

Basic Detail Report



The Stranger

Date

1890

Primary Maker

Norman Garstin

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

134.7 x 211 cm

Description

'The Stranger' dates from Garstin's time in Newlyn. His works at this time fall into two groups, large official exhibition pieces and smaller landscape studies from nature. This is one of the former, an important work painted for the Royal Hibernian Academy Exhibition of 1890. An introspective tramp, smoking a pipe with his walking stick by his side, sits on a country stile. Beside him, he has his knapsack and a white pet dog. Two children, standing on the serpentine path, which leads us across the composition, anxiously ponder the vagrant. They are unsure as to whether or not they should disturb the brooding figure. The subject of the painting is evidence of the growing tendency towards sentimental narrative, which would dominate Garstin's work for the next ten years. The foreground is bathed in the silvery grey light beloved of plein-air painters, suggestive of mystery and tinged with melancholy. The foliage is treated in a broad sketchy manner; the figures and steps are more solid and weighty. The composition in this area of the painting is not entirely successful, and the spatial relationships are unresolved. The raking diagonal of the path moves too rapidly into the distance and the children, placed too far back, are out of scale. In contrast to the foreground, the background is suffused with sunlight. Here the buildings in the village of Mousehole are treated with a precision, which belies their distance. The colour range is livelier and creates a disturbing contrast in an eerie manner: the tramp sits between the children and the warmer, brighter scene.

(Catalogue Entry [6], 'A Century of Irish Painting: Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin', The Yomiuri Shimbun, The Japan Association of Art Museums, 1997, p. 143) NORMAN GARSTIN b. 1847 d. 1926 The Stranger 1890 Oil on canvas, 134.7 x 211 cm Presented by the artist, 1908 After a career as a diamond prospector in South Africa and a spell as a journalist for the Cape Times, limerick born Norman Garstin began painting full time c. 1880. Inspired by the French Barbizon painters and the plein-air works of Bastien Lepage, Garstin became a member of the Newlyn school together with Stanhope Forbes, Walter Langley and Frank Bramley. The Stranger is an early example of Garstin's growing tendency towards the narrative style of painting of his later years. The village of Mousehole can be viewed in the distance, bathed in evening light. Garstin had a talent for suggesting the atmosphere of a particular district, seeing it in terms of mystery and character as well as the perceptible effects of light. In the foreground of the

canvas are traces of pentimenti or ghostly underlying forms which the artist painted out but which have begun to show through.