

Adam Calvert Bentley and Ardgowan Antiques

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Benjamin Zobel (1762-1831) George III Sand Picture

£1,700

A fine George III sand picture by Benjamin Zobel (1762-1831) depicting a bull and two donkeys within a barn interior. The doors of the barn are open onto a wintery scene, signed to the bottom right corner *B Zobel* presented in the original gilt frame

SKU: C4690

Height: 54 cm (21 inches) framed

Width: 69 cm (27 inches) framed

Year: English. Circa 1810



Benjamin Zobel (1762-1830) began his career in Bavaria (Swabia) in the family confectionery business. This apprenticeship became crucial to his career as a sand painter. When he turned eighteen he moved to Amsterdam where he studied miniature painting before moving to London, where he was employed by Ecchard Brothers of Chelsea for whom he designed patterned wallpapers, linens and silks. Three years later he was employed by the Prince Regent's chef Louis Weltje, and became a 'Table Decker' at Windsor Castle. The custom of 'table decking' had been introduced into England by George III, where the tablecloth at dinner was elaborately decorated with designs of coloured sands, marble dust, powdered glass or breadcrumbs. Zobel became a skilled confectioner and was entrusted with the pictures made in coloured sugars that decorated the huge tarts served at banquets. The method he employed for making sugar patterns was identical to that which he used to make his sand pictures; the sugar, or sand, was shaken through a cut and pleated playing card. Having converted the ephemeral process of sugar pattern to a permanent form of picture making, and believing that there was a future in it, he continued to make his sand pictures in his spare time. The ancient Japanese skill of bonkei or 'tray picture' was known, but Zobel has the reputation of being the inventor of the sand painting technique, and he was certainly the first to introduce the art to England. The subject matter of Zobel's sand-pictures ranges from battles and biblical scenes to landscapes and flowers, although animals, particularly horses, sheep and pigs held a particular fascination for him. His compositions were often taken from the paintings of his dear friend, George Morland. Zobel constructed his images with painstaking precision and was careful to describe every detail and texture, from the soft fur of a tiger to the rough, dusty ground of the battlefield. His works are extremely rare, not least due to the fragile nature of their construction.