

Coastal Scene with Boats

Thomas Gainsborough, R.A.

Sold



Description

Thomas Gainsborough, R.A. (1727-1788)
Coastal Scene with Boats

Grey and grey-black washes over traces of pencil heightened with scratching out
27.5 by 35.9 cm., 10 ³/₄ by 14 in.

Provenance:

With Albany Gallery, London;
With Spinks, from whom purchased, 1960s;
Burnett Family, London until 2014

Literature:

Octagon, Summer 1968, p. 17;
John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 1970, vol. I, p.220, no.485

This evocative late work by Gainsborough is a rare coastal view by the artist and has been in a private collection since the 1960s. Perhaps inspired by a sketching trip to the coast of Devon in 1779, Gainsborough exhibited two coastal views at the Royal Academy in 1781, 'Coastal Scene' is in the Westminster collection (see Gainsborough, exhibition catalogue edited by Michael Rosenthal and Martin Myrone, 2002, no. 56, pp.134-5, ill.) and an accompanying coastal view now at Anglesey Abbey. Both, like the present drawing, were invented views but were enthusiastically received by the critics. A writer in the *Morning Chronicle* described the two seascapes as 'full of the cheerfulness of the best Flemish painters, the elegance and grace of the first Italian artists, and have as much truth and correctness as has fallen to the share of any subjects of this sort.' Horace Walpole describes them in a letter to William Mason as 'so free and natural that one steps back for fear of being splashed' (*The Letters of Horace Walpole*, Oxford 1904, vol. II, p.439). Gainsborough was certainly inviting comparison with the seventeenth century Dutch artists such as Jacob van Ruisdael and Van Goyen who were so popular at the time in England and the strong diagonals and dramatic light and weather are reminiscent of de Loutherbourg.

This drawing differs from the oil in the Westminster collection only in that the rock in the centre of this work has been transformed into a figure group in the oil and clearly dates from the same period. Another oil of a coastal view, 'Seashore with Fishermen', also dating from the early 1780s is in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (op. cit., 2002, p. 254-5, no. 151). The only other recorded drawing of a coastal subject is in the Detroit Institute of Arts (see Hayes, op. cit., no. 486, p. 221, ill. pl. 152) and it is a near replica of the Westminster oil.