The Artist's Children Playing with a Toy Boat

John Constable



REF: 3094

1
Description

Guy Peppiatt Fine Art Ltd.
Riverwide House, 6 Mason's Yard, Duke St. St. James's, London, SW1Y 6BU
T: 020 7930 3839 M: 07956 968 284 E: guy@peppiattfineart.co.uk www.peppiattfineart.co.uk

John Constable, RA (1776-1837)
The Artist's Children Playing with a Toy Boat

Oil on millboard
13 by 15.5 cm., 5 ¼ by 6 ¼ in.

Provenance:
Private Collection 2012 until 2024

This recently rediscovered oil sketch forms part of a series of charming alla prima studies made by Constable of his young family in the early 1820s. These pictures, all clearly spontaneous in their conception, were usually executed on small pieces of millboard or discarded panel. They give a touching insight into Constable's status as a devoted family man. The present scene almost certainly depicts the artist's three eldest children: John Charles (1817-1841), Maria Louise (1819-1885) and Charles Golding (1821-1879). It is probably set in the artist's residence on Charlotte Street and shows the artist's eldest son directing his younger siblings in a game involving a toy boat being blown by bellows in a wooden tub. Whether a coincidence or not, Constable's third child, Charles, developed a nautical obsession at a young age and would depart for the East Indies and China at the age of only fourteen. He later rose to the rank of Commander in the Indian Navy.

Comparable studies of the artist's family include a sketch of Constable's wife Maria with their two eldest children from c.1820 now in the Tate (no. T03903) and a humorous picture of his daughter Maria Louise peering from behind a curtain dressed as Bo-Beep (see G. Reynolds, The Early Paintings and Drawings of John Constable, 2 vols, London 1996, p. 242, no. 20.88A (text), reproduced in colour fig. 1388 (plates)). Constable was clearly engaged by the humour and ingenuity of his children as they played, on one occasion executing a swift watercolour sketch of two of them constructing a Heath-Robinson style vehicle made up of chairs and a rocking horse (fig.1). Probably originally part of a letter, he proudly comments below the watercolour : "All this is entirely his own invention."

Guy Peppiatt Fine Art Ltd.
Riverwide House, 6 Mason's Yard, Duke St. St. James's, London, SW1Y 6BU
T: 020 7930 3839 M: 07956 968 284 E: guy@peppiattfineart.co.uk www.peppiattfineart.co.uk