

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Susanna Drury (Dublin c.1698 - 1770)

View of London from Greenwich

Circa: 1733

1733

Gouache

23.4 x 33.7 cm (9 1/4 x 13 1/4 inches)

Signed and dated 'Sus. Drury pin/1733' (lower right)

The present work is a remarkable early 18th century view of London as seen from Greenwich, probably from One Tree Hill or the Royal Observatory. Below the viewer, just beyond the trees, is St. Alfege Church, built by Nicholas Hawksmoor in 1712, with St. Paul's, Deptford beyond; finished in 1730. The windmills that once lined the shore of the Isle of Dogs can be seen in the middle ground. In the distance St Paul's Cathedral rises above the City of London.

Susanna Drury was from a Dublin family of Anglo-Irish ancestry. Although little is known of her life, she was influential in the development of Irish landscape painting. Her watercolour and gouache paintings of the Giant's Causeway were widely disseminated through engravings and helped bring international attention to the great site. Given Drury's comparatively small body of work, this landscape is extremely rare; rarer still being her only known depiction of London and dated work.

Drury was a mysteriously obscure but very able painter whose views of the Giant's Causeway in County Antrim are landmarks both in Irish topographical painting and in European scientific illustration. Her birth and death dates are not known but she was the sister of a Dublin miniature painter named Franklin Drury, who died in 1771. The first trustworthy views of the Giant's Causeway ever produced, Susanna Drury's gouaches of 1739-40, won the £25 premium of the Dublin Society in 1740 when the artist's identity was disclosed to the Society by Dean Gabriel Maturin, a prominent Dublin Huguenot. This raises the question of whether Susanna Drury had Huguenot connections or may have been trained on the continent. The groups of fashionably dressed figures in both of Susanna Drury's paintings show that as early as 1739 the Giant's Causeway had become a tourist attraction.

The early eighteenth century is a relatively uncharted period in the history of painting in Ireland and if

Susanna Drury learned her skills in Dublin, the most likely influence would perhaps be William van der Hagen (d. 1745) who appears to have been in Ireland from the early 1720s onward. He painted views of towns, shipping and theatrical scenery, and his View of Waterford painted in 1736, is certainly stylistically comparable to Susanna Drury's A view of London from Greenwich.

However, the fact that her only dated work, of 1733, is a London view, raises the possibility that Susanna Drury received her training in London. Her highly detailed technique suggests that she may have trained as a miniature painter, as did her brother Franklin Drury. Similarities to the French miniaturist Joseph Goupy (1689-1769) have been observed, particularly with her later use of vellum as a medium, and it is possible that she trained with him at some stage in London during the 1720s and 1730s where he was teaching draughtsmanship. Joseph Goupy was a French Huguenot engraver, painter, set designer, and watercolourist. His panoramic watercolour views of Malta belonging to the Marquis of Lothian, are similar in treatment to Susanna Drury's view of London.

This link between Susanna Drury and the French Huguenots was later seen again when Dean Gabriel Maturin, a member of one of the most illustrious Dublin Huguenot families, revealed Susanna Drury's identity to the board of the Dublin Society in 1740 (presumably she was obliged by her sex to submit her paintings anonymously), allowing her to win the prize for her views of the Giant's Causeway.

Her highly detailed observation provides us with a fascinating early record of London landscape and architecture. In the present work, the windmills that once lined the shore of the Isle of Dogs can be seen executed with extraordinary detail in the middle ground and it is these that gave Millwall its name. The mills were used for grinding corn from the surrounding fields but were demolished by the early 19th century as Millwall turned from a farming peninsula to the heart of London's ship-building industry. Today it is even more unrecognisable, as the regeneration of the 1980s saw the building of Canary Wharf. Below, we can further discern St. Alfege Church, an Anglican church in the centre of Greenwich, which is of medieval origin and was rebuilt in 1712–1714 to the designs of Nicholas Hawksmoor, a relatively new addition to the landscape when the work was drawn. In comparison with earlier paintings from similar viewpoints in Greenwich, such as Jan Griffier's 1690 London and the River Thames from One Tree Hill, Greenwich Park, we can see the development of the urban landscape. In the background, we can see Griffier's impression of what the new St. Paul's dome would look like. Construction of Sir Christopher Wren's new Cathedral began in 1675, after the damage in the Great Fire of London of 1666, and was completed in 1711, 22 years before Susanna Drury completed this gouache.

In a 1680 painting by Johannes Vorsterman the artist celebrates the remodelling of Greenwich Park in the 17th century, with the addition of the Royal Observatory, built in 1675 and the avenue of trees created for Charles II in the 1660s. Neither of these pictures show the windmills on the Isle of Dogs, which we can see in our painting, as these were constructed only in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. In both these paintings, as well as our work by Susanna Drury, all three artists have included deer on the right of the composition, a legacy of the park's use as Royal hunting grounds in the 17th century. While the view that Drury looked out on has changed substantially, there are some buildings, such as St. Alfege Church and St Paul's Cathedral, which have endured, despite being relatively recently built at the time the painting was executed.

Provenance

Bennett's Auction Rooms, Dublin, 2 February 1905;

With Frank Sabin, 1954;

Aldridge Bros, Worthing, where purchased by the previous private collectors in the early 1970s, to 2024

Literature:

Anne Crookshank, *Irish Watercolours and Drawings: Works on Paper c.1600-1914* (Abrams, 1995).