

JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER, R.A. AND THOMAS GIRTIN

(London 1775 - London 1851)

(London 1775 - London 1802)

Arno, a Villa Among Trees and Bushes

pencil and watercolour

18 x 23.5 cm (7 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ in)

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

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 lushness and the fertility of the local soil.



John Robert Cozens, *Villa Salviati on the Arno*, 1783,
Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (Figure 1)

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 6d¹ 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 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch by 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ 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 Salviati on the Arno", another of the Grand Dukes Palace.'

As already mentioned, the artists in Monro's academy copied works

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. (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond & State Hermitage Museum, Russia, 2007), p.103.



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*, see figure 1, which was later copied by Turner (fig. 2). 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* (fig. 3). 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,



Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Villa Salviati on the Arno*, c. 1796, Yale Centre for British Art, Connecticut (Figure 2)



Joseph Mallord William Turner & Thomas Girtin, *Angera, Lago Maggiore*, c. 1796, Tate Britain, London (Figure 3)

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.

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.