Study of a Left Hand

James Ward, R.A.



REF: 3292

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Description

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James Ward, R.A. (1769-1859)
Study of a Left Hand

Signed with initials lower left
Grey washes and pencil on laid paper
22.6 by 32.1 cm., 8 3/4 by 12 1/2 in.

Provenance:
Russell Worby (1954-2025)

add note:

Although Ward never undertook formal training at the Royal Academy, he had a deep-seated natural curiosity and strong desire to understand the world around him, not just in general, but through a careful detailed study of their component parts. He copied antique sculpture and attended anatomy lessons, with Joshua Brookes's, where he was able to explore both human and animal anatomy and where for a small additional fee, students were allowed to dissect and sketch the corpses.

There is a further anatomical study of a left hand in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, which appears to be the same hand as depicted here. It seems likely that it depicts the hand of Mary Thomas (c.1723-1813), the fasting woman of Wales, who, along with another supposed fasting figure, Anne Moore from Tetbury in Gloucestershire, Ward visited several times, having read Thomas Pennant's account of meeting Mary Thomas in his Journey to Snowdon, 1781. Ward later published his own account of these visits and his conversations with the women in 1813: Some account of Mary Thomas of Tanyralt in Merionethshire, who has existed many years without taking food: and of Ann Moore, commonly called the fasting woman of Tutbury. Accompanied with portraits and illustrative etchings. Both the present hand and the study in the Fitzwilliam bear strong similarities to Ward's drawing of Mary Thomas in bed, with her skeletal left hand resting on her chest, in the British Museum.

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