

Colosseum

Allan Ramsay

Sold



Description

Allan Ramsay (1713-1784)
The Interior of the Colosseum, Rome

Pen and brown ink and watercolour over traces of pencil on two sheets of joined laid paper
Inscribed verso: Rev.....
53.8 by 38 cm., 21 by 15 in.

This is one of a group of watercolours of the Colosseum drawn on Ramsay's second visit to Rome in 1754-57. It was probably drawn on a sketching exhibition made in the summer of 1755 with his friend and fellow Scot, the architect and designer Robert Adam (1728-1792) and the French draughtsman Charles-Louis Clérisseau (1721-1820). The three other known views of the interior of the Colosseum by Ramsay are all in the National Galleries of Scotland. All are upright in format and relate closely in style to the present work. One of them (D1023) is on a very similarly sized sheet (see Andrew Wilton, *Grand Tour - the Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century*, exhibition catalogue 1996, no. 108, p.155, ill.). Although Ramsay is best known for his portrait paintings, he also had a serious antiquarian side. The principal aim of his 1750s tour was to find the lost villa of the Roman poet Horace. Indeed from 1773 he gave up painting to concentrate on classical scholarship, so the appeal to him of the Colosseum is obvious.

Ramsay was born in Edinburgh, the son of an important Scottish poet of the same name. He studied in London at the St. Martin's Lane Academy in the early 1730s before travelling to Rome where he studied at the French Academy from 1736 under Francesco Imperiali and then under Solimena in Naples. He was very successful on his return as a portrait painter both in London and Edinburgh and was appointed official painter to George III in 1760. Ramsay left England in the summer of 1754 accompanied by his second wife and his sister Catherine. They were intending to go straight to Rome but having enjoyed Florence they decided to stay for a few weeks. They arrived in Rome in mid December and found lodgings in the unfashionable Viminale area. He wrote to his friend Sir Alexander Dick: 'Our rooms are spacious, and, standing high above the Tiber, the air very wholesome. But that which chiefly recommends the situation to me is its distance from the Piazza di Spagna, by which I am enabled to seclude myself a great deal from the English travellers without falling out with any of them, and to preserve the greatest part of my time for painting, drawing and reading, which, were I living in their neighbourhood, would be altogether spent in dinners, suppers and jaunts' (letter of 12th November 1755, quoted in Allan Ramsay: *Painter, Essayist and Man of the Enlightenment*, 1992, p.117).

In late February 1755, the young Scottish architect Robert Adam arrived in Rome under the patronage of the Hon. Charles Hope. He stayed with his friend the artist Clérisseau in a grand house, the Casa Guarnieri, near the Spanish Steps. Adam initially found Ramsay, fifteen years his senior, morose and unfriendly, but they soon became friends. They would often meet in each other's houses for weekly *Conservazioni*, at which Piranesi would often be present. They would also go on sketching expeditions together as well as long evening walks. Ramsay's watercolours of the Colosseum we...