JOHN BENNETT fine paintings

A wooded river landscape with travellers in the foreground, a drover with cattle and sheep on a path and ruined buildings and a villa in the distance

JOHN WOOTTON

Sold

London, England

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REF: 374770

Height: 71 cm (28")

Width: 124 cm (48.8")

Framed Height: 86.2 cm (33.9")

Framed Width: 139.4 cm (54.9")

Description

Oil on canvas

John Wootton is probably most renowned for his sporting paintings, often of Newmarket, but he was also a landscapist of both topographical subjects and also in the classical tradition influenced by Gaspard Dughet and Claude Lorrain. He is important in the development of both English sporting and landscape painting in that he was a transitional artist who developed the Dutch style of portraying these subjects and imbued them with a softer and more English sensibility.

He was born in Snitterfield in Warwickshire in 1682 although some sources have given the date 1678. There is nothing known about his parents but tradition has it that when the 1st Duke of Beaufort's daughter, Lady Anne Somerset, married the future Earl of Coventry, she moved to Snitterfield House and the young John Wootton served as her page. It is thought that it was she who encouraged him to take up painting. Lady Anne and Wootton remained in touch for at least forty years and in one letter the artist asked that she become godmother to his children.

Wootton is thought to have been apprenticed for a time to the Flemish-born landscape painter Jan Siberechts in 1694. However, sometime in the late 1690s he had become apprenticed to Jan Wyck, who had come to England from Holland and established himself at the forefront of painting military scenes and landscape. The Beauforts and Coventrys were patrons of Wyck and it is probably through them that Wootton secured this important introduction, moving to study with him in Mortlake in Surrey.

After Wyck's death in 1702, Wootton moved to Newmarket where by 1714 he had established a significant reputation with the nobility for racing scenes on the Heath and horse portraiture. He had become a founder member of the Academy of Painting in 1711 and was also a member of the Society of Virtuosi of St Luke, becoming its Steward in 1717. This would have enabled him to see, and take an interest in, a wide range of artistic subjects and styles and in his commissioned work of painting the horses on the great estates, would have been able to study significant collections. Wootton was the first English painter of horse portraits and the Earl of Egremont proclaimed him to be "…the best horse painter in England", an opinion shared by the aristocracy who regarded him as the best available to record their hunters and racehorses. A good number of this portraiture was life-sized and when a work necessitated the inclusion of a human portrait, then this was usually done in conjunction with portrait specialists such as Jonathan Richardson, Charles Jervas, William Hogarth, Michael Dahl, William Hoare, Thomas Gibson and others. One example of this large format was the mounted portrait of George II which Queen Caroline came to see in the artist's studio which she declared to be "…a large noble painting room". In 1714 at Welbeck, the collection of the Duke of Portland in which the artist is well represented, Wootton is referred to as "…ye horse painter…" and he was well rewarded for his ability and commanded a high price, enabling him to ask £40 for a large piece which was a significant figure. He had the reputation among his artistic peers of being t...

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