

ALEXANDER NASMYTH

(Edinburgh 1758 - Edinburgh 1840)

A View of Loch Lomond with Figures and Boats in the Foreground

signed 'Alex. Nasmyth' (lower right)
oil on canvas laid down on board
63.5 x 88.9 cm (25 x 35 in)

'By yon bonnie banks
And by yon bonnie braes,
Where the sun shines bright
On Loch Lomond
Oh we twa ha'e pass'd
Sae mony blithesome days,
On the bonnie, bonnie banks
O' Loch Lomond.'

- Traditional Scottish song

A VIEW OF LOCH LOMOND WITH FIGURES AND BOATS in the Foreground by Alexander Nasmyth delightfully encapsulates the beauty of the lake, the largest in mainland Britain. Loch Lomond, ever popular and exalted in traditional song and poetry, is here immortalised by Nasmyth in visual form. As is typical of the artist's work, the view is highly romantic and slightly idealised as Nasmyth often worked up his studies in the studio, modifying certain elements to achieve a harmonious balance in composition.

The sun has just dipped behind the rocky outcrop on the left of the painting and its late afternoon glow reflects on the surface of the water, the jagged faces of the surrounding hills and the luxurious clouds in the sky. The lighting has a soft Mediterranean feel, no doubt inspired by Nasmyth's travels through Italy, which enhances the poetic mood. In the foreground, a couple stands on the bank conversing, while a woman sits admiring the view and two men unload provisions from a rowing boat. At a slight distance, other sightseers alight from a boat and take in their surroundings.

Nasmyth's concern with atmospheric effects and his adherence to the ideals of the Picturesque, which were highly popular in his day, are in evidence in the present painting as well as in works such as *Dumbarton Castle and Town with Ben Lomond* (fig. 1). The two images have a number of compositional parallels, and are both marked by the brilliant rendering of the sky and weather conditions, features that have garnered Nasmyth widespread praise and distinguish his best works.

Nasmyth intended to train as an architect, but an early inclination towards painting led him to apprentice with James Cummyng (c.1730-1792), a house decorator and antiquarian. Nasmyth's talent impressed Allan Ramsay (1713-1784), who visited Crichton in 1774, and decided to take him on as an apprentice in London, where he spent four years. On his return to Edinburgh in 1778, Nasmyth set himself up as a portrait painter, initially following Ramsay's practice of painting his sitters bust-length against plain

backgrounds, before gaining confidence and experimenting by placing his subjects in landscape settings. He soon developed an inclination towards landscape painting, and in 1783, an acquaintance loaned him £500 in order to broaden his artistic education on the Continent. His sketchbooks suggest that Nasmyth visited Rome, the Bay of Naples, Bolsena, Ancona and Tivoli, as well as Lakes Lucerne and Geneva in Switzerland. He returned to Edinburgh in 1784, now aged twenty-six, and resumed painting portraits, although in the following few years he increased his output of landscapes. Nasmyth's predominant theme was the Scottish landscape, and he soon developed a consistent style and compositional formula that he maintained with great success throughout his career.



Alexander Nasmyth, *Dumbarton Castle and Town with Ben Lomond*, 1816, Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery, University of Glasgow (Figure 1)

