Oil painting - Wooded Moonlight Landscape with Pool and Figure at the Door of a Cottage

Object: Oil painting
Place of origin: Great Britain (painted)
Date: ca. 1781-1782 (painted)
Artist/Maker: Thomas Gainsborough, born 1727 - died 1788 (artist)
Materials and Techniques: transparent oil on glass
Credit Line: Bequeathed by Ernest E. Cook through Art Fund
Museum number: P.33-1955
Gallery location: In Storage

**Public access description**

The following description of this painting appeared in 1824: ‘The Cottage - Representing a most powerful effect of fire-light in the interior. The artist has given considerable interest to this subject by introducing the cottager opening the door: the contrast between the light of the cottage and that of the moon, excite the most pleasing association in the mind’.

**Descriptive line**

Oil painting on glass, 'Wooded Moonlight Landscape with Pool and Figure at the Door of a Cottage', Thomas Gainsborough, ca. 1781-1782

**Physical description**

This is catalogue no. 134 in John Hayes "The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough: A Critical Text and Catalogue Raisonne" (1982).

For a General Note on the series of transparencies and the display box, see "History 1", under "Historical Significance". For Provenance see "History 1", under "Object History Note".

Notes taken from Hayes, cat. no. 134:

“This is the first occasion on which Gainsborough painted a moonlight scene and the first in which he tried out an indoor lighting effect; the window, and the dooway against which the figure is silhouetted, are brilliantly illumined by firelight... Edward Edwards described the effects produced by Gainsborough's transparencies as "truly captivating, especially in the moon-light pieces, which exhibit the most perfect resemblance of nature."

**Dimensions**

Height: 27.9 cm, Width: 33.7 cm

**Museum number**

P.33-1955

**Object history note**

Hayes 1982, cat. no. 134, p. 498

*Provenance: Purchased from Margaret Gainsborough (1752-1820) by Dr Thomas Monro (1759-1833); Monro sale, Christie's, 26 June 1833 ff., 3rd day (28 June), lot 168, bt W.White, who bequeathed it to G.W. Reid; anon. [Buck Reid] sale, Christie's, 29 March 1890, lot 132, bt in; Leopold Hirsch; Hirsch sale, Christie's, 11 May 1934, lot 104, bt Gooden and Fox for Ernest E. Cook; bequeathed to the Victoria and Albert Museum, through the National Art-Collections Fund, 1955*

Historical significance: General Note from Hayes, cat. no. 132, p. 497

Gainsborough was familiar with transparency painting, and had himself painted transparencies for the decoration of Bach and Abel's concert rooms in Hanover Square, London, opened in February 1775; but it seems to have been de Loutherbourg's Eidophusikon, first shown in February 1781, which inspired his own 'peep-show' for displaying his ideas for landscapes. Gainsborough's rather amateurish box [which is also in the V&A, museum number P.44-1955, illustrated in Hayes, pls 171, 172] consisted of a large storage space, containing twelve slats, to house his transparencies; a system of cords and pulleys to hoist the desired transparency into position; four slats behind this position, into anyone of which could be inserted a semi-transparent silk screen; and, at the back, five candle-holders. The spectator viewed the transparencies through a large round peep-hole, fitted with a magnifying lens, in the front of the box. The lens could be adjusted to between 25½ and 34½ inches of the projected transparency, thus producing an image with a magnification of between two-and-a-half and five times the size of the original, according to the length of adjustment. The light transmitted from the candles behind, albeit diffused through the silk screen, produced a luminosity close to that in nature impossible to achieve in oil painting on an opaque support. It is not known whether the transparencies were intended to be viewed with the painted surface facing the candle or the spectator; there is optical evidence to favour the former method, but this matter, and others connected with the box, require further investigation. Gainsborough must have painted numerous
transparencies for showing in his box, but only ten survive [two further transparencies in the V&A, P.38-1955 and P.40-1955, were painted by another artist at a later date]. All ten are completely tonal in quality, executed in a range of blues, greens and browns, and Gainsborough's aim was clearly to heighten and dramatize his effects of light.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O17300/wooded-moonlight-landscape-with-pool-oil-painting-thomas-gainsborough/