

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH, R.A.

1727 Sudbury - London 1788

*Wooded Landscape with Figures, Horse and Shed*

Black chalk and grey washes, heightened with white; executed in the early 1780s.

Stamped lower right with Earl of Warwick's collector mark.

280 by 355 mm

PROVENANCE: George Guy, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Warwick and 4<sup>th</sup> Earl Brooke (1818-1893), [Lugt 2600] – possibly, his executor's sale, London, Christie's, 20-21 May 1896 [see: Lugt Suppl. 2600] – Henry Joseph Pfungst, London (1844-1917), [see: Lugt 1352] – his executor's sale, London, Christie's, 15 June 1917, lot 56 – acquired by "Seligmann" (Jacques Seligmann & Co., New York) at the above sale – from whom purchased by Alfred Ramage (1888-1926) by c.1925 – by descent to Mrs. Isabel Ramage Maddox (1890-1936) sister of the above, Washington DC – Evelyne Maddox McConnell Pope (1929-2014), daughter of the above. – Richard M. Thune (born 1947), Greenwich CT and New York – by whom gifted in 2012 to The Penn Art Collection, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia PA – sold by the University of Pennsylvania in 2016

EXHIBITED: London, P. & D. Colnaghi, *A Selection of Studies and Drawings by Thomas Gainsborough, R.A.*, May 1906, no. 59 – New York, Davis & Langdale, *British Drawings 1760-1925: A Loan Exhibition*, 1985, no. 4 – New York, Davis & Langdale, *Drawings by Thomas Gainsborough*, 1987, no. 22 – Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, *Thomas Gainsborough – Die Moderne Landschaft*, 2018, no. 35

LITERATURE: Mary Woodall, *Gainsborough's Landscape Drawings*, London 1939, pp. 62-65, no. 472 – John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London 1970, pp. 230-1, no. 526 – Christoph Martin Vogtherr, *Thomas Gainsborough – Die Moderne Landschaft*, exhib. cat., Hamburger Kunsthalle 2018, p. 112, no. 35

Thomas Gainsborough was born in Sudbury, Suffolk. He studied in London in the early 1740s with the French Rococo artist Hubert François Gravelot. Returning to his native Suffolk in 1748, Gainsborough remained there for more than a decade painting portraits and landscapes. In 1759 he moved from Ipswich to Bath and fifteen years later settled permanently in London, having established himself as a fashionable painter. Although perhaps best known for his elegant portrayals of the landed gentry and aristocracy, he delighted in creating landscapes, and the countryside was a kind of refuge for him. As the artist famously complained to his friend, the Exeter musician, William Jackson: *I'm sick of Portraits and wish very much to take my Viol da Gam and walk off some sweet Village where I can paint Landskips and enjoy the faq End of Life in quietness and ease.*<sup>1</sup>

Landscape was a constant throughout in Gainsborough's working life and it was by far the main subject of his drawings.<sup>2</sup> John Hayes wrote in the introduction of his catalogue raisonné of the artist's

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<sup>1</sup> Cited after Michael Rosenthal, and Martin Myrone, 'Landscape and the Poor', in *Thomas Gainsborough 1727-1788*, exhib. cat., Tate Britain, London, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Museum of Fine Art, Boston, 2002-3, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> From the 878 drawings, listed by John Hayes in his catalogue raisonné (op. cit.), more than 700 depict landscapes.

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drawings: *On any count Gainsborough was one of the greatest draughtsmen of his age. Trough his temperament as an artist he was able to express to perfection that peculiar blend of delight in nature, sentiment, and elegant sophistication so characteristic of the eighteenth century. Technically, he was a master of his craft, brilliant, assured, prolific.*<sup>3</sup> Than he cited William Jackson, who went as far as to declare that: *If I were to rest his [Gainsborough's] reputation upon one point it should be on his drawings. No man ever possessed methods so various in producing effect, and all were excellent.*<sup>4</sup>

Gainsborough is said to have started as a young boy by drawing landscapes on straps of paper, and he would play truant from school to go out drawing in the countryside. Early in his career, he made direct studies from nature of specific elements such as trees and plants. His first compositions were influenced by the Dutch seventeenth century landscape painters. The landscape drawings created in Bath and London however, tended to be more generalized, reflecting his awareness of the classical landscape compositions by Claude Lorrain and Gaspar Dughet. Jonathan Yarker summarised this development: *Gainsborough internalised the natural forms he had studied in his youth, the lessons of compositions learned initially from Dutch painters and latterly Gaspard Dughet, using them as the stimulus for numerous ideal landscapes he made in the latter part of his career.*<sup>5</sup>

Henry Angelo tells how in Bath the artist would occupy his evenings in making landscapes in various media.<sup>6</sup> Despite appearances, Gainsborough always needed to work from at least a reminder of life, and is said to have made surrogate model landscapes from shards of mirror (serving for water), shoots of broccoli (acting as trees) and lumps of coal (which may be discerned as rocks)<sup>7</sup>. They had been described as *models - or rather thoughts - for landscape scenery on a little old-fashioned folding oak table ... This table, held sacred for the purpose, he would order to be brought to his parlour, and thereupon compose his designs. He would place cork or coal for his foregrounds; make middle grounds of sand or clay, bushes of mosses and lichens, and set up distant woods of broccoli.*<sup>8</sup>

Gainsborough's drawings occasionally served as preliminary ideas for painting, but many – as the present sheet – were products of his imagination, created as separate entities for their own sake. It is well known that Gainsborough never sold his drawings. They were given to friends and patrons or kept by the artist, perhaps for future reference.

The present drawing is a fine example both of Gainsborough's experimental technique and of his deep interest in 'the pastoral'. It is from the artist's London period, characterized by a greater abbreviation and fluidity of movement than in the drawings from the Bath period. Our drawing dates to the early 1780s, just before the change in style in the artist's last three or four years of his life, when he reached a higher degree of immediacy, simplification and energy. It depicts a hilly landscape along a way leading to the sea. Dark clouds, approaching from the right, seem to indicate a quick weather change. While the peasant and his dog are still resting on the ground, the donkey seeks protection in

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<sup>3</sup> John Hayes, 'Gainsborough's Drawings', op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> William Jackson, *The Four Ages*, London 1798, p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Yarker, *Gainsborough and The Landscape of Refinement*, in exh. cat., Lowell Libson Ltd., London 2014, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo...*, London, I, p. 219.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Rosenthal, and Martin Myrone, op. cit., p. 212.

<sup>8</sup> *Somerset House Gazette*, I, 1824, p. 348. John Hayes identified the author as William Henry Pyne. Reynolds also recorded Gainsborough's table top models.

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the thatched shed; a milkmaid carrying two pails is returning from the left. The tree trunk behind the sheet evokes the forces of a storm.

Edward Edwards explained the ‘capricious’ manner, in which Gainsborough produced his late drawings, clearly visible in our sheet: *Many of these were made in black and white, which colours were applied in the following manner: a small sponge tied to a bit of stick, served as the pencil for the shadows, and a small lump of whiting held by a pair of tea-tongs was the instrument by which the high lights were applied; beside these, there were others in black and white chalks, India ink, bistre and some in slight tint of oil colours; with these various material, he struck out so vast number of bold, free sketches of lands cape and cattle, all of which have a most captivating effect to the eye of an artist, or connoisseur of real taste.*<sup>9</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the present drawing belonged to George Guy, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Warwick, a prominent collector of old master drawings who had inherited a superb collection from his uncle Sir Charles Greville (1763-1832). He owned 19 Gainsboroughs, including some of his most outstanding figure drawings. In the latter part of the nineteenth century it was acquired by Henry Joseph Pfunst, a wine merchant, who formed one of the finest collections of Gainsborough drawings and prints. He owned nearly eighty drawings, of which two thirds were landscape drawings. His collection of Gainsborough’s prints, which he presented to the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett in 1913, included many early states and was the most important ever made.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painting*, London , 1808, p. 139.

<sup>10</sup> See: John Hayes, op. cit., p. 100.