

WILLOW GALLERY



Tending the Flowers

Daniel Ridgway Knight (1839 - 1924)

Oil on canvas, signed.

Canvas size: 22 x 19in / 56 x 48cm

Frame size: 29 x 26in / 74 x 66cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of Eleanor Feigenspan Ballantyne, Llewellyn Park,
New Jersey (acquired in Paris, c.1920)

Private Collection, New York

LITERATURE

This painting is sold with a photo-certificate from Howard L. Rehs and will be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné to be published by Rehs Galleries.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born in Philadelphia in 1839, Daniel Ridgway Knight was an American artist who spent most of his professional life in France. His scenes of peasant life, and particularly the images of local women in the gardens of his house in Rolleboise gave him critical acclaim, fame, and success during his lifetime.

After finishing his studies at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (where notable classmates included Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins, and Earl Shinn) in 1861, Knight sailed to France to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Here Knight formed friendships with Renoir, Sisley, and Wordsworth, and their work, in particular the attention to the changing effects of light, and the concentration on everyday subjects began to influence him. Further inspiration was to come from Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier (with whom Knight had studied), who encouraged him to incorporate a detailed style of realism in his work, and to paint the scenes of peasant life that were to forge his reputation.

Instead of building a career in France, Knight decided to return to America in 1863 to fight in the Civil War. He remained there until 1871 painting largely historical subjects, at which point he once again travelled to France, and this time settled there permanently.

Knight achieved rapid success, exhibiting extensively in Europe and further afield, winning an honorable mention at the Paris Salon in 1882, and a third-class medal in 1888. He also won a gold medal in the Munich Salon in 1888, and a silver in 1889, and exhibited his work in many of the world fairs held towards the end of the nineteenth century. A contract with the famed art dealer Knoedler in the mid-1890s cemented his success.

Although often compared to Millet, Knight was much more upbeat and idealised in his depictions of rural life, painting attractive women happily performing their day's chores, surrounded by beautiful countryside. As George Sheldon wrote in his discussion on Ridgway Knight in 1889: 'He does not see the sadness of French peasant life, but its gladness. He is neither a Millet nor a Zola' (George Sheldon, *Recent Ideals of American Art*, New York, 1889, p.18). Indeed, Ridgway Knight was convinced of the inherent happiness of his subjects, telling Sheldon that 'these peasants...all save money and are small capitalists and investors. They enjoy life. They work hard, to be sure but plenty of people do that. They love their native soil. In their hours of ease they have countless diversions, and the women know how to be merry in their hours of toil' (RB Knight, *Ridgway Knight: A Master of the Pastoral Genre*, exh. Cat., Cornell University, 1989, p.7). Despite his idealised visions of the peasant lifestyle, Ridgway Knight insisted that his models wore authentic clothing, and became good

friends with many of them during the course of his career.

In 1896, he purchased a house in Rolleboise, just outside Paris, and it is the work he made there, most of it sited in his stunning garden on a bluff overlooking the Seine, that has become his most sought-after.

40-41 Duke Street, St James's, London SW1Y 6DF · Tel: +44 (0)20 7968 1830 · Email: enquiries@willowgallery.com

Monday - Friday 9:30am - 6pm or by appointment

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