

Mrs Augusta Innes Withers



Prize pair of Foreign Birds

Reference: 10842

Dimensions:

Height: 31.60 cm / 12½ in

Width: 41.40 cm / 16¼ in

Watercolour over traces of pencil heightened with gum arabic and white, with framing instructions in pencil, verso, inscribed with title on original label attached to backboard

31.6 x 41.4 cm.; 12 ½ x 16 ¼ inches

See The Nursery for the artist's biography. Both drawings have a painted marble ledge on which the birds are arranged, a compositional device favoured by the artist and used in Dutch still lifes. The combination of birds and flowers in an elaborate arrangement in this and The Nursery were subjects which Withers favoured in 1840s and a departure from her botanical work. The embossed and moulded milk glass of the vase and urn were popular in the early 19th century and

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have been beautifully rendered by Withers. The introduction of a window, here delicately drawn with a cracked pane and bubble in the glass, looks back to the Old Masters. The landscape beyond suggests a freedom not enjoyed by the captive birds and is a reminder of the interior world inhabited by women of the mid-Nineteenth century.

Withers forms part of a distinguished cohort of female artists who drew natural history subjects in inventive and diverse ways. Predecessors such as Rachel Ruysch (1664 - 1750) or Barbara Dietzsch (1706 - 1783) had similarly scientific approaches to their subjects and her work merits consideration in this broader context (see Catherine Powell-Warren, *Making her Mark, A History of Women Artists in Europe 1400-1800*, 2023, 'Scientific and Natural Illustration', p. 225-228).