

Francis Nicholson



Windermere with St Martin's Bowness

Reference: 10912

Dimensions:

Height: 30 cm / 11³/₄ in

Width: 41.60 cm / 16³/₈ in

KT327

Windermere with St Martin's Bowness

Watercolour over pencil, in the original English Carlo section frame

30 x 41.6 cm.; 11 ³/₄ x 16 ³/₈ inches

Provenance: Private collection Scotland, until 2019

framed

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

Francis Nicholson

Francis Nicholson was born in Pickering, Yorkshire on 14 November 1753, the son of a weaver. A founder member of the Society of Painters in Water-Colours he was dubbed 'The Father of Watercolour Painting' by his contemporaries. These beautiful drawings probably date from 1792-3 and represent the very best of his work, perfectly capturing the distinctive light and colour of the Lake District.

He lived the first thirty years of his life in various Yorkshire towns, learning from local teachers and painting portraits and animals, mainly in oils. He made two visits to London and took lessons from C.N. Metz.

In 1783 he settled in Whitby and took up landscape painting in watercolour, and first exhibited at the R.A. in 1789. An important early patron was Lord Bute who commissioned him to travel to the Isle of Bute to make a set of paintings.

He toured the Lake District with Sir Henry and Lady Tuite circa 1795 and they remained important friends and patrons until Sir Henry's death in 1805.

Nicholson was commissioned by his patron Walter Fawkes of Farnley Hall in Yorkshire, also an important early collector of J.M.W. Turner, to provide him with numerous watercolours of views of the Lakes. Nicholson and Fawkes corresponded in 1798 on several occasions and Fawkes waxed lyrical about the artist's work (R. Davies, "Francis Nicholson: Some Family Letters and Papers", Old Water-Colour Society's Club, 1930-1, Vol. VII, London 1931, pp. 15-30).

Around this time Nicholson pioneered a new process of watercolour whereby he stopped out light areas with a mixture of beeswax and turpentine coloured with flake-white. This allowed the application of a wash, the removal of the solution in a few areas, further application of more washes, until the multiple washes gave depth to the shadows while the remaining areas were beautifully graded in tone. Finally the highlights were applied in brilliant colour. Nicholson demonstrated this technique to the Society of Arts in 1799. In the 'Transactions of the Society' later in the year watercolours done up to that time were described as 'stained drawings' and it was stated that Nicholson's new method had produced a breakthrough allowing watercolours to be regarded as 'proper paintings' ('Transactions of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts etc', Vol. 17 (1799), p. 296).

Nicholson resigned from the Society of Painters in Watercolours in 1813, comfortably off and to concentrate on his flourishing work as a drawing master. His professional success enabled him to develop experimental techniques in his later years and he was a pioneer in the development of lithography in England.

In the Nicholson sale of 1844 lots 117-119 list 117 sketches of Cumberland and Westmoreland drawn between 1794 - 1807.

Examples of Nicholson's work can be found in most major British public collections.

Bibliography

R. Davies, 'Francis Nicholson: Some Family Letters and Papers', Old Water-Colour Society's Club, 1930-1, Vol. VII, London 1931

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B.S. Long, 'Francis Nicholson, Painter and Lithographer', Walker's Quarterly, no. 14, January 1924, Walker's Galleries, London;

G. Bell, C. Coulson and J. Dixon, 'Francis Nicholson (1753-1844)', 2012