

Gainsborough Dupont



Three rural oil sketches

Reference: 10991

Dimensions:

Height: 30 cm / 11³/₄ in

Width: 39 cm / 15³/₈ in

i A figure with a pitcher near a cottage with two donkeys

Oil on varnished laid paper

30 x 39 cm; 11³/₄ x 15³/₈ inches

ii A woodland cottage with cows near a pond

Oil on varnished laid paper with traces of pencil

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30.5 x 44.6 cm; 12 x 17 1/2 inches

iii A wooded landscape with a herdsman and cows near a cottage

Oil on varnished laid paper

25 x 34 cm; 9 3/4 x 13 3/8 inches

iv A landscape with a herdsman and cows

Oil on varnished laid paper with traces of pencil

29.5 x 37 cm; 11 5/8 x 14 1/2 inches

Sold (iv)

Provenance:

John Mayheux (d. 1839); General Arthur Easton (1863–1949); By whom bequeathed to his godson Major C. G. Carew Hunt (d. 1980); With Michael Harvard by 1959; With Edward Speelman; Brian Jenks, his sale, Sotheby's, London, 27 June 1973, lot 46; Where acquired by the father of the previous owner, by descent until 2018.

Exhibited : Victoria Art Gallery, Bath, Festival of Britain 'Gainsborough Exhibition', 1951.

Literature: John Hayes, 'The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough', 1982, vol. 1, pp. 196 and 231, no. 24, illus. plate 262 (landscape with herdsman and cows).

These virtuoso oil sketches are from a larger group of about thirteen done by Gainsborough Dupont, Thomas Gainsborough's nephew, pupil and studio assistant, and were thought to be by Gainsborough until John Hayes positively identified the hand of Dupont. Five of this group are in the collection of the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, two are in the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, and two are at Gainsborough's House, Sudbury. Eight were sold at Sotheby's, London, in June 1973, including the present examples.

Hayes describes these oil sketches on paper as amongst Gainsborough Dupont's finest works, splendidly fluent, richly painted, these decorative compositions, with their surface emphasis and animation, are a fine late expression of the rococo (Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 231). He notes that they are Dupont's most personal and distinctive contribution to the genre, and of historical interest as oil sketches clearly intended as finished compositions for display. The group exemplifies what Hayes described as Dupont's latter-day rococo emphasis on decorative picturemaking: on surface pattern, rhythmic forms and line, and brilliant, often darting or flickering effects of light (*ibid.*, p. 191). The two unfinished landscapes illustrate how the artist painted confidently directly on to paper with oils, sometimes with pencil underdrawing.

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The first reference to Gainsborough Dupont's landscapes appears to have been in 1792 when the journalist Bate-Dudley, who was well informed about the workings of Gainsborough's studio, records that some beautiful little studies of rural nature have also lately employed this Artist's pencil ('Morning Herald', 9 March 1792; see Hayes, op. cit., pp. 188-9 and 235). Philip Thicknesse, one of Gainsborough's oldest friends, notes 'at the end of his brief life of Gainsborough that Dupont was a man of exquisite genius, little inferior in the line of a painter to his uncle ... either as a landscape or Portrait painter' (ibid., pp. 187 and 302). Mrs Bell noted that his original works were chiefly landscapes ('Thomas Gainsborough', London, 1897, p. 66).

Gainsborough Dupont was born in Sudbury, Suffolk, on 24 December 1754, the third son of Philip Dupont and Thomas Gainsborough's sister Sarah. In the 1760s Dupont was sent to Bath to be raised by his aunt Mary Gibbon, the recently widowed sister of Thomas and Sarah, who set up a millinery shop there beside her brother's studio in 1762. On 12 January 1772, Dupont was formally apprenticed to Gainsborough, the older man's first and only studio assistant, and worked for him for sixteen years. Dupont was painted by his uncle four times in the early 1770s (see David Solkin et al., 'Gainsborough's Family Album', National Portrait Gallery, London, 2018, nos 26, 32& 48 and fig. 36). On 6 March 1775, some nine months after the Gainsboroughs moved to London, Dupont joined the Royal Academy Schools. After his formal training he worked in his uncle's studio in Schomberg House, Pall Mall, and continued to live at his home there, where he learned to scrape mezzotints and made small copies in oil after his uncle's portraits. In 1784, Gainsborough asked him to copy a portrait of Queen Caroline to accompany a portrait of her husband George III by John Shackleton in Huntingdon Town Hall. After Gainsborough's death on 2 August 1788, his nephew had the opportunity to develop his own practice.

Dupont continued to work in the studio at Schomberg House. Portrait commissions came, notably from George III, who admired his work, and from some of the children of his uncle's friends. In 1793 he was given his most prestigious commission, to paint a huge canvas, larger than any his uncle had painted, of the Elder Brethren of Trinity House: thirty-one figures placed across a canvas nine and a half feet tall and nearly nineteen feet wide. The group portrait - commissioned to decorate the newly completed headquarters of Trinity House on Tower Hill - took three years to complete. In 1794 Thomas Harris (d. 1820), a theatrical proprietor, commissioned a series of spirited portraits of actors that are, with a few exceptions, now in the Garrick Club, London. Dupont was also a painter of landscapes (see catalogue by John Hayes, op. cit., pp. 192-6) and he exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1790 to 1795.

Hayes notes that the dating of Dupont's landscapes is problematic, but that there does appear to be a progression from a grand, slightly stiff manner, through a poetic, pastoral kind of landscape, linking with Gainsborough's smaller late works, to a more fluent, vigorous and dramatic style, possibly influenced by Lawrence. This group fits into his later oeuvre.

John Mayheux, the first owner of these pictures, was an assistant at the Board of Control, under Lord Melville, which oversaw the activities of the East India Company from London.