

## Joseph Severn



### The brigand's family

£ 22,000.00

Reference: 11201

Dimensions:

Height:	61 cm / 24 in
Width:	75 cm / 29½ in
Framed Height:	82 cm / 32¼ in
Framed Width:	90 cm / 35⅜ in

Signed and dated lower left: J. Severn Roma 1825

Oil on canvas

61.6 by 75cm., 24 1/4 by 39 1/2 inches, framed size 82 x 90 cm.; 32 1/4 x 35 3/8 inches

# KAREN TAYLOR FINE ART

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£22,000

This unpublished painting depicts the wife and child of a brigand apparently hiding from the authorities, probably in the Alban Hills. The sleeping man, his rifle at his side, is watched over by his wife who rocks their child in a makeshift cradle covered by a cloth and hanging from a tree branch. Banditti were a popular artistic subject, made fashionable by the work of Salvator Rosa, and Severn experienced an attempted robbery first hand in 1823 when he was travelling around Naples, where brigands were common. Here he focusses on the humanity of the mother and draws attention to the precarious condition of the family.

Joseph Severn was the eldest son of a music teacher from Hoxton. At the age of 14 he became apprenticed to the engraver William Bond before entering the Royal Academy Schools in 1815. Here, in 1820, he was awarded the gold medal for historical painting for his *Una and the Red Cross Knight in the Cave of Despair*, which granted him a travelling scholarship. This coincided with the illness of his friend, the poet John Keats, and together they travelled to Rome in search of a better climate for the ailing poet. During the winter of 1820-21 Severn nursed Keats in their apartment near the Spanish Steps, his detailed letters from the period of great importance, but, on 23 February 1821, Keats died.

Severn remained in Rome, launching his own artistic career as a painter of landscapes, portraits and subject paintings. His pictures of Italian peasant life won him such an avid following that there were times during the 1820s when he could not keep up with the flood of commissions. At the beginning of 1827 he wrote to his younger brother Charles that he had "now 9 pictures on order", and by the beginning of the following year he had "eleven pictures on hand" and this popularity continued well into the 1830s. Patrons, friends, family and fellow artists all praised the freshness and originality of his Italian painting. Sir Charles Eastlake wrote of the "richness of colour" and the "truth of circumstance, situation, incident & costume," of Severn's Italian work (Charles Eastlake to Severn, 7 May 1834 and May 1832 (MS: Harvard, bMS Eng 1434 [52, 51], quoted in Grant F. Scott, *Joseph Severn Letters and Memoirs*, 2005, p. 23). It seems probable that the present work was a commission.

Severn exhibited extensively at the Royal Academy during the late 1820s and 1830s showing eleven paintings of which ten were Italian genre pictures. Today comparable paintings from this period can be found in the Thorvaldens Museum in Denmark, *Italian woman and her Daughter*, 1831 and *Italian Peasant in The Royal Collection*, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. *The Fountain* of 1828 has a similar landscape background to the present work and hangs in the Royal Palace, Brussels. *The Vintage*, was commissioned by the Duke of Bedford in 1825 for Woburn Abbey. Further work is in the collections of the Tate Gallery, London and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Severn played a crucial role in the foundation of the British Academy of the Fine Arts at Rome (1823-1936), securing funding from various influential patrons including William Hamilton, the antiquarian, and hosting evening gatherings in his apartment on the Via di San Isodoro, where artists met to study and draw from life, and where they had access to casts, painting and sculpting material and books. It was also a temporary rooming house where artists who had recently arrived from England could stay while looking for a studio (see, Grant F. Scott, *op. cit.*, p.17).

Severn remained in Rome for most of his life other than a spell in England from 1841-1861. With the help of William Gladstone, an avid patron, he became British Consul in Rome from 1860-72. He died in Rome in 1879 and, at his request,

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was buried next to Keats in the Protestant cemetery near Porta San Paolo and adjacent to the Pyramid of Cestius. Their graves are pictured below.