Oil painting - Wooded River Landscape with Figures on a Bridge, Cottage, Sheep and Distant Mountains

Object: Oil painting

Place of origin: Great Britain (painted)

Date: ca. 1783-1784 (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.37-1955

Gallery location: Paintings, Room 88, The Edwin and Susan Davies Galleries, case EAST WALL CASE

Public access description
The mountain in this painting recalls Cader Idris in north Wales. This was the subject of a painting by Richard Wilson that was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1774.

Descriptive line
Oil painting on glass, 'Wooded River Landscape with Figures on a Bridge, Cottage, Sheep and Distant Mountains', Thomas Gainsborough, ca. 1783-1784

Physical description
This is catalogue no. 154 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. 154:
There is a drawing by Gainsborough in a private collection (illustrated Hayes, fig. 154a) which is very similar to this transparency. But this transparency is "exceptionally rapidly handled", with the freedom and spontaneity of a first work, and it seems unlikely that the drawing is a study for the painting. Instead it is more likely that Gainsborough developed the ideas begun in the transparency in the drawing, with the addition of two cows in the foreground.

Dimensions
Height: 27.9 cm, Width: 33.7 cm

Museum number
P.37-1955

Object history note
Hayes 1982, cat. no. 154, p. 527

"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 Lourtherbourg's Eidoshusikon, 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/O82777/wooded-river-landscape-with-figures-oil-painting-thomas-gainsborough/