

Mount Snowdon from the slopes of Moel Hebog, Beddgelert below

John Varley

Sold



Description

John Varley (1778-1842)

Mount Snowdon from the slopes of Moel Hebog, Beddgelert below

Signed lower left: J. Varley. 1812.

Watercolour over pencil heightened with stopping out
37.7 by 51.7 cm., 14 ³/₄ by 20 ¹/₄ in.

Provenance:

With Spinks, London, 1980s;
Private collection, UK

Exhibited:

London, Society of Painters in Water-colours, 1813, no.130

'John Varley is one of the undisputed masters of English watercolour painting. As an artist, as a teacher, and as one of the founding members of the Society of Painters in Watercolours he was, arguably, among the most influential figures in British art in the early nineteenth century ' (see Timothy Wilcox, John Varley 1778-1842, 2005).

Varley was born in Hackney, the eldest of five children. Having been apprenticed to a silversmith, he turned to drawing in the mid 1790s and exhibited his first picture at the Royal Academy in 1798. His first trip to North Wales was in 1798 and 1799 and he returned again in 1801. By 1805, Varley was a very popular drawing master and numbered William Henry Hunt, John Linnell, Turner of Oxford and Copley Fielding among his pupils. His early work was much influenced by the work of Thomas Girtin but by 1812, the date of the present work, he had developed his own style using soft washes of blue and green, moving away from the stiffness that characterised the topographical watercolours of the eighteenth century. The size and quality of the present watercolour is typical of his exhibition pictures of the period.

During the Napoleonic Wars, travel to the Continent was difficult so the mountains of North Wales became a popular sketching ground for British artists and Varley in particular. He painted this view on several occasions, looking north-east from the lower slopes of Moel Hebog across to Snowdon with the village of Beddgelert below.

An 1804 version of this view is recorded in the Lupton Collection (see Adrian Bury, John Varley of the "Old Society", 1946, pl. 14).