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EST. 1817

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Jacques-Laurent Agasse (Geneva
1767-1849 London)

*A dark bay hunter in an extensive landscape,
horses and cattle beyond*

Oil on canvas

30 ³/₄ x 37 ¹/₈ in. (78.1 x 94.3 cm.)



Provenance

(Probably) Painted for George Pitt, 2nd Baron Rivers (1751-1828), Stratfield Saye, 1806.
Hausamann collection, Zurich, where acquired by the present owner.

Literature

The artist's record book (*Livre de Verité*), 1806, 'P. of a little bay Egipitian horse small size'.

This previously unpublished portrait of a bay hunter is a superb example of Jacques-Laurent Agasse's sensitive observation of the natural world. His scientific approach to rendering the creatures he depicted and highly refined technique made him one of the greatest animal painters ever to have worked in England, arguably second only to his predecessor George Stubbs.

Born into a patrician family of Huguenot origin, Agasse trained in Geneva before moving to Paris in 1786 to complete his artistic education in the studio of Jacques-Louis David. He also used this period to study animal anatomy and dissection, a practice which is abundantly clear in the physiological accuracy and precision of his later works. With the outbreak of the French Revolution, Agasse was forced to return to Geneva in 1789, before moving permanently to London in 1800 where he quickly established himself as a leading sporting painter.

This painting is likely to have been part of a series of pictures of horses that Agasse painted

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between 1806 and 1807 on the Stratfield Saye estate in Hampshire for George Pitt, 2nd Baron Rivers (1751-1828). Rivers, an enthusiastic breeder of both horses and greyhounds, and a devoted racer, had first met the Swiss painter in Geneva in 1789 and had encouraged his move to England. Lord Rivers became one of Agasse's most important patrons during the painter's early years in Britain, commissioning from the artist a number of paintings of horses on his stud farm and his beloved greyhounds. The largest and most ambitious of these commissions, *Lord Rivers' Stud Farm at Stratfield Saye* (fig. 1; New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection) was begun in July 1806 and completed over a year later on 21 December 1807, when it was entered in the artist's account book.



Fig. 1: Jacques-Laurent Agasse, 1767–1849, Swiss, active in Britain (from 1800), *Lord Rivers's Stud Farm, Stratfield Saye*, 1807, Oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

The present portrait of a bay hunter is also identifiable with an entry in Agasse's *Livre de Verité*, where it was recorded on 20 October 1806 as 'P. of a little bay Egipitian horse small size'. The landscape is comparable to that in other works from the Stratfield Saye series and the thatched stable yard buildings in the background may be among those depicted at right in the Stud Farm. We are grateful to Renée Loche for confirming the attribution to Jacques-Laurent Agasse on the basis of firsthand inspection.