Study of a Dead Pheasant

Joseph Mallord William Turner, R.A.

Sold

Guy Peppiatt Fine Art Ltd.
Riverwide House, 6 Mason's Yard, Duke St. St. James's, London, SW1Y 6BU
T: 020 7930 3839 M: 07956 968 284 E: guy@peppiattfineart.co.uk www.peppiattfineart.co.uk

REF: 2282

Description

Joseph Mallord William Turner, R.A. (1775-1851)
Study of a Dead Pheasant

Watercolour over pencil heightened with bodycolour
27.4 by 39.2 cm., 10 ¾ by 15 ¼ in.

Provenance:
Probably Walter Fawkes (1769-1825) of Farnley Hall, Yorkshire, or his family;
Probably John Ruskin (1819-1900), his sale, Christie's, 15th April 1869, lot Vokins;
Sir Donald Currie (1825-1909);
By descent until 2019

Literature:
Anne Lyles, Turner and Natural History - The Farnley Project, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery, 1988, p.60, no.39, ill.

Exhibited:
London, Tate Gallery, Turner and Natural History - The Farnley Project, 10th October 1988 to 2nd January 1989, no.39

This is one of a group of watercolours of birds drawn by Turner between 1815 and 1825 for Walter Fawkes and his family. Walter Fawkes was one of Turner's closest friends and most important patrons between 1803 and his death in 1825. Turner was a regular visitor to Fawkes's house at Farnley Hall near Otley in West Yorkshire from 1808 and there was a room reserved there for his own use whenever he wanted it. Fawkes's collection of Turners eventually numbered around 200 in all. As well as many sketchbooks of drawings executed at Farnley and the surrounding area now in the Tate Gallery, Turner produced almost forty finished watercolours of the house, grounds and neighbourhood, between 1816 and 1819, which are still at Farnley Hall.

Turner produced twenty drawings for Fawkes's five volume Ornithological Collection which included details relating to over 250 species of birds, many accompanied by a watercolour illustration and others by engravings taken from other books and bird feathers and was put together between 1815 and 1820. Turner's drawings were removed from the albums on the advice of John Ruskin after Turner's death in 1851 and remained at Farnley until they were sold to Leeds City Art Gallery in 1984.

This present watercolour is part of a group of bird studies which were too large to have been included in the Ornithological Collection. It is thought they may have been drawn for other members of the Fawkes family or perhaps for Turner's own use but it is likely they were drawn at Farnley. Ruskin certainly thought saw: `Nowhere but at Farnley. He could only do them joyfully there!' (quoted in E.M. Fawkes, `Mr Ruskin at Farnley', The Nineteenth Century, 1900, vol. 47, p.622). Fawkes's niece Amelia Hawksworth is known to have owned two game studies and three studies of bird's heads by Turner.

Anne Lyles suggests that this may be one of the two studies of dead pheasants by Turner in John Ruskin's sale at Christie's in 1869 as lots 10 and 11. We know that lot 11 is now in the Whitworth Art Gallery (Lyles, op. cit. no.40) and is described by Ruskin in the catalogue as `Dead Pheasant. Finished study. Superb.' This is likely to be lot 10 described as `Dead Pheasant. Slight, but a beautiful example of Turner's most rapid work in the middle period.'

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John Ruskin is known to have owned at least five studies of dead game by Turner with others examples in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Lyles, op. cit., no.38), Indianapolis Museum of Art (Lyles no.60) and one location unknown (Lyles no.6...

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