

Basic Detail Report



Don Quixote and Sancho Panza

Date

c. 1855

Primary Maker

Honoré Victorin Daumier

Medium

Oil on oak

Dimensions

40.3 × 64.1 cm

Description

This luminous painting is one of Daumier's most highly regarded works. It is a preparatory work for a more finished picture showing Don Quixote charging a flock of sheep painted in 1867/8 now in a private collection. Born in Marseilles in 1808, Honoré Daumier moved to Paris with his family when still a young child. His experience working as an errand boy in the milieu of the law courts had an enduring influence on his art and his keen observations of characters populating the judicial and political systems, as well as the pretensions and vanity of the bourgeoisie, brought him to the attention of a wide audience. He initially studied drawing with Alexandre Lenoir and trained for a brief period at the Académie Suisse but subsequently went on to become apprenticed to the lithographer Zéphérin Béliard. While Daumier worked in a wide range of media including oils, watercolours, drawings and sculpture, during his lifetime he was primarily known for his graphic work. His perceptive visual comments on the political and social mores of mid 19th France were published in the satirical newspapers *La Caricature* and *Le Charivari*. A committed believer in the French Republic, Daumier's drawings were on occasion deemed by the establishment to be 'too close to the bone' and he was sentenced to six months in prison from August 1832 - February 1833 for a ribald caricature he had drawn of King Louis-Philippe. Poverty and war were not romanticised in his work and his portrayal of the drudgery and physical exertion of the everyday life of poorer workers was depicted in dignified solid forms without sentimentality. His fluent draughtsmanship won the admiration of the distinguished art critic Charles Baudelaire, who considered him worthy of comparison with Goya and Hogarth while his work was celebrated by the renowned author Honoré de Balzac whose own novels explored contemporary French life. Despite such esteem, and having exhibited at the Salon as well as receiving official commissions from the State, Daumier's paintings were almost completely unknown during his lifetime. From 1863, Daumier, at the suggestion of the artist Charles François Daubigny, began to spend his summers at Valmondois, two miles north of Auvers-sur-Oise in France, where the artist JBC Corot had helped him acquire a house. Two years later he settled there permanently. Shortly before his death in 1878, a devoted group of friends organised an exhibition of his work in order to raise funds for the artist who was now living in poverty and suffering from blindness. Daumier began painting for his own

pleasure from 1834. The subjects in his paintings were mainly drawn from observations he made from everyday life, from classical mythology and from literature. A substantial and influential body of his work was inspired by Don Quixote the much-loved book written by the seventeenth century Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes. The adventures of Don Quixote, the knight errant trying to right the wrongs of the world, along with his 'squire' Sancho Panza, are described by Cervantes with a compassion, humour and philosophical insight which resonated with Daumier's own sensibility. The loose forms and lack of detail in Don Quixote and Sancho Panza suggest that this painting may be a preparatory work for a finished painting. A similar work, now in a private collection, shows Don Quixote charging a flock of sheep. The earthy coloured tones and strong contrast between light and dark of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza reveal the influence of Daumier's work as a printmaker. Any brighter colours, such as tints of blue, green and pink are mostly used for the sky. The composition here is very simple and effective and the mountainous landscape is suggested by two sloping diagonals of differing colours. There is a great sense of movement in the painting where Don Quixote, lance in hand is seen here charging into the distance on his old horse Rocinante while his squire Sancho Panza non-chalantly drinks from a bottle while balanced precariously on his donkey. (Jessica O'Donnell)