

Gallery Notes

AUTUMN 2013



JOHN MITCHELL
FINE PAINTINGS



People who are not interested in collecting modern art often ask us what they should be buying instead. Old Masters, they tell us, seem a forbidding field for the uninitiated, while the array of periods and schools in between seems positively bewildering. Both sentiments are justified to some extent: the old-fashioned term 'Old Masters' today encompasses the whole of European art from the Middle Ages to the early nineteenth century, and an art historian or specialist dealer may spend a lifetime learning about one school alone in the vast panoply of Western art. Understandably, then, potential collectors feel rather at a loss as to where to begin, and it is at this point that we aspire to be of service. Our role is to offer the best advice we can in trying to make art accessible by explaining it in simple, approachable terms, not in the sometimes arcane language of art history.

In our firm, and for three generations, an understanding of paintings has always gone hand-in-hand with an abiding interest in history. This seems to be as relevant as ever today when extolling the virtues of a picture. To own one of the paintings featured in this *Gallery Notes* is literally to own a piece of the past and metaphorically to enjoy a narrow but penetrating insight on a particular moment in history. In trying to grasp the significance of a painting, drawing or watercolour, some knowledge of what was happening outside the narrow confines of the artist's studio invariably adds to its appeal. For this reason the commentaries, which my brother, William, and I alone have written, do contain occasional references to kings, queens, wars and battles – and apologies are offered in the event of any unwelcome reminder of far-off schooldays !

When answering the question perhaps arising on social occasions, "What do you do ?", I am more often than not met with the response, "Oh, I don't know anything about art I'm afraid !" Given the enormity of what is meant by the term 'art', as we have seen above, it always surprises me that people feel that they *should* know anything about it. Traditional painting is now all but a taboo subject in the media, with its preference for contemporary art, and just as I do not claim any expertise in the professions of others, such as

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medicine, the law and banking, nor do I expect a newcomer to know anything about collecting pictures. It is, in plain parlance, our job to be of guidance to the collector – both experienced and beginner. *Gallery Notes* therefore includes some technical discussion of artists' materials and techniques if only to enable readers to be better informed. During a recent visit to the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, I came across a pastel portrait from 1753 by Jean-Etienne Liotard, the greatest pastellist that ever lived. It was both surprising and heartening to find it out on display in the main galleries, and not hidden away in a print cabinet – an enlightened move by a famous museum. I felt the same way as I did the last time I saw Liotard's best work, an uncanny conviction that the picture had just been completed moments ago and that the artist had momentarily stepped from the room. It is easy to see why Liotard's visit to London spurred on Francis Cotes (pp. 2-7) to greater heights, and it was a timely reminder, if one were needed, of the unique qualities of the best eighteenth-century pastel portraits. As fine as an example of the English pastel tradition one will ever be able to buy.

At a time when the lines between auction house, dealer, adviser, agent and other players are increasingly blurred, it needs to be said that the best 'advisers' are the ones who immerse themselves in their subject. This means sourcing the painting in the first place, assessing the quality and condition, acquiring it at the correct price, knowing who to consult about conservation, framing, and, last but not least, what should be published in offering the painting for sale. Anything less is merely arm's-length involvement, which entails a diminished confidence and understanding of the work being offered. We pride ourselves on all aspects of picture dealing, and in our taste in choosing the pictures from across several centuries. Variety of subject matter and period should not detract from expertise, we trust. Lastly, to return to the opening question, the paintings to buy are those which represent the best of their kind in their respective schools, and those that are new to the market. The oils, pastel and watercolour featured here all satisfy these key criteria, and are all remarkable in their own ways.

James Mitchell

September 2013



Francis Cotes (1726-1770)

Mary Colebrooke, later Lady Aubrey

pastel on paper laid down on linen,
signed and dated 'F Cotes pxt/1766' lower left,
in an elaborate English carved and gilded rococo frame, ca. 1760
29½ x 25½in (75 x 65cm)

This beautiful pastel by Francis Cotes dates from the richest period of the artist's career, when he competed with Reynolds and Gainsborough in popularity. His earliest known pastel is dated 1747, and therefore this arresting portrait of a sixteen-year old girl reflects the artist's consummate mastery of the medium twenty years later. Early on in the intervening period, between 1753 and 1755, the great Swiss pastellist Jean-Etienne Liotard worked in London, and the competition would have spurred on the Irish-born Cotes into producing finer and more accomplished work. Nonetheless in Cotes's earlier portraits of the 1750s his sitters can appear somewhat stolid and doll-like, whereas in his later work they are treated in a more naturalistic and thoughtful manner. The young lady in the present work is shown full of grace and sophistication, and in an entirely natural pose; the inclusion of the bust of a head on its plinth is unusual in Cotes's work and heightens the picture's classical Georgian overtones. An interesting comparison can be drawn between the powerful likeness in this work of 1766 and his stiff, rather expressionless depiction of *The Duchess of Hamilton and Argyll* (London, National Portrait Gallery, 1751) of fifteen years earlier; similarly the present Miss Colebrooke strikes us as noticeably more urbane and confident than the sitters in *Two Young Ladies* of 1757 (Louisville, Kentucky, J.B.Speed Art Museum).

Francis Cotes, traditionally thought of as the father of English pastels, remains an elusive figure. There are few primary sources from which to draw a clearer picture of his personality and life, and with the exception of some fulsome praise written in French by a friend of the historian Edmund Gibbon, little was published about him at the time. In the 1760s Cotes turned more to oil painting principally because it allowed him to charge greater prices, and his success allowed him to move to a house in Cavendish Square in 1765, but even his contemporaries knew that his outstanding skill lay in his handling of the demanding medium of pastels, or 'crayons' as they were known at the time. A year after the present work Cotes made a double portrait in pastels of Queen Charlotte with the Princess Royal asleep on her lap which has long been considered a masterpiece (Royal Collection RCIN 452805). It was



This portrait of Mary Colebrooke has until now remained in the family of her descendants, is unpublished and has never before been available for sale. It is in an exceptionally fine state of preservation, and is almost entirely free from any blemishes or marks, which in itself is rare in pastels of this size coming on to the market today.

upon seeing this exhibited at the Society of Arts that Horace Walpole observed that 'Cotes succeeded much better in crayons than in oils'. By accepting this commission for the royal family, Cotes was able to present the case for the Royal Academy to King George III, which he was instrumental in helping to set up the following year. 1767 was also the year in which John Russell joined Cotes's studio, Russell in turn becoming by the end of the century the leading exponent of pastel portraiture in England.

Pastels are coloured pigments, finely ground into a chalk which is then blended with mineral fillers for physical support and an adhesive medium, such as gum arabic. Pastel has great versatility and charm, permitting an artist to work quickly, and to convey an emotion or idea instantly. The techniques varied from artist to artist, some rubbing it on to the paper, drawing on top of these smudged areas of colour and then adding highlights. Others superimposed multiple layers, either with the broad side or the point of the pastel, and deftly used scraping to allow the paper to show through. It has been said that of all artist's media used in portraiture pastel is the most favourable for bringing out the sitter's true character – the real behind the mask. It is also very fragile and unstable, and any talk of pastels invariably turns to the issue of conservation. Close study of our Cotes pastel suggests that the girl's dress was more pink than it now is, and that the crimson lake has lost some of its intensity – the original hue is visible at the centre bottom edge where the frame has protected it from the light. After nearly two hundred and fifty years, however, it would be unsettling to us *not* to find in the picture some minor alteration. In every other respect this pastel is in an exceptionally fine state of preservation, and is almost entirely free from any blemishes or marks, which in itself is rare in pastels of this size coming on to the market today. Furthermore it has not suffered like so many fine pastels of the period from the deterioration caused by the application of a fixative. Perhaps it is precisely because it has never before been sold, and always remained well cared for in the same collection that it is so strikingly preserved. The sharpness and pure whiteness of the sprig of jasmine in the girl's hand, for example, are indicative of this.

It is interesting to note that Cotes has made additions to the right-hand and bottom edges of the paper, thereby enlarging it to the '30 by 25 inch' format most favoured by oil painters in the period, the implication being that the finished work would rival any comparable oil portrait of his sitter. As Neil Jeffares, the leading authority on eighteenth-century pastellists, has written of our picture, 'the scale of the pastel is more ambitious than Cotes's standard head and shoulders size, and no doubt the inclusion of a hand justified a higher price. Apart from the superb frame, I noted the construction of the strainer [stretcher], where the mortising of the corner crossbars is rather neater than many I have seen. This was conceived as a top of the range production....a remarkable addition to the oeuvre.'

The frame is clearly not the usual, distinctive 'Cotes frame' for which the artist charged his sitters a further three guineas at this time (on top of twenty-five guineas for the pastel itself); on the contrary, it is an exceptional example of the English rococo. Because of their delicacy, pastels have in the past rarely been re-framed, and one must suppose that this magnificent frame is the one fitted to the pastel upon completion.

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We are grateful to Neil Jeffares for studying the pastel while it was out of its frame and for his interesting comments. The pastel has now been fitted with museum standard, anti-static perspex at the recommendation of our works on paper conservator.



Martin Drolling (1752-1817)

La leçon de musique

oil on canvas, 19¾ x 24in (50.3 x 61cm)
signed and dated 'Drolling F. 1796'
with fine Louis XV carved and gilded antique frame

PROVENANCE

Collection X, sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 28th November 1910, lot 20;
Private collection, France.

Martin Drolling's paintings stem from a fascinating branch of French art that spans the period from the end of the *ancien régime* to the restoration of the monarchy, and which has long been of interest to our firm. It is an intimate, bourgeois style and in total contrast to the historical and Neo-classical school of Jacques-Louis David. Like David, Drolling was an established painter before the Revolution and lived through an extraordinarily turbulent time to see the downfall of Napoleon. Unlike his famous contemporary, however, Drolling kept a lower profile throughout, evidently never allying himself to any of the volatile factions of his time, and was thereby spared jail and, after 1815, exile. The highly prolific Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845) is the best known of the school to which Drolling belongs, and other notable exponents whose work we have cherished over the years include Michel Garnier (1753-1819) and Pierre Duval Le Camus (1790-1854). Garnier is an elusive artist but his incomparable *Une élégante au Palais-Royal* (illustrated here) happened upon by my father at an auction in 1986, has now become a celebrated impression of Paris in 1787 and unofficially dubbed 'the girl who started the Revolution'. All of the paintings in this tradition are characterized by a meticulous, highly descriptive style, never better exhibited than in our enchanting scene of children and their governess.

This highly-finished, descriptive approach Drolling assimilated from close study of seventeenth-century Flemish and Dutch Old Masters at the Louvre and at the Palais du Luxembourg, and in this respect his work can be mistaken for that of Boilly. In marked contrast to Boilly, however, Drolling specialised in interior and genre scenes and painted comparatively few portraits, perhaps the finest of which is *Michel Belot* (1791), a likeness of his father-in-law (Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts).

Previously unknown to art historians, our interior scene exemplifies Drolling's art and his predilection for painstaking detail. Such are his descriptive powers that the viewer is initially dissuaded from trying to read too much into the painting. It is enough, one tells oneself, to enjoy the harmonious palette and the pleasing subject of contented-looking children with a graceful young woman, perhaps their governess who is in the throes of a distracting romance (hence the posy she holds in her lap). The eye is drawn around the room in exploration of a wealth of detail and takes in the fact, for example, that the cat's engaging face and the woman's elaborate costume are as realistically and lovingly rendered as the human faces. It is no coincidence that Drolling's penchant and great gift for *trompe l'oeil* were remarked favourably upon in his lifetime. A later pair of his domestic interiors were described by a critic as '...a model of perfection in the imitation of inanimate nature; the space has depth, the furniture stands out, all the objects fall into place distinctly and without confusion; the illusion caused by these pictures is not diminished by lengthy contemplation; the more the eye studies them, the more it is deceived; each of these 'Interiors' creates the effect of panorama' (quoted in P. Rosenberg et al., *French Painting 1774-1830: The Age of Revolution*, (1975), p.399). One of the pictures praised here, *Intérieur d'une cuisine* (1815), was bought by the Louvre at the Salon of 1817, and was subsequently copied by Boilly.

Further study of our innocent-looking picture begins to suggest all is not quite as it appears, and this is in keeping with Drolling's reputation. We may think that in his work there is no underlying or hidden symbolism, no dominant narrative: indeed, his domestic *tableaux* even seem to celebrate the mundane and the ordinary. But do not the unwashed crockery and casually discarded napkin on the table, while forming part of a fine, Oudry-like 'still life within a painting', suggest a disorderliness at odds with the general perception of the bourgeois way



Michel Garnier
L'entrée du Palais Royal

of life? Is the cupboard above the table just a little *too* bare, and should we be troubled by the empty space on the wall at the centre of the composition, where a picture or ornament has been removed? There is clearly some sort of narrative after all, and in this Drolling anticipates Honoré Balzac writing forty years later. In the novels of *La Comédie Humaine*, he describes rooms and their contents in exhaustive – and exhausting – detail in order to hint at the personalities of their occupants, and above all at their circumstances. It is wrong therefore to presume that in our outwardly innocuous *La Leçon de Musique* Drolling does not have a more subtle message for us, and part of the enjoyment that awaits the painting's next owner will be to have the leisure to speculate what that message might be, or to conjure up a story told by the picture.

Like the portrait of his father-in-law, Drolling's self-portrait also hangs in the museum at Orléans and was probably painted around the same time – a few years before *La Leçon de Musique*. In this rather monumental picture, conspicuous by their absence are the palette and brushes which usually accompany portraits of painters, and it has never been understood why Drolling should have wished to play down the nature of his profession. The life of this rather impenetrable artist from the Alsace is not as well documented as those of many of his peers, and yet he had a successful career and, at his death, left a thriving studio which included many female students. Both his son, Michel-Martin, and daughter, Louise-Adéone, became successful artists, the latter being known as Madame Joubert. *La Leçon de Musique* was painted in the year of Napoleon's marriage to Joséphine de Beauharnais and of his successful campaign in Italy, and to me, the most intriguing aspect of Drolling's painting is how far removed the subject seems from the turmoil of that extraordinary period in European history. In itself it serves as a historical document, proof that, in spite of how we might view the past today, life for many people in Paris continued much as ever. Moreover, as Redouté and his publishers were finding with their luxurious books, the market for the finer things in life continued unabated and Drolling clearly knew that this included his finely-wrought, tender interiors.

JAMES MITCHELL





Julius Caesar Ibbetson (1759-1817)

W. Danby Esq of Swinton, Yorkshire

oil on canvas
13¾ x 19in (35 x 48 cm)
signed, dated and inscribed *J.Ibbetson. 1817 Masham May 12*

PROVENANCE

William Danby (1752-1833);
With Arthur Ackerman & Son, 191 Regent Street, London, circa 1910;
Sackville Pelham, 5th Earl of Yarborough (1888-1948), and by descent in the family.

EXHIBITED

London, Sotheby's, 1984, *The British Sporting Heritage*, no. 186.

LITERATURE

R.M. Clay, *Julius Caesar Ibbetson*, *Country Life* 1948, p.126, pl.125.

This painting dates from the last summer of Ibbetson's life, and is a touching portrait of his patron and principal benefactor. William Danby, a Yorkshire landowner, had written to Ibbetson in the Lake District sixteen years earlier and invited him to make sketches at Swinton Park, his home near Masham. In the first of a series of rather engaging letters to Danby from 1802 to 1805 now preserved in the North Yorkshire County Records Office, Ibbetson reveals that he did not respond to Danby's initial invitation for a whole year because he had been unable to make out the signature, 'until', as he writes, 'Mr.Staveley of York called on me some time ago & set me to rights & also inform'd me that you could wish to have some of my works.' So in this disorderly manner began an association which would lead to Ibbetson bringing his family to settle at Masham for the remainder of his life. The exact, rather comic circumstances are revealed in a letter from Masham in March 1805 in which Ibbetson confesses to Danby that he cannot leave his lodgings at the King's Head in Masham because of his inability to settle the bill, the most recent advance from Danby having been sent home to his wife in Westmorland. By selling six small pictures to Danby the artist was able to extricate himself, and as he sold further paintings to other members of the local gentry, such as Timothy Hutton, that spring, Ibbetson must have decided to stay in Masham. The first major painting for William Danby, described by Ibbetson himself as 'one chef d'oeuvre - the market place with real characters...viz 7ft by 5 whole length' was included in our 1999 loan exhibition of Ibbetson's work. It was most likely the reason for Ibbetson's return to Masham in the winter of 1804-5 and depicts Danby as captain of militia on horseback reviewing the local volunteers in the large market square at Masham, at a time when the threat of Napoleonic invasion was keenly felt throughout the land. As the artist himself commented of the scene, 'it is a sort of Epoch wch. will one day be interesting.'



More than a decade later William Danby is portrayed again by Ibbetson in this very fine, small canvas, but this time as the archetypal rural squire at leisure. The painting was first published in 1948 in R.M. Clay's pioneering monograph on the artist, to whom all enthusiasts of the artist must remain indebted. My disappointment at not being able to include the painting in our 1999 exhibition, nor even being permitted to reproduce it in my accompanying book on the artist, is at last offset by the gratification of being able to offer it for sale fourteen years later. In the context of Ibbetson's output in his declining years it is of exceptional quality, and, like the similarly-sized *The River Ure at Masham* (Bradford, Cartwright Hall Art Gallery), stands out among his late works.

In a sense the painting seems rather 'obsolete' for 1817, and the casual viewer might easily mistake it for a late eighteenth-century work in the style of George Stubbs. Ever the *pasticheur*, Ibbetson clearly knew the work of the great sporting artist of his lifetime, and Danby's pointer resembles those in Stubbs' work, for example *Phyllis* at Temple Newsam House, near Leeds (where there is also a considerable collection of Ibbetson's work on display). Furthermore, there is no known precedent in Ibbetson's work for this formula of the 'sporting portrait', which invariably adds to the picture's singular appeal and is somewhat at odds with William Danby's reputation as 'an accomplished scholar and author of some works of interest in moral philosophy, & c.', according to an obituary notice published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of April 1834. Educated at Eton and Christ's College, Cambridge, Danby, whose family had owned the lordship of Masham since the reign of Henry VIII, was evidently no ordinary country squire, being the author of tracts such as *Extracts from and observations on Cicero's dialogues 'De Senectute' and 'De amicitia', and a translation of his Somnium Scipionis, with notes* (1829). Above Swinton there remains today his own simulacrum of Stonehenge, and his house, remodelled by James Wyatt, boasted 'a handsome library and a richly furnished museum of minerals'. The obituarist describes him as 'strictly pious without ostentation, and his benevolence was unbounded. His virtues, in all the relations of social and domestic life, will be long cherished and remembered with esteem by his surviving relatives and large circle of friends.' Julius Ibbetson clearly endeared himself to Danby as he benefited from his generosity - both of means and of spirit - throughout the last quarter of his life. With this favourable portrait he was perhaps hoping to return some of the kindness shown to him.

The canvas has remained in very good condition, and recent cleaning has revealed the luminosity of Ibbetson's Dutch seventeenth-century sky and fine detail in the landscape of the middle distance. More unexpected has been the uncovering of another, smaller dog close to its master. This appears to have been painted out soon after the completion of the picture because the over-paint was as hard as enamel; we may never know why the little dog was covered up, but there is a story to be speculated upon at leisure by the picture's new owner.



Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1759-1840)

Cabbage Rose and Small Morning Glory

watercolour on vellum
 10½ x 8 in (26.5 x 20 cm)
 signed
 with fine antique Louis XVI frame

EXHIBITED

London, John Mitchell & Son, July 1984, *Flowers in Watercolour*, no. 26

“Plant illustration, so desirable for the study of botany, gracefully embellishes the finest products of industry, sometimes bedecks winter with the finery of spring, and charms the leisure hours of those whose magical paintbrushes give lasting existence to the ephemeral gifts of Flora.”

P.J.Redouté in the *Preface to Choix des plus belles fleurs et des plus beaux fruits* (1827-33)

For most people today the word Redouté is little more than the name of a painter of flowers from the past, known only through countless reproductions of roses. Yet the story of his life and extraordinary rise to fame at a time of great upheaval across Europe remains as compelling as ever. At the end of his life in 1840, the eighty-one year old artist could look back upon a life so remarkable as to defy the most fanciful of fiction writers. He was the same being who, as a thirteen year-old boy, had left his village in the Ardennes to become a journeyman painter, arriving in Paris three years later, a penniless unknown. He would have recalled the initial and sustained help of the great botanist L'Héritier, the support of Gérard van Spaendonck, the thrill of the royal appointment to Marie-Antoinette to record flowers in her new gardens at le Petit-Trianon, and this only six years after his arrival in Paris. Revolution swept away the queen and her world forever, to be succeeded, for Redouté, by Josephine and Malmaison instead of Versailles. Then he was summoned to instruct the new Empress, Marie-Louise, who bore Napoleon the son he craved. War with England was perhaps unwelcome to Redouté because his visit in 1787 to Sir Joseph Banks, his studies at Kew and his experience of engraving there had left a favourable impression upon him. Yet Redouté had the wisdom to keep such thoughts to himself, avoiding all political discussion, and so survived to see the Czar and his Cossacks in Paris, the return of Louis XVIII, Charles X come and go, and to instruct the daughter of Louis-Philippe who was destined to be the first queen of his native Belgium. In between his appointments, his salons, his public and private lessons, Redouté devoted himself to the great series of botanical books which immortalised his name, *Les Roses*, completed in 1824, and reproduced today throughout the world. Less well-known is the eight-volume series of *Les Liliacées* (1802-1816), with five hundred plates, yet considered by many to be his finest work.

The reason why Redouté achieved such lasting fame is that his prodigious artistic talent could be put to use in an age of major advances in both printing and in botany. The rigidity of copper engraving was then being overcome by the stipple engraving, the mezzotint and aquatint, the latter two techniques often combined. Redouté was uniquely gifted to profit from these developments by learning and improving upon them, and often himself retouched the plates before they were bound into the *grand papier* editions of the great books. As the craftsman and the technicians broke new ground, so the rapid exploration of the world was changing the horizons of the botanist. The renowned seventeenth-century flower painters such as Jan Brueghel the Elder, Rachel Ruysch and Jan van Huysum, whose work Redouté had studied as a teenager, in all depicted not more than sixty species in their compositions. Admiring and emulating their work, Redouté was heir to the great Dutch and Flemish tradition of flower painting. Unlike them, however, he explored so thoroughly the plant kingdom as to portray at least eighteen hundred species. Moreover by often recording them as individuals with their particular characteristics, and with many of them being new species to science, Redouté made an important contribution to botany.

Patronage for Redouté reached its zenith through his association with the Empress Josephine, who married Napoleon Bonaparte in March 1796. In 1799, by which time Napoleon had conquered Italy, invaded Egypt and became First Consul, Josephine bought a dilapidated estate at Malmaison, then near Paris, now engulfed by it. The property comprised 650 acres, augmented by purchase to 1815 acres by the time of her death in 1814. With encyclopaedic enthusiasm, limitless application and vast expenditure, Josephine embraced every aspect of the creation of Malmaison – from pineapples to kangaroos. Above all she loved flowers and in her Redouté had a patron and friend after his own heart, and responded accordingly with a spell of creative fervour that leaves one breathless, producing among others thousands of fully worked-up watercolours for works such as *Les Liliacées*, *Jardin de la Malmaison* and *Description des plantes rares à Malmaison et à Navarre en 1812*.

That we are now able to offer this exquisite watercolour by Redouté represents a halcyon opportunity for the discerning buyer to own something very rare, and thereby join an elite group of collectors. In terms of sustained consistency of quality over a vast output, Redouté has no parallel in the history of flower painting and yet today his work is elusive, with comparatively few people ever having seen an original. There have been very few exhibitions of his work; his oil paintings are excessively rare, while his watercolours are found in few museums and botanical libraries and, where held, are stored away in print cabinets seldom, if ever, to be seen by the public. His original illustrations for the great books, most notably the *Liliacées*, were infamously separated and sold off in a series of auctions nearly thirty years ago, and nowadays a flowerpiece such as ours becomes available perhaps no more than once a year.

Furthermore, Redouté, at the instigation of his celebrated master Gérard van Spaendonck, chose to work in a medium which is now little understood. A master of all media and engraving processes, he considered watercolour a more demanding medium than oil and in no sense an inferior one, just as today one must vehemently reject the ignorant notion that watercolour is somehow the poor cousin of oil painting. The luminosity of the vellum (calf's skin) and the apparently infinite subtleties afforded by watercolour are fundamental to Redouté's achievement. He had to ensure that his delicate pencil under-drawing would disappear beneath the watercolour – or show through intentionally for fine definition. The discipline needed to control a water-based pigment is even more rigorous on the highly



absorbent vellum, where mistakes cannot be remedied, and for Redouté to have worked in watercolour at the speed and consistency necessary to complete large-scale undertakings is simply beyond our comprehension.

Like any great artist, to discipline and technical wizardry Redouté added a very personal and magic ingredient that enabled his work to transcend the narrow confines of botanical illustration and so reach a huge audience in the nineteenth century. An innate taste guided him unfailingly in turning an individual flower or plant to the optimum viewpoint or in arranging different blooms together. The humblest or most common flower is – as here – given the same care as an exotic, costly rarity, and equally, Redouté was without peer in depicting the texture of foliage which, in terms of attention, is never accorded a subordinate role.

We invite readers of *Gallery Notes* to come in and hold this watercolour in their hands, to admire the condition of the vellum two centuries on, to marvel at the veining of the rose leaves, the water drop on the rose, the shading of the stems and the texture of the convolvuli. To do so is to feel a little closer to this illustrious artist and his astonishing creations.



Anton Raphael Mengs (1728 -1779)

St. John the Baptist

oil on walnut panel
 13½ x 18½in (34.5 x 47cm)
 with fine original Italian eighteenth century frame

PROVENANCE

Probably commissioned by Augustus III of Poland, Elector of Saxony (1696-1763) Dresden; never given to the above by the artist, but donated to his friend Cardinal Alberico Archinto; by inheritance to the Clerici family, Milan.

LITERATURE

J.J. Winckelman, *Briefe*, edited by W.Rehm and J.Diepolder, Berlin 1754 vol. ii, p. 150
 D. Azara and C.Fea, *Opere di Antonio Raffaello Mengs, primo pittore del Re cattolico Carlo III*, Rome 1787, p. XLIV

This rediscovered painting on panel by Mengs was a commission in 1754 or 1755 for the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, Augustus III, who resided in Dresden. The author of the *catalogue raisonné* on the artist, Dr. Steffi Roettgen, has established that the picture never went to the King due to the outbreak of the Seven Years War (1756-1763). Augustus III moved the court to Warsaw and Mengs, based in Rome since 1751, broke off his professional ties with Dresden after nearly a decade of patronage. Mengs gave *St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness* to his friend Cardinal Archinto and the painting has remained in Italy ever since.

Mengs was born in German Bohemia to a Danish portrait painter, Ismael, who chose Correggio and Raphael's first names for his son and took him to Rome aged twelve to study in the 'Academy of Europe'. With such a start in life, it is not surprising that by the end of Mengs's life he had a sizeable collection of paintings, sculpture and vases as well as being hailed as one of the greatest painters of his age. During his career Mengs had many British patrons in Rome and worked for the royal families of Poland, Naples, and for nearly two decades, in Madrid. Indeed an almost identical version of our panel was executed in 1769 for the bedroom of Carlos III in Madrid's Palacio Real. Painted on copper that *St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness* later belonged to the Duke of Wellington; it still hangs today at Stratfield Saye.

By the time Mengs moved to Rome in the early 1750s he had already made two lengthy sojourns there, converting to Roman Catholicism on his second stay there in 1769. The young Dresden painter was chiefly recognised for his portraits but his broadening knowledge and artistic appreciation of Titian's colour, Correggio's *chiaroscuro* and the Bolognese painters induced him to take on important religious and classical scenes, engagingly faithful in manner to those great masters. Mengs's new style of painting, later known as Neoclassicism, was in fact wholly dominated by the Roman Baroque and yet much admired by his contemporaries. In Rome Mengs also entered into a well-known rivalry with the contemporary Italian painter, Pompeo Batoni. One masterpiece in particular won Mengs fame across Europe; the fresco of *Parnassus with Apollo and the Muses*, executed in 1759 for the ceiling of Cardinal Albani's villa in Rome. In common with Batoni, Mengs made several depictions of St. John the Baptist as well as the Penitent Magdalen, the most famous being his 1752 reception piece to the Roman painters' guild, the Accademia di San Luca. This *Magdalen* now hangs in the Dresden Gemäldegalerie. In contrast to Batoni's then famous *St. John the Baptist*, 1742 (sadly destroyed in Dresden in 1945) our version is a more intimate and devotional depiction of the young Baptist, suffused with a Correggio-esque light – a most characteristic work by an eclectic artist, much sought after during his long working career.

WILLIAM MITCHELL

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JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS

Each issue of *Gallery Notes* is carefully researched by us for accuracy of comment and the reproductions are as faithful as possible. Often there is considerably more material on an artist than can be included here including expertise and commentaries by independent art historians, so please do not hesitate to let us know if we can be of help in this respect. We would also ask for your help in avoiding wastage. If you do not care to remain on our mailing list or if you change your address or wish *Gallery Notes* to be sent to an address other than the present one, please advise us. *Gallery Notes* is also available as an email attachment and as a download from our website, www.johnmitchell.net. May we, in return, offer our guidance on the acquisition, sale, conservation and framing of paintings, and on their valuation for probate, insurance, CGT or other purposes. An independent view of buying and selling at auction has always been advisable.

Our policy remains unchanged. Across all schools, periods, and values, we seek, with rigorous selectivity, a high standard of quality in what we buy. Once satisfied, we can offer works with confidence, backed up by long experience, integrity and scholarship. The business is one of long-term friendship and association, not short-term advantage.

We hope that in receiving *Gallery Notes* you will share the interest and enjoyment which they have brought to collectors throughout the world for over sixty years.

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Recently sold paintings

The six oil paintings and one watercolour illustrated here have been acquired from us in the last two years and, it is hoped, reflect the variety of periods and of subject matter which we embrace at John Mitchell Fine Paintings. The selection is intended to encourage collectors and dispel the idea that it is no longer possible to buy original, stimulating and, above all, first-rate pictures.

1 Abraham Bloemaert (1566-1651)

St. John the Baptist preaching
oil en rosaille on oak panel
15¾ x 12¼in (40 x 31cm)
circa 1593-5

Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 2012



2 Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (1634-1699)

A still life of roses, convolvulus, Canterbury bells and other flowers
oil on canvas, 20¼ x 24½in (51.4 x 62.3cm)

Private collection, California, 2013



3 Cornelis van Haarlem (1562-1638)

The Choice Between Young and Old
oil on canvas, 28½ x 35in (72.5 x 89cm)

Private collection, New York, 2013



4 Alfred-Emile-Léopold Stevens (1823-1906)

Jeune fille à la poupée
oil on panel, 9¾ x 7¼ in (24 x 18.5cm)
signed

Private collection, California, 2013



5 Dominic Serres, R.A. (1719-1793)

The Review of the Fleet, June 1773: His Majesty saluted by the Fleet at his arrival on board Barfleur at Spithead

pencil, pen and ink and watercolour, 16 x 29in (40.6 x 58.7cm)

inscribed with title 'King's review at Portsmouth 1773';

signed and dated 1777 on a label on the reverse

Private collection, England, 2011



6 Sebastien Bourdon (1616-1671)

The Conversion of St. Paul

oil on panel
24 x 30in (61 x 67.3cm)

Private collection, London, 2009

1 2 3
4 5 6
 7

7 Alexandre Calame (1810-1864)

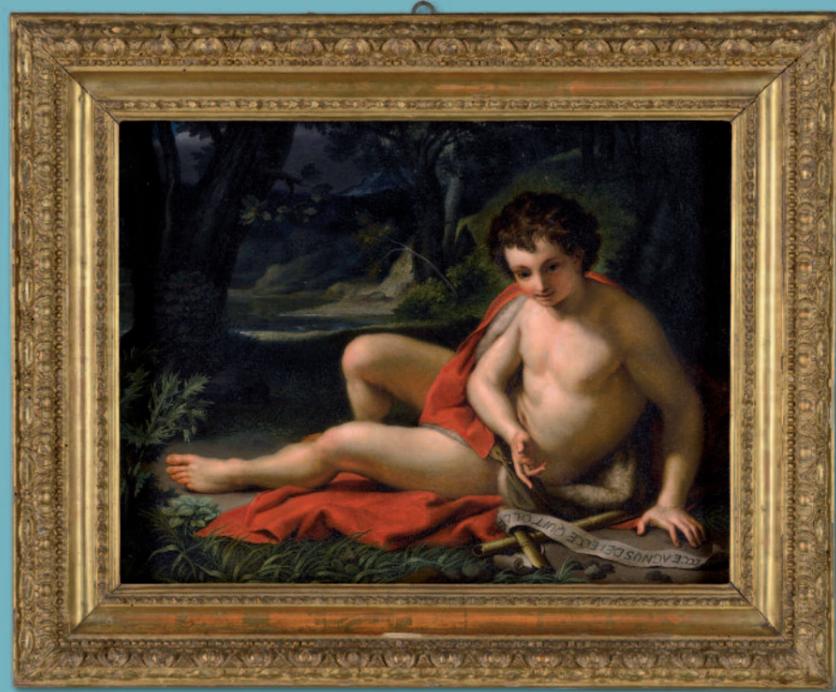
The Weisse Lütschine at Stechelberg, Lauterbunnen Valley

oil on paper laid on board
40 x 26cm

signed

Private collection, Belgium, 2013





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FINE PAINTINGS

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