



MATTHEW RIDLEY CORBET, A.R.A. (1850 – 1902)

Sheep in an Italian Landscape

Signed 'MR Corbet' (lower left), also inscribed on reverse:

'Geraldine E Turner, bought from Mr Corbet'

Oil on panel

6 ¼ x 15 ¼ in. (15.8 x 38.7 cm.)

14 x 23 in. (35.5 x 58.4 cm.) (framed)

Provenance

Geraldine E. Turner (d. 1936), purchased from the artist.

Fine Art Society, London.

Private collection, USA, until 2019.

'The sophistication of Etruscan painting lies in the appreciation of the artists who pioneered the style that landscape painting was more than the straightforward inspection of one's surroundings, and that a style of painting which relied upon the mere recordings of the face of the countryside was essentially unrewarding. The Etruscans were subjective in their approach to the landscape of Italy and England: certainly they sought to describe the physical sensations of being in the open air, but for them even more important was the evocation of the spiritual associations, which may be literary, historical, political or purely personal, which attached people to those places. In this sense the Etruscans marked a vast aesthetic advance in a country which had always preferred the literal representation of recognisable subjects in painting; their openness to and communication with European ideas about painting and its function allowed them to overcome the traditional isolation of English painting and to discover that the symbolical significance of a subject was what made a painting of lasting importance.'

Christopher Newall, *The Etruscans: Painters of the Italian Landscape 1850-1900*, 1989.



Christopher Newall's final paragraph in his ground-breaking exhibition catalogue on *The Etruscans* organised by Stoke on Trent Museum and Art Gallery in 1989 (touring to York Art Gallery and Leighton House in London) sums up the significance of this group of English and Italian landscape painters working in Rome in the late 19th century. The term was coined in 1883 to describe the group, united in their affection for Giovanni Costa (1826-1903), the painter-cum-patriot, and by their love of Tuscany and the Roman Campagna. In addition to Matthew Ridley Corbet, the other Etruscans from England included among others William Blake Richmond, Frederic Leighton and George Howard, 9th Earl of Carlisle.

Painted primarily en plein air, the Etruscan pictures were characterised by their horizontal format with strong panoramic lines. Often painted on panel, the emphasis was on atmosphere and tone, creating a mysterious and romantic idyll. In the present picture, Corbet depicts a shepherdess tending her flock on a green hillside in the foreground with misty mountains and a hilltop town in the distance. He painted these small oil studies from nature and on these based his large canvases, such as *Val d'Arno*, *Evening* purchased for the Tate by the Chantrey Bequest in 1901. The present work is reminiscent of his larger composition, *The Arcadian Shepherd and his Flock* painted in 1883, in the collection of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution.

Born in Lincolnshire in 1850, the son of a country parson, Matthew Ridley Corbet was educated at Cheltenham College and was destined for a military career. However, instead he studied under the landscape and portrait painter Alexander Davis Cooper (1820-1895) and subsequently at the Slade and Royal Academy Schools. He was G. F. Watts's apprentice, focussing on portraiture, before embarking on his trip to Italy where he was enchanted by the beauty and magic of the landscape, in particular the Tuscan coastal region and the Campagna. Corbet lived in Italy from 1880 to 1884 and it was during this period that he turned entirely to landscape painting. He was much influenced by Giovanni Costa during the 1880-90s and frequently stayed with him at his house in the coastal village of Bocca d'Arno. In 1891 he married Edith Murch, widow of the painter Arthur Murch (d. 1885). She was a talented member of the Etruscans and fellow disciple of Giovanni Costa. Matthew and Edith spent much of the 1880s and 90s between their studios in Rome and London, painting and exhibiting together.



Matthew Ridley Corbet

The Arcadian Shepherd and his Flock

Oil on canvas

15 ½ x 25 in.

1883

Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution

The present picture, *Sheep in an Italian Landscape*, bears an inscription in ink on the back of the panel: 'Geraldine E Turner, bought from Mr Corbet'. Geraldine E. Turner (née Martineau) was a miniature portrait painter, living in London and exhibiting from 1913. She exhibited over twenty works at the Royal Miniature Society and the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours. She died in 1936. Corbet's painting was with the Fine Art Society, possibly in the mid-1970s, when Peyton Skipwith organised an exhibition: *The Etruscan School* in 1976. More recently the picture has been in a collection in America.

Corbet died in 1902. His work is held in a number of public collections including the Tate, the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, Museums Sheffield, Usher Gallery, Lincoln, Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, as well as many private collections.



John McLure Hamilton (1853-1936)

Matthew Ridley Corbet

Oil on canvas

18 x 24 in.

1893

National Portrait Gallery