

## Skating

George Morland

Sold



REF: 1543

Height: 94 cm (37")

Width: 114.5 cm (45.1")

Framed Width: 91.5 cm (36")

Framed Depth: 91.5 cm (36")

## Description

George Morland was the son of Henry Robert Morland. He first exhibited chalk drawings in 1773 at the Royal Academy; his father recognized his precocious talent and bound him apprentice for seven years from 1777. Morland's chief employment during this period lay in copying and forging paintings, particularly 17th-century Dutch landscapes, although he also made a number of sea-pieces after Claude-Joseph Vernet. The excessive discipline imposed upon him during his apprenticeship may have inspired the libertarianism and disregard for social convention that characterized his later years. Although he entered the Royal Academy Schools, his attendance was sporadic; he preferred to frequent alehouses, such as the Cheshire Cheese in Russell Court. In 1780, the year the engraver John Raphael Smith published prints after Morland's *the Angler's Repast* and *a Party Angling*, George Romney offered Morland a three-year apprenticeship, but this he refused. In 1781, without his father's knowledge, Morland began working for an Irish dealer in London, who paid him only enough to ensure his continued dependence. When Morland's apprenticeship ended in 1784, he moved from the family home; the following year he was living in Margate, Kent. By the spring or early summer of 1786 he was back in London, exhibiting at the Royal Academy that year. At this period in his career Morland was producing sentimental genre pictures in the manner of Francis Wheatley; the moralizing thrust of many of them derived ultimately from William Hogarth as, for example, in *the Idle Mechanic* and *the Industrious Mechanic*, or *the Idle Laundress*, which William Blake engraved in 1788. By 1787 Morland was displaying what was to become a characteristic restlessness, while selling his works to the dealers through a middle-man named Irwin. He preferred the independence of disposing of his finished pictures through dealers rather than seeking out commissions, even declining an invitation to supply Carlton House with 'a room of pictures' for the Prince of Wales (later George IV). By this time Morland was rapidly becoming a popular artist. In 1788 alone 33 of his paintings were engraved and published, worked on by no fewer than 11 engravers, but his continued profligacy was beginning to get him into serious debt. He engaged a lawyer to look after his interests and in 1789 is thought to have made the first of several trips to the Isle of Wight in order to evade his creditors. From c. 1790 Morland began working on larger canvases, producing the very large number of rustic and smuggling scenes with which he is particularly associated. His paintings of the early 1790s, generally considered his best, are designed and finished with some care; later works show signs of being hastily executed pot-boilers. When broke he could paint a saleable picture at phenomenal speed (two and a half hours has been recorded), and if he was pressed too hard by his creditors he simply disappeared into the country. This enforced familiarity with rural life informs such anecdotal pictures as *the Benevolent Sportsman* (exh. RA 1792; Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum), commissioned by a Colonel Stuart and engraved by Joseph Grozer (b c. 1755) in 1795. In 1792, while Morland was once again in hid...