Gersau on the Lake of Lucerne, Switzerland

William Pars



REF: 2966

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Description

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William Pars, A.R.A. (1742-1782)
Gersau on the Lake of Lucerne, Switzerland

Pen and grey ink and watercolour heightened with touches of bodycolour on laid paper
24.8 by 33 cm., 9 ¾ by 13 in.

Provenance:
With Spink & Son (K311168);
Private collection until 2024

Born in London, Pars began his working career as a portait painter until in 1764 he was appointed draughtsman on a expedition to Greece and Asia Minor organised by Chandler and Revett on behalf of the Society of Dilettanti. Many of the resulting watercolours were engraved for the Society's publication Ionian Antiquities and are now in the British Museum.
Pars was one of the earliest landscape artists in watercolour. Anne Lyles described him as `one of the most sophisticated and accomplished topographers of his age'. He found `a profound inspiration in travel, and the best of his work reveals a degree of expressiveness rarely encountered in the more literal topographical drawings of his contemporaries' (Anne Lyles and Robin Hamlyn, British Watercolours from the Oppé Collection, 1997, p.128). Pars spent the last seven years of his life in Rome where he died as the result of a chill caught while sketching aged only 40.

The present watercolour originates from a three month trip in the summer of 1770 in the company of Henry Temple, 2nd Viscount Palmerston. They travelled through Switzerland to Lake Maggiore and then back along the Rhine valley. Palmerston kept a journal so we know their itinerary. They reached Lucerne on 11th August and on the 13th they hired an `awkward ill-contrived boat' to travel around the lake. They stopped at Gersau, a village on the southern slopes of the Rigi near the town of Brunnen (see Andrew Wilton, William Pars, Journey through the Alps, 1979, p.22). There are two other known versions of this watercolour, from the Brandt collection was sold at Sotheby's on 3rd July 2024, lot 56 and another was in the collection of the Earls of Yarborough.

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