Painting - The Mosque of Aurangzeb and Panchganga Ghat from the Ganges, Benares.

Object: Painting
Place of origin: Varanasi (made)
Date: December 1860 (made)
Artist/Maker: Simpson, William R.I. F.R.G.S., born 1823 - died 1899 (artist)
Materials and Techniques: Pencil, ink and watercolour
Museum number: 1142-1869
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

William Simpson was born on 28 October 1823 in Glasgow. Following a seven-year apprenticeship with a specialist lithographic firm, he moved to London in February 1851 and found employment with Day and Sons. In 1859 the firm commissioned Simpson to visit India and make drawings for a book illustrating well-known places associated with the 1857-58 uprising. Thus began Simpson's long association with India, and the first of his four visits to the subcontinent over the next twenty-five years. During these journeys he made numerous rapid pencil drawings in sketchbooks, often heightened with colour washes. Many formed preparatory studies for his finished watercolours, most of which he worked up after returning to London. The plan was for Day and Son to select 250 of these finished watercolours to be lithographed as illustrations in the projected volume. While Simpson was away in India, however, Day and Son had been drifting into debt. In 1867, before it finally went into liquidation at the end of the year, he was made a company shareholder as part payment. But, as he expressed it, 'the great work on India, on which I bestowed so much time and labour, never came into existence'. Two years later, Simpson's collection of 250 watercolours was sold off as bankrupt stock: 'This was the big disaster of my life', as he ruefully remarked. This painting shows The Mosque Ghat in Varanasi (Benares), whose reputation as a sacred city for Hindus is demonstrated by its busy waterfront, where pilgrims undergo ritual purification in the River Ganges. The ghat (a stepped bank for bathing purposes) is one of more than seventy along the sacred river.

Descriptive line
Watercolour, Mosque of Aurangzeb, Ganges, Benares, William Simpson, 1864

Physical description
The watercolour depicts the Mosque of Aurangzeb and Panchganga Ghat from the Ganges.

Dimensions
Height: 36 cm, Width: 52 cm

Museum number
1142-1869

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O108362/the-mosque-of-aurangzeb-and-painting-simpson-william-ri/