Conwy Castle, from the Llanwrst road

John Varley O.W.S

£420



REF: 1174

Height: 26 cm (10.2")

Width: 28.5 cm (11.2")

1

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Framed Height: 48 cm (18.9")

Framed Width: 59 cm (23.2")

Description

In search of sublime and picturesque scenery, Varley visited North Wales in 1798/9 and 1802, and North Wales landscapes are predominant in his early work, as he emerged out of Thomas Girtin's shadow. Conwy Castle was one of his favourite subjects, providing subject matter for exhibits for over three decades, even though he wasn't to return to Wales after 1802. Although this work has faded a little over the years, it was always a limpid watercolour, with Mynydd y Dref (Conway Mountain) shrouded in diaphanous mist behind the castle, and painted in the blue and brown palette Varley inherited from early works by Girtin and J. M. W. Turner.The present work was sold at Christie's, 15 November 1988, lot 121. The catalogue entry for the auction states the work was probably no. 465 in the Society of Painters in Water-Colours exhibition of 1804. Varley did show a "View of Conway castle" as no. 465 at the Royal Academy in 1804. Although the Society of Painters in Water-Colours was founded in November 1804, its first, ground-breaking exhibition was staged from 22 April to 8 June 1805, at No. 20 Lower Brook Street. Varley, who was a founder member, showed 42 works in this exhibition, of which three are titled as views of Conwy Castle. These were no. 188 "Conway Castle, from the Llanrwst road", no. 204 "Conway Castle, North Wales" and no. 212 "Conway Castle, with the broken tower". He did not show another view of the Castle until 1808. The present work is, indeed, a view from what Varley would have known as the Llanwrst road. Although this was an aspect of the castle he subsequently painted several times, this signed and dated work could indeed have been no. 188 in the 1805 exhibition, if not the Royal Academy exhibit.

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