

John Frederick Lewis, R.A.



Thomas Emerson seated at a table in an interior, reading a newspaper

Reference: 11069

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

Dimensions:

Height: 52.60 cm / 20¾ in

Width: 42.50 cm / 16¾ in

Watercolour over traces of pencil with scratching out and touches of bodycolour and gum arabic. Probably drawn in 1829

52.6 x 42.5 cm

This previously unrecorded watercolour of a man seated in an interior almost certainly represents the picture dealer and collector Thomas Emmerson (c. 1776–1855). 1 It is similar in style and technique to a group of watercolours of interiors, some including a figure, that Lewis painted in the late 1820s and early 1830s.

On the wall behind Emmerson hangs a well-known painting by Pieter de Hooch, *A Courtyard in Delft*, 1657, now in the Royal Collection. 2 This painting was included in Ralph Bernal's sale of 37 Dutch paintings at Christie's on 8 May 1824, lot 33, and bought by the dealer Michael Peacock for £150. It seems that Emmerson acquired it from Peacock, who was a friend and occasional colleague. Emmerson then consigned it, together with other paintings from his collection, to a sale with Harry Phillips on 1–2 May 1829, where it was lot 152. An evening reception was held to attract prospective buyers, and both the reception and the auction were popular events, apparently because the collection had been sent to Carlton House for George IV's consideration. The de Hooch entered the Royal Collection at this date, by private sale to the King, as recorded in a copy of the sale catalogue owned by another prominent dealer, John Smith. It seems likely that the present watercolour was painted in 1829 to celebrate this important sale.

Emmerson began trading around 1805, and in 1820 he moved into 20 Stratford Place, the former home of the artist Richard Cosway. He maintained his London residence until 1854, the year in which his wife Eliza died. In 1833 he also acquired Smallcombe Villa, on Bathwick Hill, Bath, which he remodelled and extended to include a picture gallery, renaming the house Smallcombe Grove.

The only other probable image of Emmerson is in a group portrait by the French portrait and historical painter, Innocent-Louis Goubaud (fl. 1780–1847) set in Christie's auction room during a sale on 14 June 1828, when John Smith bought *The Snake in the Grass* by Sir Joshua Reynolds for Sir Robert Peel. (Peel was included in the painting, although he did not attend the sale.) Goubaud's painting was destroyed in the Second World War, but fortunately it had been photographed and it is reproduced in William Roberts's *Memorials of Christie's*. 3 The man likely to be Emmerson is standing behind John Smith and wearing spectacles to enable him to see the auctioneer, the lots on offer and other bidders. 4 If he was short-sighted he would not have needed glasses for close work, such as reading the newspaper shown in the present drawing. His beaky nose, high forehead, receding hairline and slightly sagging jowls are apparent in both depictions. In Goubaud's painting, Smith is shown seated with his hand raised to bid for the Reynolds painting; also represented are the 2nd Marquess of Stafford, Lady Morgan, John Allnut and James Christie (see photograph below).

Emmerson purchased paintings both publicly at auction and privately; for instance, in 1821 he acquired a group of paintings from the Paignon-Dijouval collection, most of which were sold in Paris at auction in December that year. He and Smith worked closely together and conducted a significant amount of business in France. He bought and sold many paintings by Dutch and Flemish masters: works by Teniers, van Ostade, Dou, Metsu, ter Borch and Cuyp, as well as de

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Hooch, and even Vermeer's View of Delft passed through his hands. He sold pictures to William Beckford and to George Lucy of Charlecote Park, Warwickshire. Emmerson also sold paintings at well-advertised auctions throughout his many decades of activity, mainly because he attempted to withdraw from the business on more than one occasion. In 1837, no doubt in reference to a sale taking place on 19–20 May that year (Lugt 14726), George Gunn noted that Emmerson was selling again, perhaps for the last time. 5 However, sales of the dealer's collection continued to take place in London, often without any reserves, indicating that he hoped to dispose of all of his stock. John Smith described him as a rich man in a draft letter to the financially strapped Gunn, but thought he would be reluctant to part with his money. 6 Although Emmerson was predominantly known as a dealer in paintings, he also bought and sold objects of antiquarian interest – armour, furniture, ceramics, objets d'art and vertu.

Emmerson also did business with some of Smith's other clients, such as Sir Charles Bagot, and he was involved in Bagot's purchase of The Intruder by Metsu (bought by Smith at auction) in 1831. 7 In 1823 he sold a painting by Wouwermans to Sir Robert Peel through Smith for 450 guineas. 8

The dealer's wife Eliza (1782–1854) was a patron of John Clare (1793–1864) and a poet herself: their friendship is well documented in surviving correspondence. In a letter to Clare of 1826, Eliza apologised for not sending him that week's newspapers, since her husband had yet to read them as he had been abroad. 9 The Emmersons were also close to another of Clare's patrons, William Waldegrave, 1st Lord Radstock (1758–1825), whom Thomas advised on artistic matters.

Lewis painted and exhibited a number of interiors depicting objects of antiquarian interest between c. 1828 and 1834. They enabled the artist to show off his talent for depicting a variety of textures and colours using bodycolour and scratching out in order to enhance the richness of the surface of his watercolour. This work may be compared with his An Interior, in Tate Britain, dated c. 1834, 10 which shows a seated woman stitching lace in a room with antique objects, including the richly embroidered yellow tablecloth and small round blue and red vase seen in the Emmerson watercolour. The Tate watercolour also includes two framed paintings: a Dutch scene and a Venetian subject by Bonington, a tribute to the talented artist, who died young. The tablecloth was a favourite of the artist's; he also used it in a watercolour depicting John Bulteel of Flete in an interior, exhibited as The Squire at the Society of Painters in Water Colours in 1830. 11 This interior also includes four paintings on the walls by or after the Flemish artist Frans Snyders. A further watercolour, Interior of a Studio, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, also shows a framed Dutch painting, probably based on an engraving of de Hooch's Woman drinking with two men and a maid. 12

Literature:

William Roberts, *Memorials of Christie's: a record of art sales from 1766 to 1896*, London, George Bell & Sons, 2 vols, 1897, facing p. 120, pp. 121–2. Sir Christopher White, *The Dutch Paintings in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen*, 2016, no. 84. Charles Sebag-Montefiore with Julia I. Armstrong-Totten, *A Dynasty of Dealers: John Smith and Successors 1801–1924, A Study of the Art Market in Nineteenth-Century London*, London, Roxburghe Club, 2013. Mark W. Westgarth, *A Biographical Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Antique and Curiosity Dealers*, Regional Furniture XXIII, 2009, Regional Furniture Society, Glasgow. This watercolour is to be included in two forthcoming articles: by Julia Armstrong-Totten, 'Partners and frenemies: the networking strategies of 19th century picture dealer John Smith (1781–1855)' in Susanna Avery-Quash and Barbara Pezzini, eds, 'A Worldwide Market for Old Masters between the Napoleonic Era and the Great Depression' (working title), to be published in late 2017/early 2018; and by Briony Llewellyn, who will be writing about the series of antiquarian interiors produced by Lewis in the late 1820s and early 1830s. With particular thanks to Briony

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

Llewellyn, Charles Newton and Julia I. Armstrong-Totten; also to Emma Trehane for her comments about Eliza Emmerson, Mark Westgarth, Susanna Avery-Quash, Mark Evans and Kim Sloan.

Notes:

1. Charles Newton and Briony Llewellyn confirmed the attribution to Lewis, suggested the identity of the sitter and carried out some of this research.
2. RCIN 405331.
3. William Roberts, *Memorials of Christie's: a record of art sales from 1766 to 1896*, London, George Bell & Sons, 1897, vol. I, facing p. 120, described on pp. 121–2. Roberts gives Goubaud's name incorrectly as 'J. Gebaud'.
4. Julia I. Armstrong-Totton has suggested this identification.
5. Charles Sebag-Montefiore with Julia I. Armstrong-Totten, *A Dynasty of Dealers: John Smith and Successors 1801–1924, A Study of the Art Market in Nineteenth-Century London*, London, Roxburghe Club, 2013, p. 253.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 323.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 75–7, letters 34–8.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
9. 10 January 1826: 'I have omitted sending you the Sunday Newspapers on account of Mr E having been in Paris nearly a fortnight, & he likes to see the weekly news on his return from the continent – I expect him home in about a week.' Egerton MS, British Library, EG2247, fol. 127v.
10. Oppé Collection, Tate (TO8173).
11. Private collection; sold Christie's South Kensington, 5 December 2013, lot 138.
12. Interior of a Studio, Victoria and Albert Museum (620-1870); de Hooch, *Woman drinking with two men and a maid / La Buveuse*, 1658, Musée du Louvre (RF 1974-29).

Innocent-Louis Goubaud (fl. 1780–1847), *The Sale of The Snake in the Grass*, 1829.
Photograph courtesy of the Witt Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, London