

JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



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 artist's 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'!

