The Valley of La Grande Chartreuse, France

John Ruskin

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REF: 2929

Description

John Ruskin (1819-1900)
The Valley of La Grande Chartreuse, France

Inscribed in a later hand verso: ``The Grande Chartreuse' 'original drawing by John Ruskin/Reproduced in Praeterita Vol II sold/to me by M.r …. Severn Sep.t 1900/Rob.t E. Cunliffe/Exhibited at Coniston 1900
Pen and brown ink and watercolour over pencil heightened with touches of bodycolour on blue paper
32 by 48.7 cm., 12 ½ by 19 in.

Provenance:
Bequest from the artist to Arthur (1842-1931) and Mary Severn (1846-1924);
Sold to Robert Ellis Cunliffe (1848-1902), September 1900;
Acquired by the present owner, November 2007

Literature:
E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn ed., The Works of John Ruskin, London, 1903-12, vol. XXXV, 'Praeterita', illus. facing page p.473 pl. 35; vol. XXXVIII, p, 243, no. 477

Exhibited:
Cumbria, Coniston Institute, Ruskin Memorial Exhibition, July to September 1900, no. 66
London, Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours, Ruskin Exhibition February 4 - March 2 1901, no, 95

Ruskin visited La Grande Chartreuse in 1849 and despite the dramatic position of the monastery and its surroundings, he appears underwhelmed by his visit. He records that he 'had been totally disappointed with the Monastery itself, with the pass of approach to it, with the mountains round it, and with the monk who showed us through it. The buildings were meanly designed and confusedly grouped … and the monk … had no cowl worth the wearing, no beard worth the wagging, no expression but of superciliousness without sagacity, and an ungraciously dull manner…Having followed him for a time about the passages of the scattered building, in which there was nothing to show…we came to a pause at last in what I suppose was a type of a modern Carthusian's cell, wherein, leaning on the window sill, I said something in the style of Modern Painters, about the effect of the scene outside upon religious minds. Whereupon, with a curl of his lip, "We do not come here," said the monk, "to look at the mountains." Under which rebuke I bent my head silently, thinking however all the same, "What then, by all that's stupid, do you come here for at all?" (ibid).

This drawing belonged to Joan Severn (née Agnew) who was Ruskin's second cousin, and became companion to Ruskin's mother from 1864. She married Arthur Severn, the son of Ruskin's friend Joseph in April 1871, and the two became executors of Ruskin's estate as well as looking after him in his later years. It was bought by Robert Ellis Cunliffe in 1900. He was a successful Lancashire solicitor who retired to Coniston and formed a notable collection of watercolours including a number by Ruskin.

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