

Study of Trees

Thomas Gainsborough, R.A.



Description

Thomas Gainsborough, R.A. (1727-1788)
A Study of Trees

Inscribed upper left: No 19
Pencil on laid paper
20 by 14.7 cm., 7 ¾ by 5 ¾ in.

Provenance:
Private collection, UK

Literature:

Hugh Belsey, 'A Second Supplement to John Hayes's 'The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough'', Master Drawings, vol. XLVI, 2008, no.1025, ill.

The present drawing has been dated by Hugh Belsey to circa 1756 and he compares it to Trees Overhanging a Stream in the Cantor Arts Centre, Stanford University (John Hayes, The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough, London, 1970, p. 138, no.107).

There are several sketches on similar size sheets to the present drawing, which was formerly part of the artist's sketchbooks used for his plein-air sketching at this period. In 1799 Gainsborough's daughter Margaret held a sale including ten sketchbooks belonging to her father. The whereabouts of the contents of several of these has been well documented and amongst the sheets are several carefully studied, but rapidly executed sketches of trees or compositional sketches from nature.

Bate Dudley in Gainsborough's obituary described Nature as Gainsborough's 'teacher and the woods of Suffolk his academy' (The Gentleman's Magazine, August 1788, p. 753). It is certainly true that during the early part of his career, the majority of Gainsborough's sketches are taken directly from nature and in particular trees and foliage and the present sketch is characteristic of these early studies. Although such studies were botanically accurate, Gainsborough's interest lay not in a desire to record such detail, rather they were intended to inform the artist's overall understanding of nature. He could then adapt such subjects in his finished paintings and drawings into a form and shape, that whilst immediately recognisable and full of animation and character, did not detract from the overall, elevated atmosphere he intended.