Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Duncan GRANT (Doune, nr. Aviemore 1885 - Aldermaston 1978)

Provençal Landscape

Oil on canvas.

Signed and dated DGrant 128 in black ink at the lower right.

A partly torn label from The London Artists' Association, inscribed Duncan GRANT and numbered 2, and further stamped 22within an oval LAA stamp, pasted onto the stretcher bar.

A price £ 75-0-0 written in black ink on the stretcher bar.

A frame-maker's stamp A LA PALETTE D'OR / J. PENCE / MARSEILLE stamped onto a stretcher bar.

21.8 x 32.8 cm. (8 5/8 x 12 7/8 in.)

Some of Duncan Grant's finest landscapes were painted on the annual trips to France and Italy that he and Vanessa Bell took from the late 1920s onwards. This small landscape was probably painted in the south of France, near the coastal town of Cassis, several kilometres to the east of Marseille. As Grant's biographer has noted of the artist's first visit to the region in 1927, 'Cassis in the spring captivated him…he began thinking of building a studio in the area. He was seized with the idea that Cassis should from now on become an annual refuge from the darkness and gloom which, like a metal dish-cover, descended every winter over cold, grey London.' Later that year Grant and Bell began renting La Bergère, a small farm cottage just outside Cassis. Surrounded by the vineyards of the Château de Fontcreuse, La Bergère – described by one writer as 'Charleston in France' – became Grant and Bell's base in the south of France during the next decade, and was visited by them every year between 1927 and 1938.

As Richard Shone has noted, 'Grant made several paintings and drawings of the farmhouses and cottages around the Château de Fontcreuse, its surrounding vineyards and olive groves…Grant's first prolonged stay in Cassis [in 1928] was highly productive, giving him a new range of subject matter and uninterrupted peace. Much of his work from this stay is in a fluent, calligraphic manner, the paintings carried out in a loose web of turpentine-thinned brushwork, the drawings and pastels in heightened colour…and with vigorous passages of rhythmic cross-hatching.' Landscapes such as the present example, executed with vibrant colours applied with loose brushstrokes, reveal the influence of French Post-Impressionist painting on Grant. As can be seen from a stamp on the stretcher, the artist purchased the blank canvas from a frame-maker in nearby Marseille.

Among closely comparable landscapes by Duncan Grant is a small painting of a farmhouse among trees, likewise dated 1928, in the collection of the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh. Other, similar views of the South of France include an oil sketch on paper of a view near Cassis in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and a Provençal Landscape of 1929 in the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle.

The stretcher of this small oil sketch also bears a label of the London Artists' Association, established, at the suggestion of Roger Fry, in 1926 by John Maynard Keynes and the collector Samuel Courtauld to support young artists. Grant was one of a select group of seven artists, also including Bell, Fry and the sculptor Frank Dobson, invited to join the Association. These artists would be provided by the LAA with a guaranteed income of £150 a year, offset by sales of their works at exhibitions organized by the Association, the proceeds of which would go to the artists after a commission had been deducted. The inaugural London Artists' Association exhibition, held at the Leicester Galleries in 1926, was a critical and commercial success, with Grant regarded by many critics as the most gifted member of the group. In April 1927 the LAA organized a small exhibition of 'Paintings by Duncan Grant' on New Bond Street in London, in which seven of the eleven works on view sold quickly. In later years the Association counted artists such as William Coldstream, Paul Nash, Victore Pasmore, William Roberts and Christopher Wood among its members, while Matthew Smith exhibited with the group but was not an official member. Many of the LAA exhibitions were held at the Cooling Galleries at 92 Bond Street, where Grant presented solo shows of recent work in 1929 and 1931. Later in 1931, however, both Grant and Bell resigned from the LAA and signed contracts to sell their work through the Agnew's and Lefevre galleries in London. The London Artists' Association was eventually disbanded at the end of 1933, with a final retrospective exhibition held at the Cooling Galleries in 1934.

The present work was acquired, probably from an LAA exhibition at the Cooling Galleries between 1929 and 1931, by the wealthy American heiress, philanthropist and social activist Dorothy Payne Whitney Elmhirst (1887-1968). With her second husband, Yorkshireman Leonard Knight Elmhirst, she had acquired the late 14th century Dartington Hall, a country house and estate in Devon, in 1925. The Elmhirsts developed Dartington Hall into a rural estate, establishing a progressive co-educational boarding school (whose alumni included Lucian Freud) on the grounds and providing support for local artists and craftsmen, so that by the 1930s Dartington was a gathering place for numerous artists, writers and intellectuals. The Elmhirsts supported many of the young artists of the day, inviting them to stay at Dartington and acquiring their work. In 1961 they established the Dartington College of the Arts at Dartington.

This Provençal Landscape was presented by Dorothy Elmhirst to Wyatt Rawson (1894-1980), a member of the progressive New Education Movement who helped to set up the Dartington Hall School in 1926 and taught there until 1931, and thence passed by descent to the present owner.

Exhibitions

Possibly London, London Artists' Association at The Cooling Galleries, Recent Paintings by Duncan Grant, 1931.

Artist description:

Born in the Highlands of Scotland, Duncan Grant was educated in London and manifested an interest in art from his youth. He was trained in Paris, studying for a period with the painter and draughtsman Simon Bussy, and found inspiration in the work of such Post-Impressionist artists as Cézanne, Gauguin

and Van Gogh, whose paintings were championed in England by the art critic and artist Roger Fry. The art of the Parisian Post-Impressionist painters was to have a profound effect on the work of the young Grant. Through his cousin Lytton Strachey, Grant was introduced to Fry and the other artists and intellectuals of the Bloomsbury Group, notably Vanessa Bell and her husband, the art critic Clive Bell, as well as her sister, the writer Virginia Woolf. In October 1912 Grant showed several works at the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, organized by Fry at the Grafton Gallery in London, which aimed to show the work of modern British painters alongside that of European artists such as Picasso and Matisse. In 1913, Fry, Grant and Vanessa Bell established the Omega Workshops, a design collective, based in Bloomsbury in central London, that produced textiles, furniture, ceramics, murals and household goods for domestic interiors. In 1916, at the height of the First World War, Grant, his lover, the novelist David ('Bunny') Garnett, Vanessa Bell and her two young sons left London for the country, eventually settling at Charleston Farmhouse, near Firle in East Sussex. For much of the next half century this isolated house, which was extensively decorated by Grant and Bell, remained a rural outpost and meeting place for members of the Bloomsbury circle.

Lifelong artistic and emotional partners, Grant and Bell worked side by side and shared their lives until her death in 1961. The two were lovers for a brief period, despite Bell's (by now failed) marriage and Grant's homosexuality, and on Christmas Day 1918 their daughter Angelica was born at Charleston. (Raised by Clive and Vanessa Bell, she did not learn who her true father was until she was eighteen.) In February 1920 Grant had his first one-man exhibition at the Paterson-Carfax Gallery in London, with twenty-four of the thirty-one paintings finding buyers, while towards the end of that year a group of his watercolours were shown, alongside watercolours by Bell, at Percy Moore Turner's newly opened Independent Gallery in London. Grant was to continue to show his work at the Independent Gallery over the next few years, achieving some commercial success, while working between studios in London, Charleston and Paris and continuing to receive commissions for interior decorations in private homes. In 1924 a small monograph on his work was published, with an introductory essay by Roger Fry, and the following year both Grant and Bell were among the artists invited to join the London Artist's Association, established, at the suggestion of Fry, by John Maynard Keynes and the collector Samuel Courtauld. The inaugural London Artist's Association exhibition, held at the Leicester Galleries in 1926, was a critical and commercial success, with Grant widely regarded by most critics as the most gifted member of the group. Within a few years Grant's paintings – landscapes, portraits, still life subjects and interior scenes, for the most part - were being shown at other galleries in London, as well as in America, France and Germany.

Grant and Bell continued to work often alongside each other, both in England and in France, and also travelled, together and with friends, throughout much of Europe. The pair collaborated on a number of interior decorations, most significantly the dining room of the country home of Lady Dorothy Wellesley at Withyham in Sussex, begun in 1928 and completed between 1929 and 1931. (Much praised at the time, the painted panels are today in the Southampton City Art Gallery.) In 1931 both Bell and Grant left the London Artist's Association and signed contracts to sell their work through the Agnews and Lefevre galleries in London, and between 1932 and 1934 they collaborated on a fifty-piece dinner service decorated with portraits of famous women, a commission from the art historian and museum curator Kenneth Clark, who was a prominent supporter and collector of their work. In 1935 Grant was one of several prominent artists tasked with providing works of art for the ocean liner RMS Queen Mary, then being built at Clydebank in Scotland. Despite spending about a year designing and painting several large murals, carpets and curtains intended for the first-class lounge, his work was rejected by the directors of the Cunard-White Star Line and was never installed. Grant and Bell also worked together, alongside Bell's son Quentin, on the extensive mural decoration of the small rural church at Berwick, a few miles from Charleston, which was completed in 1943. The early years of the postwar period found Grant at the height of his success. Later public commissions included the decoration of the Russell Chantry of Lincoln Cathedral, completed in 1958. The following year a retrospective exhibition of Grant's work was mounted at the Tate Gallery, which included eighty-four paintings and fifty-three drawings and watercolours. After Vanessa Bell's death in 1961, Grant continued to live and work at Charleston until his own death in 1978. The two painters are buried next to each other in the nearby churchyard of St. Peter's Church in West Firle.