JOHN BENNETT fine paintings

Old London Bridge

JOHN CLEVELEY The Elder

£ POA

London, England

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REF: 374889

Description

JOHN CLEVELEY the Elder English School1712-1777Old London Bridge Oil on canvas, signed with initials and dated 176665.5 x 93.1 cms251/4 x 365/8 inchesOverall framed size 87 x 113.6 cms 341/4 x 443/4 ins This painting is based on the one produced by Samuel Scott (1702-1772) which is now in the collection of Tate Britain. It was very popular at the time and Scott made ten further examples of it as well as having the primary work engraved by Peter Charles Canot in 1758. The old bridge, which was dismantled in the early 1760s, educed much nostalgia for such a famous historical landmark which was probably the impetus for Cleveley to paint this work.
John Cleveley was a significant painter of dockyards, ship portraits, naval engagements and river scenes who was one of the major earlier English marine painters like Nicholas Pocock, Peter Monamy, Dominic Serres and Charles Brooking whose work was imbued with the vital and naturalistic influence of Willem van de Velde the Elder and Younger (c.1611-1693 and 1633-1707 respectively.)He was born in Deptford in or about 1712, the son of Samuel Cleveley of Newington Butts in Southwark who was a joiner and shipwright at the Deptford dockyard. His childhood was spent surrounded by naval ships in all stages of construction and it was a logical progression for him to become apprenticed to Thomas Miller to train as a shipwright starting on 3rd November 1726. The young Cleveley then went to work with John Hall who was a Deptford boat builder and shipwright.His natural skill in draughtsmanship was augmented by a keen understanding of how a ship was built and interacted with the water and and it is possible that some of his employment at the dockyard involved the painting of coats of arms and figures from mythology which decorated warships of the period. In 1701, the construction of the Royal Sovereign was completed but such was the scandal over the cost of the carved decorations on this ship that in 1704, the Admiralty decreed that there could be no carvings on future vessels apart from on the head and stern galleries and that all other ornamentation had to be painted. The consequence of this was that many carvers lost their employment in the Royal dockyards whereas painters were taken on to adorn the full-length sides of most ships at the level of the upper deck gunwales and above.It seems that Cleveley did not take up painting seriously until he was in his thirties and the first recorded dated painting by him was in 1747. The earliest examples of pictures by him depict the launching of ships at Deptford and these are of very high quality and the close attention to detail meant that the sequence of these works can be dated by comparing the size of the tree which grew to the side of the Master Shipwright’s house. His pictures are beautifully composed and painted and display a mastery of the perspective of a ship and also in the rendering of the architectural elements of the buildings on the waterfront. The cool tones and silvery seas evoke the English landscape and the softness of the light and climate, something which he shares with Samuel Scott. Scott had been particul...

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