The Simplon Pass, Switzerland

John Singer Sargent

Sold

REF: 3077

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Description

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John Singer Sargent, R.A. (1856-1925)
The Simplon Pass, Switzerland

Watercolour over pencil heightened with bodycolour
47 by 64.8 cm., 18 ½ by 23 ½ in.

Provenance:
Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 24th July1925, lot 2, bt. Thomson;
David Croal Thomson, London (1855-1930);
Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert H. Spender-Clay (1875-1937) and Pauline Spender-Clay (1880-1972);
Thence by descent

Exhibited:
London, Royal Academy, Exhibition of Works by the late John S Sargent, R.A., 1926, no.149, p.25

Literature:
William Howe Downes, John S. Sargent: His Life and Work, London, 1926, p.317;
R. Ormond and E. Kilmurray, John Singer Sargent: Figures and Landscapes, 1908-1913, Complete Paintings: Volume VIII, New Haven and London, 2014, p.173, 371, no.1579, illustrated

The view depicted is the Hubschhorn (right) and the Kaltwasser Glacier to the east of the Simplon Pass in Switzerland. Sargent made several trips to the Alps between 1908 and 1912 and painted this view on a number of occasions. In the summer of 1910, the year the present picture was painted, Sargent and a party of friends, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, stayed at the Hotel Bellevue on the Simplon Pass. One companion, the artist Adrian Stokes, wrote at length about their visit to the Simplon, stating about Sargent that `though he most likely considered himself to be on a holiday his industry was constant. He also noted that the rapidity and directness with which he worked was amazing.' In this particular watercolour, Sargent contrasts the earthy green of the hillock in the foreground with the snow-covered mountains behind, using the white of the paper to help form the clouds and snow.

The Simplon was one of five watercolours by Sargent purchased in 1925 by Colonel Herbert H. Spender-Clay and his wife, Pauline Astor. Pauline Astor was born in New York, the daughter of William Waldorf Astor and Mary Dahlgreen Paul of Philadelphia. The Astors moved to London in 1891 and established themselves in English society by buying two grand houses, Cliveden House and Hever Castle. When Pauline's mother died in 1894, Pauline assumed the role of hostess.

The Spender-Clays lived at Ford Manor, Lingfield, Surrey and in London. They had three daughters, one of whom married Sir David Bowes-Lyon, the brother of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and became Lady Bowes-Lyon. The other married Sir Philip Bouverie Bowyer Nichols, a British diplomat and Ambassador, and became Lady Nichols. The third daughter died in infancy.

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