



William Powell Frith Racing Picture, The Derby Day

William Powell Frith

Sold



REF: 30287

Height: 50 cm (19.7")

Width: 110.5 cm (43.5")

Framed Height: 75 cm (29.5")

Framed Width: 130 cm (51.2")

Description

William Powell Frith, The Derby Day Engraving.

An exceptional large and impressive Victorian engraving after the oil painting of the Epsom Derby by William Powell Frith, titled 'The Derby Day'. Frith has produced another of his panoramic narrative works of life showing the hustle and bustle of Victorian life, this time at the races. This original engraving was published March 2nd 1863 by E. Gambart & Co.

A picture whose subject is the day at the races, you would think it would show the jockeys and horses, but they have taken a back seat. The emphasis is on the motley crew of the Victorian racegoers, representatives from all social classes. In the center, a couple of children are sprawl on the ground with a pair of tumblers, dressed in white, performing for the crowds, although the small child of the act is more interested in the picnic being laid out in front of the carriages by a footman. To the left, next to the Reform Club's private tent, a thimble rigger is swindling a top hatted gentleman, with a country drover dressed in a smock, hand in his pocket waiting in line, although his anxious wife is trying to restrain him. There is a young man with hands in his pocket realising he is a victim of the frequent pickpockets of the time, the pickpocket behind him examining the gold watch and chain. Just to the right of the pickpocket we see a group of gentlemen playing cards. Lined all around the racetrack we see racegoers drinking champagne in their carriages, with the racecourse grandstand visible in the background. On the far right we even see a young lad under a carriage trying to swipe a missed place bottle of champagne. Above him the lady with the parasol tries her best to ignore the advances of a fortune-teller and leaning nonchalantly against the side of the carriage her bored male companion is watching a barefoot girl selling flowers.

William Powell Frith (1819-1909) was an important Victorian English artist, one of the greatest of the nineteenth-century. His teeming panoramic masterpieces, including 'The Railway Station' and 'Life at the Seaside - Ramsgate Sands' broke new ground with their depiction's of diverse contemporary Victorian crowds. He was elected to the Royal Academy in 1853, presenting 'The Sleeping Model' as his Diploma work.

Frith used drawings, sketches, friends and family as well as hired models to pose for all the main figures to help in the execution of his original oil painting. He even went as far as to commission the photographer Robert Howlett to photograph for him as many groups of figures and crowds as he could. He asked a real jockey 'Bundy' to pose on a hobbyhorse in his studio for the riders in the picture, also hiring an acrobat and his son, whom he saw performing in a pantomime in Drury Lane.

Jacob Bell, a chemist and amateur artist, commissioned Frith to paint the large 5-6-foot canvas for £1,500, he produced two large sketches in addition to the finished work, the whole process taking fifteen months. When Frith's original painting was shown at the Royal Academy in 1858 the response was so overwhelming that a rail was erected to keep the crowds back and a policeman was placed on guard.