JOHN BENNETT fine paintings

Flying Childers held by a Groom, a view of Newmarket Heath beyond

Thomas Spencer

Sold



REF: 125479

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Description

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Circle of THOMAS SPENCER 1700-1763English SchoolFlying Childers held by a Groom, a view of Newmarket Heath beyond Oil on canvas, in original carved giltwood frame 101.5 x 127 cms40 x 50 inchesOverall framed size 143.5 x 118 cms 56½ x 42½ inchesEx Collection: Lord Falmouth Sold Christie’s 4th February 1924 (as Seymour) lot 47 to Barclay for 29gns. Thomas Spencer was a renowned 18th century equestrian artist but comparatively little is known of his life. It is very possible that he was a pupil of James Seymour and they were certainly working together between 1740 and 1746 when they produced thirty-three racehorse portraits for the publisher J Cherry which were engraved by H Roberts.

It is also probable that he was a professional painter prior to his time with Seymour as he had a reputation for producing portrait miniatures, some of which were on enamel. Horse portraiture, with the increased interest in racing at that time, proved more profitable and set the course for his career as is demonstrated by the fact that Spencer was able to charge 15 guineas for a portrait on horseback in 1760.

His style is very similar to that of James Seymour. Both have a charming, slightly primitive style and this influence can be seen in other horse painters of the time such as Francis Stringer, William Shaw, Richard Roper, Daniel Quigley, Thomas Burford, Thomas Butler and John Walsham. Seymour's paintings were strongly coloured and quite finished whereas Spencer's is somewhat softer and more naturalistic which probably resulted in a better likeness. Some critics regard Spencer to be the superior of the two because of this ability but Seymour has always been better known. As they both signed frequently with initials, there is a suspicion that a number of works that had been deemed to be Seymour were in fact by Spencer as often they are virtually indistinguishable.

The racecourse at Newmarket can be considered the centre from which the tradition of British sporting painting originated. The three artists who are considered the founders of the school were firstly Pieter Tillemans, John Wootton and then James Seymour and they all worked there and all produced large panoramic views of the Heath with a string of horses. They originated the idea of combining a sporting subject with the earlier tradition of a topographical or panoramic landscape. Thomas Spencer was one of the very few painters of that time who were able to capture the prized high-spirited imported Arab blood that was making such a mark in the racing world. In addition, he took care with his settings and there are trees in the landscape rather than just a rolling plain and the clouds are artistically portrayed.

Spencer and Seymour seem to have revived their collaboration of the early 1740s when they illustrated the folio "Horses and Pedigrees" which was published in 1752 and the former's paintings that were reproduced included race horse portraits of "Sporley", "Silver Leg", "Starling" and " Othello". Another set of twelve mezzotints e...