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LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART



ARTIST UNKNOWN

perhaps (*A View in the Hills Southern India*)
oil on canvas
54 x 81.5 cm

Provenance:

Possibly John S. Bowering, London
Topographical Paintings, Drawings, Prints and Bronzes, Sotheby's Parke Bernet & Co, London,
3 November 1976, lot 103 attributed to John Webber as A View of the Hinterland of
Tahiti, illus. p. 67
unknown
Blue Boy Gallery, Melbourne c.1977
private collection, Melbourne

Exhibited:

The Two Worlds of Omai, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, 1977, as *A View to the Hinterland
of Tabiti*, attributed to John Webber, cat. 47

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This perplexing landscape painting has baffled numerous curators since it was acquired by a Melbourne collector around 1977, as attributed to John Webber who served as official artist on James Cook's third voyage of discovery around the Pacific (1776–80) aboard HMS Resolution. Although having been attributed to John Webber by Sotheby's, today, it is generally agreed this attribution is not sustainable.

Stylistically, the painting takes much from the work of Welsh artist Richard Wilson, sometimes referred to as the father of English landscape painting. Amongst his followers were Constable and Turner, the latter visiting the locations of a number of Wilson's most famous paintings. Contemporary thinking dates the painting around 1770-1780.¹

Although there had been some enthusiasm for the subject being of the Glasshouse Mountains, Queensland or the Pigeon House Mountains, NSW, a study of the landform has eliminated the scene being Australian, while the distinctly exotic feel of the painting has suggested a location somewhere in the Pacific.² Although there are no landscape features that are an exact match to the very distinctive volcanic plug formations, several drawings of Tahiti by John Webber describe similar formations. To some degree, this accounts for Sotheby's attribution.

The artist has depicted the foliage in elaborate detail and one would expect the leafy bough structure in the foreground to be representative. It is not a form used by Australian Aboriginals, but has similarities with those used within Polynesia.³ The building atop the lava plug appears to be of cultural origins with possible linking to Asian heritage. Further, a landscape analysis suggests a similarity with Southern India, and in particular the Toda Hills.⁴

1. Email from Michael Rosenthal to Lauraine Diggins 2016

2. Email from Paul McIntyre to Lauraine Diggins 1 May 2002

3. Email Paul McIntyre to Lauraine Diggins 21 January 2002

4. Email from Michael Rosenthal to Lauraine Diggins 2016