Studies of a Farmer on horseback and his Family

Robert Hills

Guy Peppiatt Fine Art Ltd.
Riverwide House, 6 Mason's Yard, Duke St. St. James's, London, SW1Y 6BU
T: 020 7930 3839 M: 07956 968 284 E: guy@peppiattfineart.co.uk www.peppiattfineart.co.uk

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Description

Robert Hills (1769-1844)
Studies of a Farmer on horseback and his Family

Watercolour over pencil
27.8 by 21.2 cm., 10 ¾ by 8 ¼ in.

Provenance:
With the Albany Gallery

This is a typical example of Hills's sketches of farmhands which often include multiple studies on the same sheet. However his depiction of rosy-cheeked, well-fed children in clean well-made clothing, and cheery behatted farmers on horseback, does not show the realities of the time. The politician William Cobbett (1763-1835) writes of the poverty of the British countryside in the 1820s and suggests people should `go into the villages and look at the miserable shed in which the labourers reside…. survey the rags on the backs of the wretched inhabitants' (quoted in R.J. Evans, The Victorian age: 1815-1914, 1968, p.3). There are a number of related sketches in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge which were the subject of a 2008 exhibition (see Nicola Gauld, `The fields calls me to labour - Watercolours of nineteenth century rural Britain by Robert Hills and his contemporaries, exhibition booklet, 2008, nos. 36, 40 and 42, ill.).

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