



Colour-printed examples of George Morland's famous anti-slavery scenes

MORLAND, George.
 African Hospitality. [&] Slave Trade.

London: S. Morgan, 1814. Pair of mezzotints, printed in colours and hand-finished. Each c. 475 x 650mm.

£4,000

A pair of scenes contrasting the treatment given to European shipwreck survivors rescued by Africans with the brutality of the slave trade, with an African family being divided among different slave traders on a beach. Painted by George Morland (1763-1804), the subjects were a departure from his usual rustic and sporting themes. His 'Slave Trade', exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1788 under the title "Execrable human traffic. Or the affectionate slaves", is regarded as the first painting to record a slave trading scene. Morland then painted 'African Hospitality' as a companion, which was exhibited in 1790. 'Slave Trade' was a sensation, giving a substantial boost to the Abolitionist cause, only a year after the founding of the 'Society for the Abolition of the Slave trade', and nearly two decades before Britain finally banned the trade. The London engraver and publisher, John Raphael Smith (c.1746-1812), had already published prints after Morland and, by the time 'African Hospitality' was exhibited, mezzotints of both scenes were in production. The mezzotints were first published together in 1791 and, defying a downturn in the print market caused by the French Revolutionary Wars, sold well across Europe. This pair, published over twenty years after their first publication, shows their lasting popularity: the new



Altea Gallery Ltd. 35 Saint George St, London W1S 2FN
info@alteagallery.com - www.alteagallery.com
Tel : +44(0) 20 7491 0010

publisher, S. Morgan, considered the plates worth printing in colour. While the results made the prints look more like paintings, it was a laborious and expensive process. Coloured inks would be carefully painted onto the copper plate by brush; after each impression the plate had to be meticulously cleaned before the cycle started again, severely restricting the number that could be printed in a day. Surviving examples are very scarce.

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