Study of Oak Leaves

John Ruskin

Sold

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Description

John Ruskin (1819-1900)
Study of Oak Leaves

Signed lower right: J. Ruskin/Brantwood 10 Sept 1879
Watercolour over traces of pencil
22.2 by 27.9 cm., 8 ¾ by 10 ¾ in.

Provenance:
With the Leicester Galleries, London, where bought July 2002;
Private Collection

The present drawing is part of a small group of rapidly executed studies of oak leaves, executed in September 1879. Two other drawings are in the Guild of St George, Museums Sheffield. One bears an inscription which states that it was drawn to show his friend and neighbour, Susan Beever 'the manner of his work'. As Christopher Newell has noted, in this group of lively studies, Ruskin has found 'in the contorted shapes and crackling textures of the leaves a sculptural character analogous to the decoration of a carved capital or a piece of wrought iron'. (see John Ruskin, Artist and Observer, London 2014 p. 346). By placing the twig and its leaves centrally on the sheet, and viewing the subject up close, Ruskin has imbued the subject with a monumentality. This study was executed at Brantwood, the artist's Lake District home, which he had bought in 1871 and which provided him with a tranquil escape from the pressures of his working life. Like at least one of the studies in the Guild of St George, the current drawing is on a dark pink paper which has bleached.

Throughout his career, Ruskin made careful studies of leaves, branches, foliage, feathers and other small natural elements. His interest always appears to be in capturing the inherent beauty in the shapes and forms of his chosen subject, rather than in botanical accuracy.

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