

Charles Caryl COLEMAN (Buffalo 1840 - Capri 1928)

A View of Vesuvius from Capri

Pastel on buff-coloured board.

Signed with the artist's monogram and dated Sept.-20th / 1901 in blue chalk at the lower left.

184 x 305 mm. (7 1/4 x 12 in.) [image]

251 x 344 mm. (9 7/8 x 13 1/2 in.) [sheet]

Charles Coleman enjoyed a fine view of Vesuvius from the Villa Narcissus, his home and studio on Capri, about nine miles away from the volcano, which had been in a state of almost constant activity for over two hundred and fifty years, since a major eruption in 1631. A large group of pastel drawings by the artist, collectively entitled 'Songs of Vesuvius', was exhibited at the Noe Art Galleries in New York in December 1906. Several pastels depicted the great eruption of the volcano earlier that year, which lasted several months and culminated in April. A review of the exhibition commented, 'Charles Caryl Coleman, an expatriated American who has his studio in Capri, was fortunate in knowing Vesuvius so well from being so long its neighbour that when the eruption began last April he was exactly the right one to record all its impressive and majestic phases. He shows at Noé's thirty-four "Songs of Vesuvius", done in pastel and as exquisite as Japanese water-colors. In most of them the element of tragedy is not felt, only the decorative beauty of the colors and masses of fire and lava and smoke. Mr. Coleman is in no way a romanticist, and his calm presentation of that awful catastrophe is almost a denial of its terrors.'

As another review of a later exhibition of Coleman's work, held at the Albright Art Gallery in the artist's native city of Buffalo in 1916, noted, 'The group of pastels, drawings and tempera which Mr. Coleman aptly designates as "Songs of Vesuvius" date mostly from 1906, when the memorable eruption took place. They are in the truest sense lyrics of art, delicate fleeting notes of exquisite color in which the majesty of an awful natural phenomenon is interpreted with great seriousness, yet made to serve as a basis for a sensuous effect, extraordinarily light, subtle and tender. The Vesuvian pieces alone make a beautiful exhibition and by their unusual quality of color and composition attract alike both art lovers and students.'

This atmospheric pastel view of Vesuvius by Coleman is dated the 20th of September 1901. A stylistically comparable pastel of the volcano, executed during the eruption of April 1906, is today in the Brooklyn Museum, while also in the same collection is a much larger pastel of Vesuvius, dated

December 1913.

Artist description:

Born in New York State, Charles Caryl Coleman travelled to Europe in 1856 as a teenager. He spent three years studying in Paris, followed by two years in Florence, where he met his compatriot and longtime friend Elihu Vedder. In 1862 he returned to America and served in the Union army during the Civil War. Wounded in battle in 1863 and honourably discharged, he was back in Europe by 1866. After some time sketching with Vedder in Brittany and the Côte d'Azur, Coleman had settled in Rome by December 1866. He was to spend the remainder of his career in Italy, living and working mainly in Rome, but with several visits to Venice, and also making regular trips back to America. Among his important patrons was the notable Scottish art collector and philanthropist Louisa Baring, Lady Ashburton. In 1880 Coleman bought a villa on the island of Capri, where he settled permanently in 1885. As one scholar has noted, 'He soon became one of the island's most memorable residents, joining a community of expatriates from many countries that had been established in the 1820s. "Uncle Charlie", as Coleman was known, transformed a portion of a convent guest-house into a virtual palace for art, crowding his Villa Narcissus with Roman, Moorish, Persian, and Renaissance antiquities and hundreds of his own landscapes. In this exotic setting he entertained students from the American School of Archaeology in Rome and acted as the leader of the circle of painters active on Capri.'