

Scottish Paintings & Sculpture (561)

6th June 2019, Edinburgh

Lot 59

Estimate: £7000 - £10000 + Fees

ROBERT BROUGH R.A., A.R.S.A. (SCOTTISH 1872-1905)
ROWING BOATS BY A HARBOUR QUAY, CONCARNEAU

Oil on panel, also painted verso 'Fishermen on the quay'

26.5cm x 35cm (10.5in x 13.75in)

Note: Robert Brough's art is often overshadowed by the trauma and tragedy of his untimely death; after suffering horrific burns in a train collision outside of Sheffield. A great friend and protégé of Singer Sargent, the older artist rushed to be with his friend in his final days and following his death curated a memorial exhibition in celebration of the young artist's talent. Brough's life was cut short during a steep upward career trajectory; he was very much a rising art star, working alongside Sargent and having recently been made an associate of the Royal Scottish Academy.

Brough displayed a talent for both art and music from a young age, and was greatly encouraged by the family's neighbour, the painter Sir George Reid. With this support Brough found an apprenticeship as a lithographer in Aberdeen and used his earnings to fund trainings at Gray's School of Art in the city, before applying to the R.S.A. Schools in Edinburgh in 1891. By the end of his first year, he had been awarded three prestigious prizes, thus beginning a notable career. Brough completed further training in Paris, enrolling at the Académie Julien in Paris with Scottish Colourist S.J. Peploe, before travelling on in search of Sisley at Moret-sur-Seine and then Gauguin at Pont Aven in Brittany. By 1894 he had returned to his native Aberdeen and his steady progress was being closely monitored by the local press, 'When only three-and-twenty years of age Mr. Brough created some sensation and scored an undoubted triumph with two pictures shown at the Grafton Exhibition of the Society of Portrait Painters. His reputation already extended far beyond the confines of his native land. He had important pictures in Munich, Moscow, and in other leading Continental Galleries' (1895 *Aberdeen Daily Journal*). Then by 1897, and the age of 25, he was in London working on society portraits alongside Sargent.

A Scottish artist, with a particular European flair, Brough's modern French training combined with a range of influences and inspirations from Raeburn to Velazquez to create a sophisticated and flamboyant approach. Close engagement with the selection of offered works by this intriguing artist reveal his true talent and dexterity; his lightness of touch and sophistication across mediums particularly apparent. *Rowing Boats by a Harbour Quay, Concarneau* atmospherically evokes the Brittany coast and the quick, deft brushwork is handled with a charming lightness. An unfinished working sketch still visible verso reveals the artist's working practice. In *Rowing Boats*, and *Figures on the Harbour Wall, Brittany*, Brough beautifully balances the compositions and utilises the unique qualities of the differing mediums. Within the offered group a particular preoccupation with ripples and reflections is visible, elegantly captured by the artist in a variety of media, from directly applied waving lines of pastel pigment to



a patterning of daubs of fluid watercolour. Overall it is his dexterity with pastel that is a true delight to witness, with his lightness of touch allowing him to delineate the patterning of architecture and greenery in *South of Concarneau*, the colourful, graphic topography rising elegantly out of the buff paper surface, and the sparseness of a Parisian winter in *Bulb Planting in the Tuileries Gardens, Paris*, the effortful gestures of the workers clear in their brief outlines and the elegance of the city visible in the grey and white distance.

Brough's talent and approach was beautifully summarised by his friend and mentor, Sargent: '... the grace, the fluidity, the lightness of touch that are so delightful in Brough; that very rare quality of surface that seems to make the actual paint a precious substance.'