The Falls of the Liri at Isola di Sora, Italy

Richard Wilson

Sold



REF: 2501

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Description

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Richard Wilson, R.A. (1714-1782)
The Falls of the Liri at Isola di Sora, Italy

Black chalk, stump and pencil on laid paper on original wash mount
Sheet 26.5 by 40.4 cm., 10 ¼ by 16 in.

Provenance:
William Lock of Norbury (1767-1847);
Iolo Williams (1890-1962);
Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, 10th July 1980, lot 137;
Edward Croft-Murray (1907-1980);
By descent until 2021

Literature:
Brinsley Ford, The Drawings of Richard Wilson, London, 1951, p. 33;
William George Constable, Richard Wilson, London, 1953, p. 211, under pl. 98b;
Dr Paul Spencer-Longhurst, with Kate Lowry and David Solkin, Richard Wilson Online: A Digital Catalogue Raisonné, (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2014)., no. D337a

Born in Penegoes, Powys, North Wales, Wilson became the leading British landscape artist of his generation, as well as one of the great artistic pioneers of the 18th century. He was instrumental in elevating landscape painting from being regarded as either topographical, or merely descriptive, into a genre in its own right, often imbued with classical or historical associations.

Wilson initially established himself as a portrait painter, however during the time he spent in Italy, between 1750 and 1757, he became increasingly interested in landscape painting. He was inspired by European contemporaries, such as Francesco Zuccarelli (1702-1788), whom he met in Venice in 1751 and Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789), who he met shortly afterwards in Rome and who strongly recommended landscape as a genre in preference to portraiture. Subsequently Wilson altered track and it is his landscape painting for which he is most celebrated.

On Wilson's return to London, he established a studio in the affluent Piazza of Covent Garden. He was a founding member of both the Society of Artists in 1760 and of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768, and he exhibited regularly at both institutions. However, in later years, for reasons which are still uncertain, Wilson's reputation underwent a rapid decline from which it has only recently recovered. He turned increasingly to drink in his last years, eventually unable to even hold the post of Librarian at the Royal Academy, which his fellow Academicians had appointed him in an effort to help him. In 1781 he retired to the home of his cousin, Catherine Jones at Colomendy Hall, Clwyd, where he died the following year.

The view depicted in the present drawing, is probably the Cascata Grande, Isola del Liri, near Frosinine, south-east of Rome, with the Castello Buoncompagni on the left, overlooking the falls. Robert Adam also depicted the Falls of Liri in June 1756 (contained in the album 'The Travel Drawings of Robert and James Adam', vol. 1/243, Sir John Soane's Museum, London).

We are grateful to Dr Paul Spencer-Longhurst for his comments on this drawing.

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