Oil painting - Sunset on a bay, with castle ruins

Object: Oil painting
Place of origin: Munich (made)
Date: 1848 (made)
Artist/Maker: Libert, Georg Emil, born 1820 - died 1908 (artist)
Materials and Techniques: Oil on canvas
Credit Line: Bequeathed by Rev. Chauncey Hare Townshend
Museum number: 1553-1869
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

Georg Emil Libert (1820-1908) was born in Copenhagen. He was in Munich in 1846-47 and travelled in Southern Germany and Austria in 1851, 1857 and 1875. He exhibited in Vienna in 1873.

This painting is a fine example of the Romantic imagery which developed in Northern Europe in the 19th century and favoured harmonious landscape characterised by a high degree of finish and clear tones. It shows a small embarkation adrift on the sea at sunrise. Dated 1848, this composition was made shortly after Libert went to Munich where sojourned a group of Romantic painters under the influence of Caspar David Friedrich. This type of compositions was quite popular and attracted the collectors’ interest during the second half of the century.

Descriptive line
Oil painting, ‘Sunset on a Bay, with Castle Ruins’, Georg Emil Libert, Danish school, 1848

Physical description
In a small bay on a rocky coast-line is a small embarkation with figures, close to the shore, under a wide cloudy sky at sunset, hills in the distance with a ruined castle on top of a hill at mid-distance.

Dimensions
Height: 109.2 cm estimate, Width: 146 cm estimate, Height: 145.3 cm Frame, Width: 181.8 cm Frame, Depth: 11 cm Frame,

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Object history note
Bequeathed by Rev. Chauncey Hare Townshend, 1868

Historical significance: This painting is a typical example of seascape paintings at dusk and twilight favoured by Scandinavian artists under the influence of the German David Caspar Friedrich (1774-1840) and his pupil the Norwegian Johann Christian Dahl (1788-1857), with whom he may have been in contact when he came to Munich in 1845-46. The compositional formula and palette are probably indebted to such compositions by Friedrich as Moonrise over the Sea, 1821, The Hermitage, St Petersburg. This composition is almost similar to 1633-1869 which shows an identical bay with a small embarkation but variations in the background coast-line. The high degree of finish and clear tones along with an interest in atmospheric effects such as the sunset light are characteristic of the Romantic movement. The Romantic artists focused on the fragility of humankind against the omnipotent nature, which is here well illustrated with the frail embarkation adrift on the immensity of the sea, enhanced by the sunrise light reflecting on its surface.

This painting was bequeathed by the Rev. Townshend who owned a large collection of 19th-century landscape and genre paintings.

Historical context note

The word Romanticism derived from the medieval term ‘romance’ and was first used by the German poets and critics August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel to label a wider cultural movement beginning with the late 18th and ending towards the mid 19th century. Romanticism started first in Western Europe as a literary and philosophical movement and only gradually involved the other arts, explicitly around 1800. Romantic artists were fascinated by nature they interpreted as a mirror of the mind. They investigated human nature and personality, the folk culture, the national and ethnic origins, the medieval era, the exotic, the remote, the mysterious and the occult. The interest in the exotic and the non-Western, illustrated in France by such a painter as Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), as well as the medieval revival, witnessed in England by Horace Walpole (1717-1797), are perhaps the most identifiable parts of Romanticism. It is really in the Post-Napoleonic period that this movement gained ascendancy. Its greatest proponents were among others Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) and François-René de Chateaubriant (1768-1848) in France, Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) in England, Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) and Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) in Germany. In the visual arts, it was largely played out by 1850, but in music it persists for another generation.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O124417/sunset-on-a-bay-with-oil-painting-libert-georg-emil/