

Breton Fisher Boy

Joseph Knight (1837-1909)



REF:

Description

Watercolour Signed lower right & inscribed on reverse by hand "A Breton Fisher Boy" 53.5 x 44.5 cms (21 x 18 ins)

Joseph Knight was a founder member of the Manchester School of Painters. He refused to conform to art school rules and painted in a free style which gathered a following of young admirers disillusioned by the old school methods of teaching. They would meet in Knight's studio in York Place, behind Union Chapel in Oxford Road, Manchester, twice weekly, to discuss how to develop new techniques. They experimented with different tones and colours, especially after visits to Pont-Aven in Brittany which attracted a great colony of artists, from the 1850's onwards. One notable artist who spent much time there in the 1880's and early 1890's was Paul Gauguin. The different ways of working had a great influence on the group but the more they experimented the more criticism they received from the Manchester art critics and the old school of painters. It would take over 10 years for the Manchester School to be accepted by the critics but illustrates how the group sought change and were much influenced by Joseph Knight who was responsible for the turn in direction. Joseph Knight became a member of the Manchester Academy of Fine Arts, joining in January 1868, withdrawing in 1879 and being re-elected in 1883. He was also elected a member of the Dudley Gallery, the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, associate of the Society of Painters-Etchers, the Royal Cambrian Academy of Art, (founded in 1881 and became Royal in 1882), the Limners Club and Art-Min-Afon at Betws-y-Coed. In 1874 he was a prize winner at the Royal Manchester Institution and in 1891 won a Bronze medal at the Paris Exhibition. He exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1861-1908 and his work is to be found in their permanent collection, likewise at the Victoria & Albert Museum, The Tate Gallery, London, Manchester Art Gallery and the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Knight lived briefly in London but by the 1870's had moved to Denbighshire with his wife Elizabeth, four sons and two daughters. Once again his studio, this time in Betws-y-Coed was the focus for meetings of young artists from the Manchester School. By the 1880's, a considerable number of them, notably, F W Jackson, H Clarence Whaite, Edward Norbury and John & Joshua Hague had colonised the Conway Valley, near Knight's home there. Joseph Knight began as a portraitist but is principally known as a landscape artist, also known for his small genre paintings and engravings. He worked in both oil and watercolour. This painting of a Breton Fisher Boy is arguably one of the finest examples of his work in portraiture and watercolour and is in the original Watts frame designed by the artist, George Frederick Watts, showing ornate leaf-work borders. Knight most probably painted this work whilst on a visit to Pont-Aven in Brittany where he developed his freedom of style. He influenced other young artists with his break from the traditional methods imposed by art schools and academies at the time, which resulted in his founding of the Manchester School.