

A Couple under a Tree, possibly the Artist and his Wife

Richard Cosway



Description

Richard Cosway (1742-1821)

A Couple under a Tree, possibly the Artist and his Wife

Pencil

22.8 by 14 cm., 9 by 5 ½ in.

The present drawing appears to relate to a print depicting the artist and his wife, in 17th Century costume, probably in their garden at Schomberg House, Pall Mall, with their servant, the celebrated anti-slavery campaigner, Quobna Ottobah Cugoana, also known as John Stuart. (c.1757-c.1791). Cosway was influenced by the work of Sir Peter Rubens, whose work he also collected, and the present drawing, is one of a small group depicting a couple in costume, inspired by Rubens work.

In January 1781 Cosway married the artist and musician Maria Hadfield and during the following decade, the couple were at the centre of fashionable society in London. They operated a popular salon, hosted musical evenings, from their home in the heart of St James's and numbered the Gainsboroughs amongst their neighbours. They published original music compositions and drew the most eminent figures of the day, many of whom numbered amongst their patrons, including George, Prince of Wales (later George IV) for whom Richard Cosway worked for thirty years.

Maria was the eldest child of Charles Hadfield and Isabella Pocock, who owned a hotel in Florence. Maria was talented both in music and drawing and aged 13, she came to the notice of Johann Zoffany (1733-1810), who encouraged her artistic ability and introduced her to many of the leading artists of the day. In 1778 she was elected to the Florentine Accademia del Disegno. In 1776, Maria's mother and younger siblings had returned to England, following the death of her father and in 1779, Maria was called to join them. She arrived with letters of recommendation and introduced to the leading figures in the London art world, including Sir Joshua Reynolds and Angelica Kauffman.

Although welcomed by the London art world, Maria found it difficult to forge an independent career, which may have, in part at least, led her to accepting Cosway's offer of marriage. The marriage however, appears to have caused Maria further problems professionally, with her husband's refusal to allow her to sell her work. Consequently, Maria began to spend long periods in Italy and France, where she concentrated on encouraging girls' education, establishing a school at Lyons in 1803 and then at Lodi in Lombardy in 1812. She returned to London in 1817 to nurse her ailing husband and remained until his death in 1821, when she then returned to Europe, settling in Lodi until her death in 1837