Matterhorn

John Ruskin

Sold



REF: 2241

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Description

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John Ruskin (1819-1900)
The Matterhorn from the north-east

Signed with initials and inscribed lower centre: State of snow on Matterhorn in 1849. {J.R, on the spot, Aug. 2nd}/Sketch never completed; but if I cut the margin away, I should make the angles false, inscribed lower left: Matterhorn. 2nd August. P. 163. I and numbered 3 upper right
Watercolour over pencil
24.2 by 33.7 cm., 9 1/2 by 13 1/4 in.

Provenance:
Given by Ruskin to his Drawing School Collection at Oxford but taken back by him in 1887;
W.H. Willink by 1912;
Anonymous sale, Bearne's, Torquay, 16th January 1991, lot ??;
Anonymous sale, Christie's, 26th September 2007, lot 243, where bought the present owner

Literature:
E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds.), The Works of John Ruskin, 1903-1912: vol.5, 1904 (Modern Painters, vol.3), p.xxvII; vol. 6, 1904 (Modern Painters, vol. 4), pl.38 (right) and pp.283 and 288; vol. 21, 1906 (The Ruskin Collection of Oxford), p.278, no. 119; and vol. 38, 1912, (Catalogue of Ruskin's Drawings), p.267, no. 1121;
E.T. Cook, The Life of John Ruskin, 1911, vol. I, p.250;
Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehorse (eds.), The Dairies of John Ruskin 1848-1873, 1958, p.416, note 2

Exhibited:
Kendal, Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Sublime Inspiration: The Art of Mountains from Turner to Hillary, 1997, ex-catalogue

Engraved:
By J.C. Armytage for `Modern Painters', 1856, vol. 4, pl. 38

This important drawing is probably the first detailed study of the summit of the Matterhorn, a mountain that was not successfully climbed until 1865. Ruskin's annotation ` State of snow on Matterhorn in 1849' is fascinating showing his early interest in what we would now call `climate change.'

Ruskin's Swiss tour of 1849 was intended partly as a rest from his recent undertaking, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, which had been published in May and partly at preparation for further work on his Modern Painters. He arrived at Zermatt on 2 August and remained for a week, before returning to Chamonix. The present drawing was made the first day in Zermatt and Ruskin recorded in his diary: 'A lovely day with sharp north wind. Drawing Matterhorn. Then up to a bed of overhanging rocks which I thought were marble, but found to be a pure and lovely quartz rock in thin folia.' He wrote in more detail to his father, who had remained in Geneva, 'I had glorious weather, and on Friday… I got up to a promontory projecting from the foot of the Matterhorn and lay on the rocks and drew it at my ease. I was about three hours at work, as quietly as if in my study at Denmark Hill, though on a peak of barren crag above a glacier and at least 9000 feet above sea'. (Cook and Wedderburn, op. cit.)

On 9 August, just before leaving, Ruskin made another study of the mountain, from further east from the moat of the Riffelhorn. (now in the Guild of St George at Sheffield) . A third drawing from the same trip is now in the Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard.

Ruskin made detailed descriptions and drawings of the Alps, including of the Matterhorn in Volume IV of Modern Painters, which he sub-titled 'Of Mountain Beauty'. He not only drew the mountain, but also took a number of photographs...

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