The Theatre of Xanthus, Lycia

William James Müller

Sold



REF: 1068

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Description

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William James Müller (1812-1845)
The Theatre of Xanthus, Lycia

Signed lower left: Theatre of Xanthus WM.1843
Watercolour over pencil, with collector's mark lower right
37.4 by 55.7 cm., 14 ¾ by 21 ¾ in.

Provenance:
Thomas George Baring, 1st Earl of Northbrook (1826-1904);
S. Rowland Pierce, his Executors's sale in these Rooms, 17th October 1968, lot 113, bt. Langham;
Dr Theodore Besterman, his sale, Christie's, 14th December 1971, lot 74, bt. Agnew;
A Deceased Estate sale, Sotheby's, 25th November 2004, lot 194, bt. by the present owner

Exhibited:
Brighton Art Gallery, 1962, no.69

This dates from the most important sketching tour of Müller's career, in Lycia in modern day Turkey in the winter of 1843-44. He left England with his pupil Harry John Johnson (1826-1884) on 12th September 1843 and after stopping for supplies at Smyrna met up with the archaeologist Sir Charles Fellowes, who had organised the expedition, at the mouth of the river Xanthus. On 1st November they walked the six miles to Xanthus, the ancient capital of Lycia and they remained in the area for three months. Müller worked constantly, despite the bad weather, and developed a looser more confident style and worked on a larger scale than he had before.

He returned with `one or two hundred drawings' (N. Neal Solly, Memoir of the Life of William Muller, 1875, p.200, letter from Müller to J. Satterfield, 12th February 1844) which were widely recognised as the finest achievement of his career. They were shown at a meeting of London's Graphic Society in January 1845 and then not until after his sudden death aged 33, only eighteenth months after his return. They were exhibited at the Bristol Institution, along with other works, before being sold in London. The Bristol Gazette described them thus: `The great characteristic of the sketches is their freedom and spirit - a bold, comprehensive, almost daring - and yet most natural - grasping of the subject….' (Bristol Gazette, 5th March 1846, p.3). For more on Müller's Lycian trip, see Greenacre and Stoddart, W.J. Müller, exhibition catalogue, 1991, p. 142-145.

This is a view of the remains of the Lycian city of Xanthus. In the foreground is a typical Lycian house tomb where the stone has been hewn to imitate wooden roof beams. The Roman amphitheatre is behind and probably dates from the 2nd century AD. It is relatively intact, with only the upper rows of the auditorium missing, having been used as construction material for later buildings. On the far right is the top of the Pillar tomb, an unusual funeral monument in Lycia, as it is actually two tombs in one and it is likely to date from the 4th or 3rd centuries B.C.

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