolnoth painted mainly large-scale watercolour views of Scotland, and exhibited in London between 1838 and 1875. He was a founder member of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolours, where he exhibited from 1879, and also showed at the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts and the Royal Scottish Academy. Watercolours by Woolnoth are today in the collections of the Kirkcaldy Galleries in Fife and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, as well as in several private collections.