

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Jean Etienne Liotard (Geneva 1702–1789 Geneva)**

*A Dutch Girl at Breakfast*

oil on canvas, ca. 1755–56

46.8 x 39 cm (18<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in)

### **Provenance:**

Jean Etienne Liotard, his exhibition sale, Great Marlborough Street, London, 6–9 July 1773, lot 55 ('A Dutch girl pouring coffee'), unsold;

Jean Etienne Liotard, his sale, London, Christie's, 16 April 1774, lot 33 ('A Dutch girl at breakfast'), where acquired by William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough (1704–1793), for £15.4s.6d;

Thence by descent to Frederick Ponsonby, 10th Earl of Bessborough (1913–1993);

By whom bequeathed to the Stansted Park Foundation.

### **Exhibited:**

London, Jean Etienne Liotard, Great Marlborough Street, 6–9 July 1773, no. 55;

London, Royal Academy, *European Masters of the Eighteenth Century*, 1954–55, no. 47, p. 26;

London, The National Gallery, on long-term loan, April 2002–March 2015;

London, Royal Academy, *Jean-Etienne Liotard 1702–1789*, 24 October 2015–31 January 2016, no. 75.

### **Bibliography:**

E. Humbert, A. Revilliod and J.W.R. Tilanus, *La vie et les Œuvres de Jean Etienne Liotard*, Amsterdam 1897, p. 139, no. 112, reproduced;

L. Gielly, *L'Ecole genevoise de Peinture*, Geneva 1935, pp. 50, 203;

N. Trivas, untitled MS monograph and catalogue of the work of Liotard, 3 vols, 1936 (Preface dated Amsterdam 1938), no. 253;

'Eighteenth-Century Art at the R.A.: French and British Paintings', in *The Illustrated London News*, 27 November 1954, p. 946, reproduced;

Frederick Ponsonby, Earl of Bessborough, *A Place in the Forest, being a history of Stansted in Sussex*, London 1958, p.119;

A. Staring, 'Hollandse werken van Liotard en Perroneau', in *Oud Holland*, 1959, p. 228, reproduced;

R. Loche and M. Roethlisberger, *L'opera completa di Liotard*, Milan 1978, p. 93, no. 57, reproduced;

F. Grijzenhout, *Liotard in Nederland*, exhibition catalogue, Utrecht 1985, pp. 68–71, reproduced fig. 34;

Frederick Ponsonby, Earl of Bessborough, and C. Aslet, *Enchanted Forest: The Story of Stansted in Sussex*, London 1984, p. 142;

B. Scott, 'A Turkish sensation', in *Country Life*, 1985, p. 1574;

M. Roethlisberger, 'Holländische Malerei in der Westschweiz', in *Im Lichte Hollands: Holländische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts aus den Sammlungen des Fürsten von Liechtenstein und aus Schweizer Besitz*, exhibition catalogue, Zurich and Basel 1987, p. 42, reproduced fig. 2;

M. Roland-Michel, *Chardin*, Paris 1994, p. 254;

M. Roethlisberger and R. Loche, *Liotard: Catalogue Sources et Correspondence*, 2008, vol. I, p. 493, no. 342; vol. II, fig. 488;

C. Baker, W. Hauptman and M. Stevens, *Jean-Etienne Liotard 1702–1789*, exhibition catalogue, London, Royal Academy, 2015, pp. 169, 172–173, 210, cat. no. 75, reproduced.

A. Godycki, 'Notes on Jean-Etienne Liotard and Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting,' *The Burlington Magazine* [forthcoming].

### **Condition:**

The painting is in very good condition. As noted in the condition report provided by Sarah Walden for Sotheby's, the painting has been relined, gently cleaned and revarnished at some point in its history (she suggests half a century ago), but its paint surface is, for the most part, fine and unworn. There is some craquelure across the surface of the painting, most noticeably across the wardrobe at top left. There are some old retouchings on the outer edges, and at specific points towards the centre of the composition (e.g. just to the left of the coffee pot, on the top of the heater in the foreground). The figure remains in excellent condition.

The painting was sold in a gilt frame, which has a notable loss along the bottom edge.

### **Export objection under Waverley Criteria 1 and 2**

This painting meets Waverley Criterion 1 because it is closely connected with our history and national life. Liotard himself exhibited this picture in London in 1773 and sold it the following year at Christie's to his great friend and patron Sir William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough. Bessborough had been the source of the invitation to Constantinople in 1737 for that formative sojourn at the beginning of Liotard's career and remained one of Liotard's most dedicated patrons, amassing more than seventy works by the artist during his lifetime. This picture is one of a very few to have remained with Bessborough's descendants since its purchase 242 years ago: Roethlisberger and Loche's *catalogue raisonné* list only seven works

with the Stansted Park Foundation.<sup>1</sup> This painting's early history in London reflects the city's growing dominance in the European art market at the end of the eighteenth century, while its recent history hanging on the walls of the National Gallery between 2002 and 2015 made it the only openly accessible work by Liotard in this country.

Equally, this painting meets Waverley Criterion 2 due to its outstanding aesthetic importance. *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* is in near-impeccable condition. Its meticulous handling of paint epitomises Liotard's theories of art: his best-known maxim, as articulated in his *Traité des Principes et des Regles de la Peinture* (1781), was that a picture should have 'Point de touches' (no visible mark-making). In this, *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* excels, as it does in Liotard's other dictate that a painting should rival nature: this picture is a *tour de force* of Liotard's ability to imitate different surfaces and textures, from the sophisticated rendering of the painting on the back wall, to the extraordinary reflections of the coffee service in the table-top. The painting's subject matter is unique within Liotard's oeuvre. Within Britain, its genre and medium make it highly unusual: there are no genre scenes by Liotard in British public collections, and the vast majority of his works in this country are either miniatures or pastels, many of which, sadly, do not share this picture's extremely high quality.

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<sup>1</sup> These are: nos 62 and 63, the pendant portraits in oil of the then Viscount Duncannon and his wife; no. 276, the pastel portrait of Princess Amelia of Hannover in profile; no. 342, *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* (the painting under discussion); no. 496, a pastel portrait of the future 3rd Earl of Bessborough; no. 497, a pastel portrait of George Ponsonby, the 2nd Earl's nephew; and no. 498, a pastel portrait of William Brabazon Ponsonby, future Lord Ponsonby.

## DETAILED CASE

*A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* depicts a young woman in a recognisably Dutch interior. She is modestly dressed, in a pale dress and white cap, and is pouring herself a cup of coffee. Everything in the picture – her costume, the coffee service, the relatively simple furniture, the straw matting on the floor – is typically Dutch of the mid-eighteenth century, with the exception of the painting of the church interior that hangs conspicuously on the wall behind her. This is evidently from the seventeenth century; it evokes the Delft church interiors of Emanuel de Witte (1615/17–1691/2) and Hendrick Cornelisz. van Vliet (1611/12–1675), but a definitive attribution has yet to be reached (it might have been in Liotard's own collection, which included almost 100 seventeenth-century Dutch paintings). That both Liotard's painting and the painting within it share a light source from the left suggests, as Maryanne Stevens has recently argued, that *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* can be seen as Liotard's tribute to, and emulation of, the *fijnschilders* of the Dutch Golden Age.<sup>2</sup>

Liotard travelled extensively throughout his career: his destinations included, but were not limited to, Paris, Rome, Naples, Constantinople, Vienna, Lyon, London, Delft and Amsterdam. He made two visits to the Netherlands – the first between 1755 and 1757, the second between 1771 and 1773 – and *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* most likely dates from the first of these visits, since the objects in the interior reflect so strongly the tastes of the 1740s and 1750s. This first stay was the period in which Liotard was most active as a collector of Dutch painting, and also the moment of his marriage to Marie Fargues, in August 1756.

Liotard's marriage was a key moment in his professional career, not least because, up to this point, he had styled himself 'le Peintre Turc', worn Turkish clothes, and grown an extremely long beard.<sup>3</sup> This beard was much remarked upon in Paris and London, and although his wife made it a condition of their marriage that he cut the beard off, it had already done much to reinforce Liotard's reputation as a painter of Oriental subjects. Liotard owed this formative experience in Constantinople entirely to William Ponsonby, Viscount Duncannon (later 2nd Earl of Bessborough), who, thirty-seven years later, would purchase *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast*. The two men had met in Rome in 1736 and, according to the account of the Earl of Sandwich who travelled with them to Constantinople in 1738, Liotard was brought along on the voyage to the Levant 'to draw the dresses of every country they should go into; to take prospects of all the remarkable places which had made figure in history; and to preserve in their memories by the help of painting, those noble remains of antiquity of which they went in quest.'<sup>4</sup> Although no illustrated publication appeared and Liotard kept the group of costume drawings for himself, Ponsonby was to remain one of his most staunch supporters: *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* was one of more than seventy works by Liotard that he purchased from the artist.

*A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* has unbroken provenance that reaches directly back to this patronage relationship. Its minutely described interior is highly unusual within Liotard's oeuvre: his genre scenes tend to make use of an abstracted, neutral background, as with the

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Etienne Liotard 1702–1789, exh. cat. London, Royal Academy, 2015, no. 75, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> Liotard inscribed a 1744 self-portrait, now in the Uffizi, 'J. E. Liotard / de Geneve Surnommé / le Peintre Turc peint / par lui meme a / Vienne 1744.'

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Roethlisberger and Loche 2008, vol. 1, p. 261.

*Déjeuner Laverne* (private collection) or *The Breakfast* (Alte Pinakothek, Munich).<sup>5</sup> Its medium is an equally unusual choice, since pastel was far and away Liotard's preferred medium. As Roethlisberger notes, after the portrait in oil of Simon Luttrell (ca. 1754–55), Liotard did not paint another portrait in oil for fifteen years.<sup>6</sup> The choice of oil for *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast*, then, was clearly deliberate and marks this picture out as belonging to an area of Liotard's art woefully underrepresented in Britain. ArtUK lists only four paintings in oil by Liotard in British public collections, of which one may be an autograph copy, two others are copies, and one is the unusual collaborative group portrait at Ickworth to which Liotard may have contributed as little as one head.<sup>7</sup> A far better comparison in terms of quality, rarity and technique is the Getty's *Still Life: Tea Set*, also in oil, with which *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* shared the same meticulous technique, enamel-like surface and absence of visible brushstrokes. It must be remembered, however, that Liotard was primarily a portraitist. His portraits far outnumber his genre scenes and still lifes, and this is especially true in Britain, where the eighteenth-century stereotype about the British mania for portraiture is borne out by the number of pastel portraits Liotard executed during his first stay (fifty pastel portraits and one preparatory drawing survive). When Liotard did turn his hand to genre scenes, it was generally either to *turquerie* subjects inspired by his time in the Levant (such as the series of *Dames pensives*) or to moments of domesticity, in which he used members of his Lyonnais family as models (such as the *Déjeuner Laverne* and *L'écriture*). Furthermore, many of these genre scenes exist in multiple autograph versions, which the painting under discussion does not. *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* is unique; exceptional not only in quality, but also in subject matter, genre and medium.

There is no record of a commission for *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast*, which lends weight to the suggestion that it was either painted on spec or perhaps for Liotard himself. Liotard's second visit to London appears, from what survives, to have been far less fruitful than his first. In more straitened financial circumstances, he organized an exhibition-sale at his house on Great Marlborough Street, in which the picture featured (no. 55, 'A Dutch girl pouring coffee'). Although unsold here, it was bought the following April from Christie's by Ponsonby, who by this point had assumed the title of 2nd Earl of Bessborough. It has remained in the Bessborough family ever since – a stability that has presumably contributed to its excellent state of preservation.

Sold at Sotheby's on 6 July 2016, *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* achieved a price of £4,405,000. This is an unprecedented figure for a Liotard at auction; previously, the highest price paid was €1,464,750 for the portrait of Mademoiselle Louise Jacquet (Sotheby's, Paris, 21 June 2012, lot 57). *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* is a masterwork of exceptional quality by an artist who made a significant contribution to British artistic life during two extended visits to the country. Its subject matter is unique, its medium unusual, and its long connection to the UK since the time of its purchase in 1774 should not be overlooked. It is a major work by an artist who is not currently championed by British national collections, and whose dominant

<sup>5</sup> Roethlisberger states that this interior is 'unique' amongst Liotard's genre scenes, although some of his *turquerie* subjects do suggest a three-dimensional space (Roethlisberger and Loche, *Liotard: Catalogue, Sources et Correspondance*, 2008, vol. 1, no. 342, p. 493).

<sup>6</sup> Roethlisberger and Loche 2008, vol. 1, p. 449.

<sup>7</sup> [http://artuk.org/discover/artworks/view\\_as/grid/search/makers:jean-etienne-liotard-17021789--keyword:liotard](http://artuk.org/discover/artworks/view_as/grid/search/makers:jean-etienne-liotard-17021789--keyword:liotard) [accessed August 2016]. See Roethlisberger and Loche 2008, vol. 1, no. 195, pp. 401–403.

medium (pastel) makes exhibition difficult. This painting's departure from Britain would represent a grave and irreplaceable loss.

8<sup>th</sup> September 2016