

GALLERY NOTES®

from

JOHN MITCHELL FINE PAINTINGS

EST 1931

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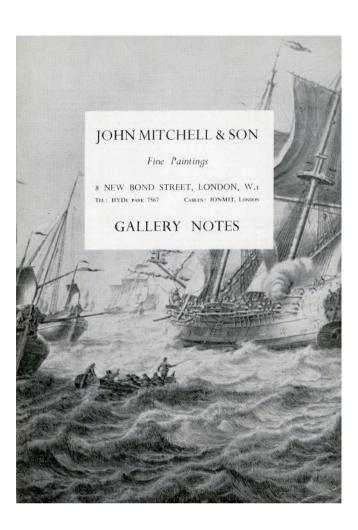
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FOREWORD

To readers of *Gallery Notes* half a century ago and more, the cover illustration of a shipping scene (see illus) would have been familiar, but few may have known the artist or the fact that it was actually painted in black and white. The picture in question, sold by John Mitchell in 1960, was a whaling scene from the early eighteenth century by Adrian Van Salm, the last exponent of the Dutch method of penschilderij. This distinctive technique of drawing with brush and pen on a hard white ground was made famous across Europe by Willem Van de Velde the Elder, and the splendid exhibition at Greenwich last year reminded us how it was so particularly well suited to marine subjects. Even in later years, when he and his family worked in the Queen's House, there was little falling-off in quality in his 'pen-paintings' (see p. 4-5), and one wonders how these unusual pictures were regarded by the English imitators of the Van de Veldes such as Samuel Scott (see p. 10-11).

Meanwhile it is twenty-five years since I wrote a book on Julius Caesar Ibbetson, and I am not sure I ever imagined that today, a quarter of a century on, we would still be unearthing first-rate paintings by him. Just such a pair appeared at Christie's in 2018, and these proved to be the original - and only - commission for John Boydell and his Shakespeare Gallery enterprise. Up until then, the only record of these pictures had been the engravings done after them - and a mis-identified illustration of one in Waterhouse's Dictionary. Happily, they have recently been bought from us by The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC, which is all the more laudable since that institution does not normally acquire paintings. Since then, two impressive landscapes by Ibbetson have come to light (see p.14-19), one illustrated in the first book on the artist of 1948, and the other, as far as I can tell, unrecorded. As, perhaps, one's interest in an artist like Ibbetson has become even less fashionable than it was in 1999 (!), so these discoveries re-affirm a long-held conviction in the worth of this engaging character and his handsome landscapes.

Of particular note elsewhere is the sumptuous flowerpiece by **Antoine Berjon** (p. 20-21), a very uncommon 'summer visitor' to the gallery. Arguably one of the greatest flower painters in France before Henri Fantin-Latour, Berjon's paintings are much more scarce, and more stimulating, than those by his contemporaries Madame Vigée Lebrun and Anne Vallayer-Coster, and thirty-five years ago, when my father bought this Berjon, that counted for a great deal. Now, however, the tables are reversed, and it is the ladies whose flowers are so infatuating; when, in time, a sense of proportion is regained by museum curators and collectors, Berjon's star will shine brightly once again.



Also in this edition of *Gallery Notes*, the fine portrait attributed to **Kneller** (p. 6-7) should be singled out for its pristine condition and for the satisfaction we have had in finding a suitable period frame for it. At the same time, readers may note from our cataloguing of it that we have resisted the vogue for declaring every portrait of this kind to be by Mary Beale. In deference to our times, however, we are delighted to publish the lovely, summery *fête champêtre* by **Maria Spilsbury** (p. 24-25), another interesting figure from the Georgian age.

As always, we encourage our friends, clients and readers of *Gallery Notes* to judge this selection of pictures on their individual merits, on their state of conservation and on their quality, over and above the artist's name. We look forward, as always, to showing them to you here at Avery Row.

James Mitchell June 2024





IULIUS CAESAR IBBETSON (1759-1817)

The Taming of the Shrew: Act IV, scenes 1 and 5
oil on canvas – a pair (2), 31 x 22 inches, one signed. Acquired by the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC. 2024



WILLEM VAN DE VELDE THE ELDER (1611-1693)

An English two-decker lying-to at sea in a moderate breeze, with boats pulling towards her

signed and indistinctly dated 169(?) oil, pen and ink, and wash 'en grisaille' on canvas 22 ¼ x 25 in. (56.2 x 63.5 cm.)

<u>Provenance:</u>

Auction, Prestel, Frankfurt-am-Main, 18-19 November 1921;

Literature:

M.S.Robinson, The Paintings of the WILLEM VAN DE VELDES, National Maritime Museum, 1990, 2 vols., p.96, no. 796.

In December 1667 Cosimo de' Medici, son of Ferdinando II, Grand Duke of Tuscany, arrived in Amsterdam during his extensive tour of north-western Europe. It is recorded that over the next few days 'he went to see paintings by various masters, among them by the draughtsman Van de Velde, by the famous painter Rembrandt...and by others.'

Two things stand out in this sentence. In the first place Willem Van de Velde is mentioned in the same breath as Rembrandt, who was nearing the end of his life but beginning to gain international fame, and, secondly, Van de Velde is described as a draughtsman. By this time Willem Van de Velde (1611-1693) had established a reputation in Amsterdam as the leading exponent of the art of 'pen painting' or 'penschilderij'. By this term we understand his pictures of ships, sea battles and coastal scenes which were hand drawn in pen and ink, on canvas or wooden panel, in a manner intended to imitate engraving. It is thought that Van de Velde produced about eighty of these highly individual pictures during the course of his long and remarkable life, and it is just such a work which we are pleased to present here.

Van de Velde had a son also called Willem (1633-1707), and together they are now regarded as some of the most important marine painters in the history of art. They focused exclusively on maritime subjects, and there is no recorded work by either of them without the sea in it in some shape or form. Their lives and work were made all the more remarkable by the fact of their move to England in the early 1670s and, in time, they have come to be seen as founders of the marine painting in Britain, a rich tradition which reached its apogee in Turner, nowadays the most famous of all British artists. The latter, on being shown a print of a Van de Velde painting, is said to have exclaimed, 'That made me a painter!'

Even before the father, son and their families departed from Holland as the golden age of the republic drew to a close, and the armies of Louis XIV massed on its southern border, Willem the Younger had created some of the finest marine paintings in an incomparable period in art history, and we need walk no more than ten minutes from our gallery to the famous Wallace Collection to see one of the greatest of them all (*Calm: Dutch Ships coming to anchor*). The son Willem could – and did – draw most capably, but it was for his serene, coloured oil paintings that he has always been so acclaimed. For now, however, we should dwell briefly on his father's 'pen paintings', which today are much more scarce than his son's productions but every bit as sought after.

Van de Velde the Elder was born five years after Rembrandt in the same town, Leiden, and his family worked on barges on the rivers and canals there. It is clear that from an early age he was a gifted draughtsman, and this epithet has stuck with him ever since — certainly, as we have seen, it was how he was

known to Cosimo de' Medici. Van de Velde did not invent the unusual technique of drawing in paint and ink on a white surface, or 'ground' – that accolade belongs to the Mannerist artist of the previous century, Hendrick Goltzius – but he adopted and perfected it to suit his speciality. Beginning in the 1640s when he used the style on vellum, he continued exploring the medium even when in London and right up to the very last years of his life, to which period belongs our example.

The appeal for a painter of ships of this painstaking, precise technique is obvious, for it allowed an artist like Van de Velde, who was intimately familiar with ships and seafaring to show the innumerable details of rigging, guns, deck fittings, stern ornamentation and other shipboard features. His most famous pen paintings depict in panoramic splendour some of the battles from the Anglo-Dutch Wars which took place in the middle of the century. Most remarkably, Van de Velde is now regarded as the first war artist in history, for he saw for himself at close-hand a number of the naval engagements of the period. In one of his paintings he shows himself at work in a small boat (called a 'galjiot' in Dutch) sketching the ships firing broadsides at each other. Cosimo de' Medici's two 'pen paintings' are today on view in the Palazzo Pitti, Florence and in the museum in Karlsruhe, Germany; in the latter, which was on display in Amsterdam, the wealth of detail is simply staggering and absorbs the viewer for minutes on end.

Not only did Van de Velde's pen paintings attract wealthy customers for the family's art studio because patrons would know that Van de Velde drew of what he knew and that he had seen such dramatic scenes at first hand, but it is clear that these productions were prized for their dual quality. On the one hand, you could spend ages studying the myriad details up close, for example the individual ships of both sides which the artist took so much trouble to identify by their distinctive features; on the other hand, on stepping back one could take in the whole, breathtaking scene – all the more imposing, given that his largest pictures measured over eight feet in width. After the move to England, when he was already over sixty years old, Van de Velde began to paint smaller 'pen paintings' and only on canvas; the later ones are marked by a much more delicate touch and greater use of pale washes - or brushed areas – to suggest volume in sails, and to create a sea surface and sky.

A major exhibition on the Van de Veldes, father and son, has recently been held at Greenwich in the very building where they set up their studio under the patronage of King Charles II. No fewer than eight of the father's *'penschilderij'* were on display – as if to remind one of their stature at the very top of a wishlist for lovers of marine art!

JFM



SIR GODFREY KNELLER (1646-1723)

Portrait of George Clarke (1661-1736)

oil on canvas,

27 ½ x 23 ½ in. (70 x 60 cm.);

with fine carved period frame, c.1700

As the most successful and prosperous court and society painter of his age Godfrey Kneller had an enormous studio output, but the elegance and virtuosity of handling on display in this painting suggest it is by the master's hand. The original wooden stretcher on which this beautifully preserved portrait rests bears two old inscriptions that read *Mr G Clarke*. By cross referencing that name with Kneller paintings in national collections, we have discovered that this sitter is most likely one George Clarke, of All Souls, Oxford, who was an architect, print collector and Tory politician who sat in the English and British House of Commons between 1702 and 1736. There are no fewer than four portraits of him by Kneller and his studio, all of which bear a striking resemblance to this picture, even if ours appears to be the most youthful sitting.

Special mention is to be made of the fine and appropriate English frame with its carved and gilded acorn and leaf pattern, which perfectly enhances the portrait within.

JAB





JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)

Studies of putti - a pair (2)
oil on unlined canvas, 14 x 9 ½ in. // 12 ¾ x 10 ¾ in.
(35.5 x 24 cm. // 27. 5 x 32.5 cm.)





SAMUEL SCOTT (c.1702-1772)

An English Yacht and other Shipping becalmed oil on canvas,17 x 23 in. (43 x 58.5 cm.) with carved and gilded English frame

Such is the scarcity of Samuel Scott's work that it has not been possible to find any record of a painting by the artist passing through our firm's hands in ninety-four years of activity. As with many eighteenth-century British artists, inadequate biographical information has long gone hand-in-hand with a fundamental misunderstanding of his work and little or no discernment of his authentic productions. Even well into the twentieth century, generic views of London and the River Thames in the style of an English Canaletto were attributed to Scott, almost by default. His contemporaries, however, did not consider him a topographical artist at all; instead he was widely regarded as the Navium et Prospectum Marinorum Pictor ('painter of ships and sea views') which he labelled himself on the engraving of his portrait by Thomas Hudson. One obituary notice recalled '..an artist so universally admired for his painting of Sea-Pieces and Shipping, as to be esteemed the English Vandevelde.' In the most recent, and most authoritative, survey of Samuel Scott published in 1982 Richard Kingzett began his 'Introduction' as follows: 'The first Exhibition entirely devoted to Samuel Scott was arranged at Agnews in 1951. Unfortunately when the 52 pictures and drawings chosen for the occasion were assembled in one gallery it became apparent that works by at least six different painters were on view.' In his Catalogue of all the artist's surviving known works which follows, there are only twenty-one marine paintings not of naval battles. That our (calm) is not among them reminds us that no list of an Old Master's work can ever be considered exhaustive, but it also shows how, within the interval of thirty years, ideas about what Scott's paintings really looked like had coalesced to whittle down the number of his autograph paintings to a surprisingly small body of work.

Our painting probably belongs to the early part of Scott's career, when he leant heavily on the work of Willem Van de Velde the Younger. The latter's death in 1707 resulted in large numbers of the drawings from the Van de Velde studio being bought by collectors, many of them marine artists like Scott who were quick to appreciate the towering stature of the Van de Veldes and their legacy. Van de Velde 'sea-pieces' were unashamedly copied and re-interpreted not only by Scott, but by his younger contemporary and a founding member of the Royal Academy of Arts, Dominic Serres. Both Serres and Charles Gore even took original Van de Velde sheets and re-worked them.

The present painting purposely evokes the 'calms' of the English period of Van de Velde the Younger, which were becoming so popular with collectors in England; the yacht is very much in the seventeenth-century mould, and could even be one of that flotilla of such craft so beloved by King Charles II and his brother James, Duke of York, while the general arrangement of the various vessels strung out across the composition, with the billowing gun-smoke at its centre, is consistent with an earlier style. To cast shadow across the shipping on one side, and highlight a principal, single craft is pure Van de Velde, too. The recent cleaning of this canvas has revealed the paint surface to be miraculously well-preserved, with even details of the rigging in the far-off shipping still visible. (In many marine paintings of this period, one finds that the more delicate and fine brushwork has been worn away by over-enthusiastic cleaning in the past.) As a result it is rewarding to compare, say, the exquisite handling of the masts and shrouds of the yacht and their backdrop of limp, weathered canvas with similar passages in any number of pictures by 'Vandervell', as he was sometimes known in this period. In fact, from the deck upwards one could easily be persuaded of the hand of the Dutch master himself. The fact that the painting is later in period by the unusual, decorative eight-oared gig featured prominently lower left and its distinctively Georgian-looking crew, now more elaborately drawn than in earlier marine paintings; among them are a mother and child, with the latter trailing a fishing rod in the water just beside him. Just beyond the prow of their boat is an incongruous lateen-rigged one which, again, suggests Scott creating his own distinct style, even if it meant straying from the conventions of maritime accuracy. By breathing new life into an accepted idiom, and for those not wishing to commemorate a particular naval engagement, Scott found success serene 'sea-pieces' such as ours.

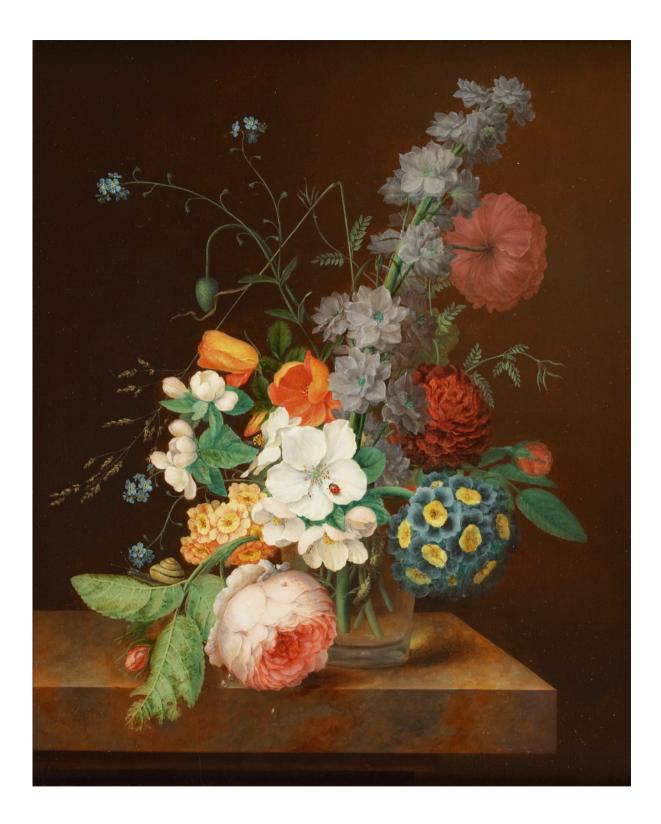
JFM

 $1.\ R. Kingzett, \textit{A Catalogue of the Works of Samuel Scott}, \underline{Walpole Society}, 1982, Vol.\ XLVIII$



GEORG FREDERIK ZIESEL (1756-1809)

Still lifes depicting roses, auriculae, morning glory and other flowers in a glass vase on a marble ledge - a pair (2) oil on panel, $17 \times 13 \frac{1}{2}$ in. (43 x 34 cm.), both signed G. F. Ziesel F



This flawless pair of flower paintings by the seldom seen eighteenth-century Flemish painter, Georg Frederik Ziesel, with their high degree of finish and delicately balanced compositions are typical of the artist's few known works. He was first recorded working in Antwerp in 1780 where he exhibited at the salon and thereafter in Ghent. Later in his career, he travelled to Paris where he painted alongside a fellow Netherlander, Gérard van Spaendonck.

Exceptionally, Ziesel was also known to have made paintings on glass, as seen in the example which was with our gallery in 2012. Another fine flowerpiece on glass by Ziesel can be seen in the picture collection at Nostell Priory in Yorkshire.

JAB



All three Ibbetson paintings in these *Gallery Notes* date from the last decade of Ibbetson's life, when he lived at Masham in North Yorkshire. Even though of views he no longer saw, and derived from memory and the large collection of sketches which he relied upon, as examples of his oils they are as fine and as pleasing as one is ever likely to see. Each is different in mood and palette, but all three share the romantic spirit which informs the artist's best pictures and watercolour drawings.

JFM

JULIUS CAESAR IBBETSON (1759-1817)

A View of Clappersgate, near Ambleside
oil on canvas, 23 1/4 x 34 1/4 ins. (59 x 87 cm.),
signed and dated J.Ibbetson 181(2?)

More than a decade after moving away, Ibbetson here depicts accurately, and fondly, the hamlet called Willy's Hill at Clappergsate, where he spent two of the happiest years of his life, from 1800 to June 1802. Looming above the settlement is the dramatic fell called Loughrigg, while in the foreground is the bridge over the River Brathay which is still there today, and which was painted in 1805 by Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg, the French-born Royal Academician whose work Ibbetson clearly knew and admired. In the Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, there is Ibbetson's painting of the actual house, built in 1677, and in our picture it is almost certainly to be found among the cluster of cottages away on the right, where the path leads away and up over the hills. It was here that he first lived with his new bride, Caroline, here that he wrote and published his instruction manual, Painting in Oil, and here that they received many visitors and admirers of his work. On 16th June 1800, Dorothy Wordsworth recorded in her diary that 'WIlliam [her poet brother] and I went to Brathay by Little Langdale... We drank tea at Mr. Ibbetson's.'

The exceptional, undisturbed condition of this large canvas is affirmed by the wisps of cloud lingering in the hills in the upper right and the crows wheeling among the rocks, a welcome indication that the paint surface throughout the picture has not been worn and abraded by harsh cleaning, and nor are the darker tones marred by the excessive cracking and opacity which has affected some of the artist's work where he experimented with his 'gumption' as he called it, a kind of glaze which he concocted. The wonderful contrast between the warmer hues and the cooler greys and blues is very much in the manner of the Dutch Old Masters, whom he revered, and is, to my mind, what makes Ibbetson's best work stand out. A very similar tonality and palette are to be found in his Buttermere Bridge and Church from the 'Fish' Inn, painted at almost the same time (1813) (Wordsworth Trust, Dove Cottage, GRMDC.A211) Note, too, his trademark prussian blue on the coat of the man with an axe and firewood, balanced by the vivid dab of red of his companion which Ibbetson habitually used to draw in the viewer's eye. Above and beyond the contented cattle and scene of harmony by the river, the brooding outcrops are starkly backlit by the magnificent 'Ruisdael' sky. It is Ibbetson at his 'sublime' best.

JULIUS CAESAR IBBETSON (1759-1817)

Blencathra seen from St. John's-in-the-Vale, near Keswick oil on canvas,

22 x 27 ¾ in. (56 x 70.5 cm.)

signed and dated Julius Ibbetson 1807

with fine period carved and gilded frame

Ibbetson first visited the Lakes in 1798, although he had included its scenery in a few landscapes more than ten years earlier when he still lived at Kilburn. After Clappersgate, he moved to Troutbeck on the other side of Ambleside for a further two years, and between 1799 and 1806 he exhibited no fewer than fourteen Lakeland scenes at the Royal Academy, two further views in 1811 and a final one the following year at the British Institution. The topography in the present picture is uncommon in his work, and the very fact that we have been able to pinpoint the setting after the painting came to us without a title shows how well Ibbetson came to know the region, and moreover how accurately he could recall its mountainous terrain some years after he last saw it. As is usual in his work, concern for geographical precision is balanced with some artistic license; here the delicately-rendered stand of silver birch trees at the left of the composition and the 'convenient' rocky bluff beyond are purely picturesque, as are the cattle, while the passengers in the oncoming cart might easily be evocations of his beloved Bella with his two children from his first marriage. In Painting in Oil, he describes how he prepared his canvases with a warm ground of thinned oils, which he would then rub down with a pumice stone. On to this he would draw his outlines in watercolour, and only then would he embark on the oil colours, preferring to mix them directly on the canvas by laying them over each other rather than blending them on a palette. In this silvery, crisp landscape, so very much in the Dutch manner, his method of working the sky is particularly satisfying, and one can see how he has overlain fine glazes of the same colour in the troughs of the hillsides and in the sinuous river leading one's eye away up the valley, while closer in, judicious flecks of naples yellow highlight the darker foreground.







A Coast Scene in the Peninsular War

oil on canvas,

22 ½ x 34 ¼ in. (56.5 x 87 cm.)

signed and dated Julius Ibbetson AP 1808

Provenance:

with Dowdeswell & Dowdeswell, 160 New Bond Street, London, before 1917; with The Leger Gallery, Old Bond Street, London, 1948.

Literature:

R.M.Clay, Julius Caesar Ibbetson (1948), p. 50, pl. 102.



Smugglers on the Irish Coast, Tate Britain

Rotha Mary Clay researched and wrote her pioneering book on Ibbetson in arduous circumstances during the Second World War, travelling up and down the country in blacked-out trains, experiencing lengthy delays in correspondence and difficulties in obtaining black and white photographs. Out of respect to her, therefore, I have here retained the traditional title which accompanies the full-page illustration of this painting in her book. However, it is not certain what the exact inspiration was for Ibbetson here, and it may well be that a captured French ship was run aground and its cargo pillaged before the arrival of 'the authorities", as Clay suggests. As early as 1781, however, Ibbetson painted a similar composition with prominent cliffs on the right, and a man addressing a crowd on the foreshore below; the assembly is surrounded by horses and supplies, while other men are busy rowing to or from larger vessels beyond (Rocky Coast Scene, Government Art Coll. GAC6824). This idea of large, possibly not entirely lawful gatherings at a remote coastal spot continues in two other recorded paintings which relate very closely to ours, Flamborough Head, Georgian House, Bristol City Art Gallery) and Smugglers on the Irish Coast, Tate Britain (see above), this latter the same size and same date as ours and almost certainly its pendant.

This lively scene is full of interest for the variety of figures which Ibbetson clearly enjoyed portraying. Even though he was working from an earlier idea as evinced by the existence of a preparatory drawing for this exact composition, seeing the large militia gatherings in the town square at Masham at the height of the Napoleonic invasion threat, as he did, must have rekindled his interest in crowd scenes and all the picaresque characters he had encountered in his travels round Britain - and on his single voyage to the Far East.



ANTOINE BERJON (1754-1843)

A Basket of Roses and a Hydrangea on a Marble Ledge with a chequered Beetle oil on oak panel,14 3/8 x 19 in. (36.5 x 48 cm.), signed. With fine Louis XVI carved and gilded antique frame

Provenance

With Galerie Charpentier, Paris, 1965;

Sorheby's Monaco, 3rd December 1989, where acquired by John Mitchell & Son, London;

Private Collection, Europe, until 2023.

Literature:

Jacqueline Custodero, *Antoine Berjon (1754-1843), peintre lyonnais* (doctoral thesis, University of Lyon, 1985), no. 91, as whereabouts unknown;

Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier & Etienne Grafe, *Les Peintres de Fleurs en France de Redouté à Redon*, (Les Editions de L'Amateur 1992), col. pl. pp.128-9.

The appearance of this painting at an auction in Monte Carlo in 1989 coincided - perhaps happily for Sotheby's - with the height of my father's obsession with this elusive flower painter, and his commensurate desire to buy and acclaim the artist's work whenever possible. Few, alas, were the opportunities to do so, and in the intervening thirty-five years only a handful of paintings and drawings have been added to Berjon's recorded oeuvre, confirming my father's theory that, in spite of his long life, Berjon painted very few oils. In recent years two have been wisely bought by the Toledo Museum of Art and

Stockholm's Nationalmuseum, this latter once discovered in a private collection in Lyons by our firm. Thus Berjon's fabled reputation today hangs on a handful of justly celebrated still-lifes and the anecdotes of his rather cantankerous nature and reclusive ways.

Here, then, is one of them, a magical flowerpiece which my brother and I have always been intrigued to see, but which, until now, has been hidden away for a generation. In terms of quality it compares favourably with the exclusive cadre of museum examples, in particular the Louvre's *Bouquet de lis et de roses dans une corbeille posée sur une chiffonière* of 1814, in which there is the same interplay between luxuriant flowers and the hard textures of woven basket and marble. With the composition filling all the pictorial space, and flowers or leaves reaching into three corners, this is unmistakably Berjon at his best; everyday summer flowers mysteriously achieve monumentality and neo-classical grandeur, and one is reminded why an early critic claimed, more than a century ago, that his paintings have 'la sensation de réalité et de beauté des meilleurs Chardin.'

JFM

RAMSAY RICHARD REINAGLE (1775-1862)

Portrait of a boy
oil on canvas, 13 x 11 ½ in. (33 x 28 cm.)

This charming portrait gained admittance to our gallery not for the éclat of the artist's name (which was in fact not known) but for its quality and undisturbed state of preservation - often the best reasons. Over a year it has been shown to several friends and specialists in British art, and the consensus now that it is the work of Ramsay Richard Reinagle is a rather neat conclusion to the attribution process. A distinguished colleague had originally proposed the name of John Constable, and this has proved to be not quite as unbridled as it first seemed. At this point I should acknowledge the gracious help of Ann Lyles, the Constable scholar, who studied the picture for a whole afternoon, and patiently explained why, on balance, it is not by him, one of the principal arguments being that it is almost too good for Constable (his portraits sometimes being rather weak.)

In common with many other engaging artists of the period, Reinagle has become a rather obscure figure, but in fact he was something of a child prodigy, with some pedigree as an academician*. Out of hundreds of recorded, exhibiting artists in his milieu, only a few names stand out today, and Reinagle provides an interesting link between two of them, Allan Ramsay and John Constable. The former had taught Philip Reinagle, the father, and was godfather to Ramsay Richard, while Constable, only a year his junior, became his firm friend in 1799. Reingale had returned from a perilous tour of the Continent, and Constable had arrived in London in April that year to enrol at the Royal Academy Schools. They shared lodgings together off Great Portland Street, and that summer Constable took him back to East Bergholt to meet his

family and friends. Perhaps in gratitude for his stay, Reinagle produced the portrait of Ann Constable, the artist's mother, now at Tate Britain. From the same time dates Reinagle's wellknown likeness of Constable in the National Portrait Gallery. It is difficult to believe, therefore, that there was not at least some sharing of ideas, style and influence between the two young, aspiring artists. The fact that Reinagle's tender portrait of Ann Constable was for a long time attributed to her son seems to endorse this theory, and to explain why the present picture might superficially be associated with John Constable. There were other influences on Reingale's work too. Later, in about 1810, he would become a studio assistant to John Hoppner, and to understand further the genesis of Reinagle's own portrait style, one need look no further than in Ellis Waterhouse's Dictionary of 18th c. British Artists: in his words, His best portraits, between Hoppner and Lawrence in style, are very competent...>

As it is, in palette, style, handling and with the subject set against a low, distant horizon, our portrait compares very closely with a number of known Reinagles. We can only hazard a guess at the identity of this wholesome lad in his distinctive lambskin cap with its glossy black peak, but might not Reinagle have met him during that stay in Suffolk?

JFM

* see F.G.Notehelfer, *The Strange Case of Ramsay Richard Reinagle (1775-1862*), British Art Journal, Vol. XXI, no. 1



MARIA SPILSBURY (1776-1820)

The Fourth of June
oil on canvas
40 x 50 in. (101 x 127 cm.)

Exhibited: Royal Academy, 1807 Lent from a private collection.

Many years ago we advised on the conservation and valuation of a collection of Old Masters which had passed down in a client's family, and among them was this merry genre scene by another late eighteenth-century artist then unknown to us - and probably to most of our colleagues. Nonetheless, Maria Spilsbury had some success as an honorary exhibitor at the Royal Academy between 1792 and 1808, when she married one John Taylor. Soon thereafter they moved to Dublin, where she continued to show her paintings. We are grateful to the owners for allowing us now to publish the picture for the first time, and for allowing us to have it in the gallery as a welcome addition to our summer display.

In this 'fete champetre', children play at soldiers and march past the older generations who look fondly on, while in the background there is a pretty tent adorned with the king's cipher, with one side open to reveal a feastladen table. In the tender expressions of the figures, and the innocent, bucolic feel we are reminded of the pastoral amusements of George Morland, while the figures themselves are not unlike those of another contemporary, Julius Ibbetson. There is a painting by Maria in Tate Britain, The Schoolmistress (1803), showing a crowded schoolroom in which, surprisingly, harmony and order are maintained. Not surprisingly, despite its anachronistic vision of English life, the artists rather naive style and her complete obscurity, this long-neglected painting has been rushed out of storage for public display at Millbank alongside more familiar themes such as 'Women in Revolt'!

JFM



FERDINAND VON WRIGHT (1822-1906)

A Golden Eagle - study

oil and pencil on canvas, 11 1 /4 x 9 1 /4 in. (28.5 x 23.5 cm.)

signed with initials on reverse

Provenance:

Fredrika Fabritius (1818-1902), the artist's sister.

Literature

A.Leikola, J.Lokki et al., *Bróderna von Wrights fáglar*, 1989, p.139, illus. in colour

Fifteen years ago we were introduced to the rarefied subject of Finnish ornithological art when we had - all too briefly, in hindsight - a haunting picture of a ural owl by Ferdinand von Wright (below left). He and his four brothers were brought up in a remote region in central Finland, their forebears having moved there from Yorkshire in England in the previous century. Three of them, Magnus, Wilhelm and Ferdinand

became noted artists, known principally for birds but also for landscapes and other illustration work. They were largely self-taught, and, in their backwoods existence, parallels might inevitably be drawn with their contemporary working far away in more tropical latitudes, the great John James Audubon.

Ferdinand's magnificent *Fighting Capercailies* (1886) hangs today in the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki, and is nothing less than an icon of Finnish art. In the same national collection hangs his *Golden Eagle by a Lake* (1897, oil on canvas, 31 x 40 in., (below right), for which this is a study.

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