

Portrait of a Sportsman with two Spaniels, possibly Charles Hyett (1688-1738)

Thomas Robins



Description

Thomas Robins the Elder (1715-1770)

Portrait of a Sportsman with two Spaniels, possibly Charles Hyett (1688-1738)

Indistinctly signed lower right

Gouache on vellum, in an 18th century carved pearwood veneer frame

22.2 by 26.3 cm., 8 ¾ by 10 ¼ in.

Literature:

Cathryn Spence, *Nature's Favourite Child - Thomas Robins and the Art of the Georgian Garden*, 2021 p. 68, ill. fig. 53

As a portrait, this picture is almost unique in Robins's work and is likely to be of a Gloucestershire landowner. Cathryn Spence dates the work to 1738-40 and suggests it may depict Charles Hyett (1686-1738) who was MP for Gloucestershire from 1722 to 1727 and lived at Hunt Court, Badgeworth. His son Benjamin Hyett (1708-1762) was Robins' most important patron. The distinctive rocks in the background may be the quarries at Leckhampton Hill which are only a few miles from Badgeworth. It could also therefore possibly be a portrait of Captain Henry Skillicorne, the owner of Cheltenham Spa, whose wife's family owned land in Leckhampton. The rendering of the spaniels is very similar to that of the dogs in Robins' views of Henbury (Bristol Museums) and Stanwell (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven).

Thomas Robins was born at Charlton Kings near Cheltenham. Little is known of his early life but he was in Bath by 1760 where he established his reputation as a topographical artist producing views of the city and local grand houses. He returned to his home county drawing at least two panoramic views of the city of Cheltenham in 1748. One is in Cheltenham Art Gallery and another was sold at Christie's on 5th June 2007, lot 32 for a hammer price of £26,000 (see John Harris, *Gardens of Delight - The Rococo English Landscape of Thomas Robins the Elder*, 1978, p.20, pls. 35 and 37). A view of Sandywell Park a few miles south of Sudeley, dated 30th September 1758 is in an album of drawings by Robins in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Works by Robins are rare - two views by him of Honington Hall were sold at Christie's on 14th July 1987, lots 135 and 136 for £45,000 and £26,000 respectively.

Robins's importance is as one of the earliest topographical artists working on paper (or vellum), recording gardens and country houses from 1747 until the late 1760s when few others were doing so. His works are often drawn within a framework of painted intertwining rococo flowers. John Harris describes him as 'an artist who painted English houses and garden when they were most enchanting; whose eye captured the rococo garden at its perfection and when it was most whimsical; whose paintings are almost sensual in the sheer delight they give; such was Thomas Robins the Elder' (Harris, op. cit. above, p.1).

We are grateful to John Harris and Cathryn Spence for their help in cataloguing this picture.