Oil painting - The Poultry Seller

Object: Oil painting

Place of origin: Great Britain (painted)

Date: ca. 1787-ca. 1793 (painted)

Artist/Maker: Heighway, Richard (painter (artist))

Materials and Techniques: Oil on canvas

Museum number: 233-1879

Gallery location: In Storage

Descriptive line
Oil painting, 'The Poultry Seller', attributed to Richard Heighway, ca. 1787-ca. 1793

Physical description
Oil painting

Dimensions
Height: 26 in estimate, Width: 21.5 in estimate, Height: 87.5 cm  Frame dimensions, Width: 75 cm  Frame dimensions, :

Museum number
233-1879

Object history note
Purchased, 1879

Bought (Anderdon Collection), sale Christie's, 31st May 1879 (lot 157) £50.10s, along with four other oil paintings; by John Crome (museum numbers 232-1879 and 236-1879), by George Morland (museum numbers 234-1879 and 235-1879). James Hughes Anderdon was a collector of paintings, engravings and autograph letters. In 1875 he presented to the Royal Academy an annotated set of Royal Academy catalogues for the Annual Summer Exhibitions from 1769 to 1850.

Historical significance: Little has previously been recorded about Richard Heighway, and there is no entry for this artist in the Dictionary of National Biography. However, information from descendants of the artist has added some details to what little has hitherto been known about him. He was the fourth son of Samuel Heighway (1720-1784) and born in 1755 at Pontesford, Shropshire. He was possibly educated at Balliol (?), and probably trained with the painter Henry Walton, (the address given in the Royal Academy Catalogue for 1787, his first exhibition, was at Walton's residence in Half Moon Street). He primarily practised as a portrait painter, travelling between London and Shrewsbury; addresses given in Royal Academy catalogues were 6 Little Vine Street in 1788, Litchfield and 5 Carrington Street in 1789, and Shrewsbury and 31 Newgate Street in 1793. He exhibited five works at the RA in 1787, 1788, 1789 and 1793, the titles being: A girl tying her shoe, Portrait of a lady, A woman selling saloop, Portrait of a young lady, and A market girl. According to Ellis Waterhouse, The Dictionary of British 18th Century Painters in oils and crayons (1981), Heighway also painted "miniatures on glass", and genre subjects. He seems to have given up his practice after his ordination in 1790 and appointment as curate of Middle, north of Shrewsbury. He married and had four children; his youngest son, Richard Husband Heighway, was also a painter. The last record of him is in a register of 1817.

Although the painting was purchased as an attributed work, and has always been published as such, there seems little doubt of the attribution to Heighway in the light of the family information, and the resemblance of the work to Heighway's 'fancy' portraits of his nephews and nieces (photographs on the Departmental File). The sitter for The Poultry Seller could well have been one of his nieces. The image clearly resembles the work of Henry Walton (c.1746-1813), with whom Heighway was associated. The painting seems to date from the 1790s, and it is possibly that exhibited at the RA in 1793 (no.232) under the title A market girl.

Paintings such as this which focussed on a single figure, were a type of genre picture known as 'fancy pictures' which became hugely popular in the late 18th century. Painted with the focus on a single figure, much like a portrait, these pictures represented rustic types, usually attractive children and young women, often selling their wares or on the way to market, as with the The Poultry Seller. Early examples of this type of genre picture were by Philip Mercier (about 1689-1760) and Henry Robert Morland (about 1719-1797). But they were popularized in the later 18th century by artists such as Henry Walton and Francis Wheatley (1747-1801).

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O131888/the-poultry-seller-oil-painting-heighway-richard/