JOHN BENNETT fine paintings

A View of the Rotunda and the Royal Hospital, Ranelagh Gardens from the south bank of the Thames

JOSEPH NICHOLLS

Sold



REF: 347022

Height: 51 cm (20.1")

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Width: 61.3 cm (24.1")

Framed Height: 66.5 cm (26.2")

Framed Width: 74.7 cm (29.4")

Description

This view was also depicted by both Canaletto and Samuel Scott but in a more panoramic way, from slightly different viewpoints and containing different elements in the river craft and figures. The Canaletto, which bore the title "Chelsea from the Thames at Battersea Reach," was painted in 1751, was on a grand scale and measured eight feet by three. It showed from one side the greenhouse of the Physic Garden, to the other which depicted buildings to the east of the Rotunda and Ranelagh Gardens. Canaletto advertised the picture for sale in a newspaper but when no sale was concluded he apparently decided to divide the painting in half to increase the opportunity for a sale and to possibly make more money. The western half was purchased by the Marquis of Lothian for his collection at Blickling Hall in Norfolk where it remains today but now in the ownership of the National Trust who acquired the Hall in 1940. The eastern section passed through several hands, eventually being sold at Christie's in 1802. At a later date it was bought by a New York dealer who then sold it to the Cuban railway tycoon and collector Oscar Cinetas who took it to Cuba in 1951, eventually bequeathing it shortly before the Castro revolution to the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana. The National Trust approached the Cuban government and offered £2 million pounds for their half of the painting but were rebuffed but following the intercession of the British Council and the Foreign Office, high quality images were taken of both paintings and the original has been recreated digitally.

In Lambert's History of London and its Environs published in 1806, he writes: "Ranelagh was the seat of an Irish Nobleman of that title, in whose times the gardens were extensive. On his death the estate was sold and the principal part of the gardens was converted into fields, though the house remained unaltered. Part of the gardens also was permitted to remain. Some gentlemen and builders having become the purchasers of these, a resolution was taken to convert them into a place of entertainment. Accordingly, Mr William Jones, architect to the East India Company, drew the plan of the present Rotunda, which is an illustrious monument of his genius and fancy. The chief material employed was wood, and it was erected in 1740….a noble edifice, somewhat resembling the pantheon at Rome, with a diameter externally of 185 feet and internally of 150 feet. The entrances are by four Doric porticoes opposite each other, and the first storey is rustic. Round the whole on the outside is a gallery, the stairs to which are at the porticoes; and overhead is a slated covering which projects from the body of the Rotunda. Over the gallery are the windows, sixty in number, and over these the slated roof. The interior is elegantly decorated, and, when well illuminated and full of company, presents a most brilliant spectacle. Indeed, it may be said of Ranelagh that, as a public place of amusement, it is not to be equalled in Europe for beauty, elegance, and grandeur. Before the Act of Parliament passed in 1752, which prohibited all places of entertainment from being opened before a certain hour of the afternoon, the Rotunda was open every day for public breakfasts. It was not, h...

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