

JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



Julius Caesar Ibbetson (1759 - 1817)

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

oil on canvas

22 x 27 3/4 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.