Portraits of the Artist's Sons

Lady Diana Beauclerk

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Description

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Lady Diana Beauclerk (1734-1808)
Portraits of the Artist's Sons

Half length, one looking left, the other right
A pair, pastel
Both 44.2 by 34.5 cm., 17 ¼ by 13 ½ in.

Provenance:
By descent in the Spencer family at Woolbeding House, Midhurst;
Bequeathed to Henry Arthur Lascelles, Wooldbeding House (1842-1913) in 1873;
By descent in the Lascelles family at Woolbeding until sold, Sotheby's London, 19th October 1970, lot 63, bt, Winifred Williams;
Mrs Franklin, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Exhibited:
Gerald N. Norman Gallery, London, circa 1971

These are portraits of the artist's children, George Richard, Viscount Bolingbroke (1761-1824) andFrederick St John (1765-1844) dating from circa 1770. They descended in the artist's family at WoolbedingHouse until they were sold at Sotheby's in 1970 with a number of other works by Beauclerk. The sale alsoincluded a portrait of George with a pug (lot 52) (now untraced). An earlier portrait of George learning towrite was recorded at Lydiard Park in 1992. A portrait of the artist's daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, wassold at Sotheby's on 15th July 1999, lot 51.

Lady Diana Beauclerk's brother Lord Robert Spencer (1747-1831) bought Woolbeding House in 1791. It descended in the Spencer family to his illegitimate daughter Diana Bouverie (b.1786 to his mistress Harriet Bouverie whom he married in 1811). Diana Bouverie (1786-1873) married George Ponsonby (1774-1863)in 1812 and bequeathed Woolbeding House to their relations, the Lascelles, on her death. The house was given to the National Trust but the Lascelles family continued to live at Woolbeding until 1969 shortly before the present pictures were sold at Sotheby's in 1970.

Lady Beauclerk was born Lady Diana Spencer and was the eldest daughter of Charles Spencer, 3rd Duke of Marlborough. She grew up at Blenheim Palace and made copies of the pictures there from a young age. In 1757 she married the 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke but he was serially unfaithful so, controversially for the time, she left him for her lover Topham Beauclerk (1739-1780). This led to divorce in 1768 and she married Beauclerk two days later. They moved in court circles and Lady Diana's closest friends were thecountesses of Pembroke and Spencer and the Duchess of Devonshire. Horace Walpole, Lord Orford, wasalso a close friend of the couple and the diarist Joseph Farington recalls his views of them: ` Lord Orfordmentioned many particulars relative to the late Mr. Topham Beauclerc [the celebrated wit]. He said He wasthe worst tempered man He ever knew. Lady Di passed a most miserable life with him. Lord 0, out of regardto her invited them occasionally to pass a few days at Strawberry Hill. They slept in separate beds.Beauclerc was remarkably filthy in his person which generated vermin. He took Laudanum regularly in vastquantities. He seldom rose before one or two o'clock.'

After his husband's death, she moved into Devonshire Cottage in Richmond. She was well known for her drawings of children and infant cupids and bacchantes, some of which were engraved by Bartolozzi, and she also produced designs for Wedgwood pottery. Walpole was a great admirer of her work and...

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