SPHINX FINE ART



**Joseph Mallord William Turner, R.A. (London 1775-London 1851) & Thomas Girtin (British 1775-1802)**

**Arno, A Villa Among Trees and Bushes**

pencil and watercolour
18 x 23.5 cm (7⅛ x 9¼ in)

*Arno, a Villa among Trees and Bushes* presents an imposing Tuscan farmhouse framed by sprawling verdant vegetation. The light terracotta tones of the tiled roof and walls blend harmoniously with the subtle colouring of the surrounding landscape. The blue sky is dappled with light cloud cover that hints at muted summer warmth, while the varying palette of greens applied to the trees and bushes highlight their lusciousness and the fertility of the local soil.

The present work is a joint collaboration, datable to c. 1795, between two of the great British watercolourists, J.M.W. Turner and Thomas Girtin. As young artists they worked in the famous 'academy', run by the noted collector and patron Dr. Thomas Monro (1759-1833). Monro hired aspiring artists to make copies of existing watercolours and drawings, by artists including Canaletto (1697-1768) and John Robert Cozens (1752-1797). Monro paid the artists well; Turner claimed that he could earn up to 3s 6d[1] and an oyster supper a night which meant that the young artists 'could earn a living while learning the fundamentals of watercolour painting as well as having access to his [Monro's] outstanding collection of drawings'.[2] In collaborative works, including *Arno, a Villa among Trees and Bushes,* 'Girtin drew in outlines and Turner washed in the effects'. Turner and Girtin worked there for three years, from 1794-97, although these sessions must have taken place in the winter, as the two artists spent their summers on sketching tours.

The present work bears a label which reads: 'Italian villa with trees 7½ inch by 9¼ Bought from Agnews as a copy by Turner from Cozens. Original sketch in pencil is in Vol. vi. of the Beckford Sketch Books, now owned by the Duke of Hamilton. Volume vi. contains J.R. Cozen's sketches made between Sept 15th and Oct 10th 1783 and the sketch for the above drawing is dated "Arno Sept 25th" and is on page 14 of the volume. There are five other sketches of the same date, one of "Villa Salviate on the Arno", another of the Grand Dukes Palace.'

As already mentioned, the artists in Monro's academy copied works from a variety of sources and the present work derives from a pencil sketch by Cozens on page 14 of volume vi. of the Beckford Sketch Books.[3] Cozens made these sketches during his tour of Italy of 1782-83, part of which was made in the company of the young William Beckford (1760-1844), who was a friend and patron of his father, the artist Alexander Cozens (1717-1786). During this trip, Cozens made his second trip to Rome, via Germany and Austria and he travelled as far as Naples accompanied by Beckford who was, at the time, one of the wealthiest men in England. During this sojourn Cozens filled his sketchbooks with small studies, which he later worked up into finished watercolours. There are seven Beckford sketchbooks containing Cozens' work from this trip. From 1794-1797 Cozens was in the care of Monro, following a mental breakdown. The doctor therefore had access to Cozens' studio and to his volumes of drawings, for his academy to use. Cozens' depiction of the villa depicted in the present work is dated 25th September 1783, and there are five other sketches from that date, including *Villa Salviati on the Arno,* which was later copied by Turner. A comparison between pencil sketch and watercolour demonstrates how Turner took Cozens' composition and imbued it with the sense of atmosphere that would be such a notable feature of Turner's work throughout his career. As the warm dawn light washes over the work a sense of vitality is given to the landscape. Additionally formal details are expanded on, such as the water with its rippled reflections, or the trees, swaying gently in the river breeze.

These qualities are also seen in another of the collaborative works between Turner and Girtin, the Tate's *Angera, Lago Maggiore.* Like *Arno, A Villa among Trees and Bushes,* the watercolour features the quick and precise draughtsmanship of Girtin in conjunction with Turner's masterful handling of colour. Considered together the works demonstrate the full range of both artists ability. In the present work Girtin produces a detailed and careful study of trees and bushes, whereas in the Tate's work the composition is more panoramic in which the dense wooded shore is contrasted with delicate stillness of the water. Turner on the other hand dramatically changes the atmosphere between the two works with only a subtle shift of palette; In *Arno, A Villa among Trees and Bushes* the predominantly green palette is suffused with yellow, which creates the feel of a warm summer's day. However, in the Tate's work the green palette is underpinned by blues and greys which contributes to the cool and misty atmosphere. Both examples demonstrate how well the two young artists worked in conjunction with each other.

Turner is one of the most important and original of all European landscape artists, and it was as a watercolourist that he began his career. In fact 'the application of colour might be said to have preceded the drawing of outline; the earliest reports of his activity as a boy tell of him colouring prints which were exhibited for sale in his father's shop'.[4]

Dr Monro took over from his father as the principle physician to the Bethlem ('Bedlam') Hospital for the insane in London. In addition to Cozens, he was consulted on the treatment for George III's (1738-1820) bouts of insanity. He moved to 8 Adelphi Terrace in 1793 and it was here that he ran his 'academy', which had such a significant impact on contemporary British watercolour painting. In addition to Turner and Girtin, other artists associated with the Monro circle included John (1778-1842) and Cornelius Varley (1781-1873), Peter de Wint (1784-1849) and John Sell Cotman (1782-1842). As a collector Monro was voracious in his acquisition and was a pioneer in his concentration on the work of contemporary British landscape watercolourists. Although he was an amateur artist himself, his importance lies in his role of collector and patron.

We are grateful to Andrew Wilton for confirming the attribution of the present work.

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[1] *Diary of John Farington,* October 24 1798.
[2] Hargraves, M., 'Joseph Mallord William Turner' in *Great British Watercolours from the Paul Mellon Collection,* exh. cat. (Virgina Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond & State Hermitage Museum, Russia, 2007), p.103.
[3] Currently in the collection of the Whitford Art Gallery, Manchester (D.1975.9.14).
[4] Wilton, A., 'Turner's Drawings and Watercolours', in *Turner: 1775-1851* (exh. cat. Tate Gallery, 1975), p21.

**Provenance:**

Thos. Agnew & Son;
The Leicester Galleries, March 1953;
H.M. Langton;
Spink & Son.;
Private collection.

**Artist description:**

Turner was born near Covent Garden in London. His first job was as an assistant to an architect, and his early works reveal the influence of many eighteenth-century topographical artists. At the age of fourteen he decided to become an artist, and began to study at the Royal Academy Schools in 1789. His early *oeuvre* consisted of drawings and watercolours on paper, which he exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1790; it was some years before he felt ready to start painting in oils. Turner exhibited his first oil painting, *Fishermen at Sea,* at the Royal Academy in 1796, when he was twenty-one. Success came relatively early, and in 1803, at the age of twenty-seven, he began work on the spacious gallery in his house in Harley Street, which not only advertised his achievements but provided a more sympathetic setting for his pictures than the crowded walls of the Great Exhibition Room at the Royal Academy. Nevertheless, he continued to exhibit at the RA and, unlike a number of other British artists, remained involved with the Academy throughout his career. He become an Associate Member in 1799, aged twenty-four, and a full Member in 1802, as well as being elected Professor of Perspective in 1811, and appointed acting President in 1845. In 1840 Turner met the critic John Ruskin, who became the great champion of his work, writing: "'We have had, living amongst us and working for us, the greatest painter of all time".

Turner travelled extensively throughout Europe, especially to France and Italy, and gathered inspiration for some of his finest works.

In his later life, Turner began sending to the Academy exhibitions unfinished canvases which one contemporary described as being 'without form and void, like chaos before the creation'. He would then complete them in the exhibition room on Varnishing Days, virtuoso performances which soon became legendary.

Turner became interested in contemporary technology, as can be seen from his works *The Fighting 'Temeraire'* and *Rain, Steam and Speed.* At the time his free, expressive treatment of these subjects was criticised, but it is now widely appreciated.

Throughout the 1830's and '40's Turner kept up a steady flow of masterpieces in both oil and watercolour. However, his health began to break down in 1845. After displaying four last works at the Royal Academy in the late spring of 1850 it appears that Turner was too physically feeble to paint any more.

Turner died on 19th December 1851. Turner bequeathed much of his work to the nation. In addition to nearly two thousand paintings and watercolours in private hands, he left an immense body of work in his Queen Anne Street and Chelsea studios - some 282 finished and unfinished oil paintings and 19,049 drawings and sketches in watercolour, pencil and other media. The great majority of the paintings are now at Tate Britain.

**Collections**

J.M.W. Turner is represented in a vast number of collections worldwide, among others: Art Institute of Chicago; Fitzwilliam Museum at the University of Cambridge, UK; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Louvre Museum, Paris; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; National Gallery, London; Pinakothek, Munich; Royal Academy of Arts Collection, London; Tate Gallery, London; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Frick Collection, New York City; Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro; National Gallery of Victoria, Australia; National Maritime Museum, Greenwich; National Portrait Gallery, London;

Philadelphia Museum of Art; The British Museum, London; The Huntington Library, California; The Wallace Collection, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London.