

JAMES MACKINNON

Fine Paintings and Drawings Business by appointment only

Edward LEAR

London 1812-1888 San Remo

Santa Maria di Polsi, Calabria

Pen, ink and blue wash heightened with white on buff paper

49.7 x 34.3 cm 19 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches

Inscribed and dated 8 August 1847 and numbered 60; with numerous pen and pencil notations.

This drawing of the dramatic landscape surrounding the monastery of Santa Maria di Polsi was used by Lear for the print of the subject in his *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria and the Kingdom of Naples*, London, 1852. Lear left San Luca on 7th August and made sketches of Santa Maria the following day which are numbered 60-63. The present drawing is the most important of those known. Nos. 61 and 63 are held in the Houghton Library at Harvard and the whereabouts of no. 62 is not known. The other drawings are in pen and ink on smaller sheets lacking the grandeur of the landscape in this subject. The remoteness of the site emphasises how Lear endured hardships to attain such places.

Perhaps best known to the general public for his nonsense rhymes and verse, Lear was a highly skilled and original landscape painter in oil and watercolour. He developed his talent drawing the parrots in the Zoological Gardens leading to his first publication at 19, *Illustrations of the Psittacidae or Parrots* in 1830. He then painted birds and animals in the private menagerie of the Earl of Derby for his son Lord Stanley.

In 1836 Lear travelled to the Lake District of England. Lear then spent three years in Italy from 1847, completing three illustrated volumes on his travels.

Thereafter Lear travelled widely in the Mediterranean countries, notably Greece, in particular Corfu and Mount Athos, Italy and Egypt, but he also visited India. The fruits of these travels were numerous pen and ink sketches finished with washes of watercolour, and jewel-like finished watercolours and oil paintings, some of large format.

Santa Maria di Polsi is a town and monastery near San Luca in Calabria whence Lear started his journey to the site in the Aspromonte mountains on 7th August 1847. It stands in a deep gorge at 2,800 ft. above sea level and until recently could not be reached by road. The monastery was founded by Roger II of Sicily in 1144, but archaeological evidence has been found suggesting that the site was used for worship much earlier during the period of Greek settlement of Magna Graeca from the 8th century B.C.

An annual festival has taken place for centuries in late summer into autumn, of a somewhat pagan character although centred on the statue of Santa Maria which is processed through the town. By contrast and in tandem with this, the *Ndranghetta* held annual meetings in the locality until these were disrupted in more recent times by the forces of law and order.