Gypsy Girls

William Henry Hunt



REF: 2998

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Description

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William Henry Hunt O.W.S. (1790-1864)
Gypsy Girls

Signed lower right, W. Hunt
Watercolour over pencil heightened with bodycolour and touches of scratching out
62.2 by 52.6 cm., 24 ½ by 20 ¾ in.

Provenance:
C. H. Arning, by 1912;
With Michael Bryan, London, June 1998;
Albert Dawson, his sale, Christie's South Kensington, 22 March 2006, lot 1466

Exhibited:
London, Old Watercolour Society, 1839, no 84, as The Gipsy Toilet;
Manchester, Whitworth Art Gallery, Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition of Watercolour Drawings by Deceased British Artists, also of a Collection of Paintings and Drawings by J. Sell Cotman, August-October 1912, no. 23;
London, Michael Bryan, Alpine Gallery, English Watercolours, June 1988, no. 30

The present large scale exhibition watercolour is typical of the artist's work exploring rustic subjects. As the eminent collector, critic and artist Harry Quilter (1851-1907) wrote, 'when Hunt's work turned to the subject of humanity, it became at once less elaborate, and more powerful. The same hand which could mark and reproduce each faintest change of colour in the petals of the primrose or the blush of the grape, could…comprehend his [sitter's] character and his life, and set him down for ever in simplest, truest guise' (Harry Quilter, Prefaces in Art, Life and Literature, 1892, p.181).

Despite the sense of reality in this watercolour, the subject is in fact carefully staged, with the artist's wife, Sarah and his daughter, Emma modelling for two of the figures. The identity of the third sitter is uncertain, although the blond girl could be one of the two sisters of Hunt's favourite modelling trio, the Swain brothers, who also apparently sat for Hunt on occasions.

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