Sotheby's
A GREAT BRITISH COLLECTION: The pictures collected by Sir David and Lady Scott, sold to benefit the Finnis Scott Foundation
London | 19 Nov 2008, 02:00 PM | L08137

LOT 96
SOPHIE ANDERSON
1823 - 1903
NO WALK TODAY
signed l.l: S Anderson; inscribed and signed on the reverse: No Walk Today/ S Anderson/
Merton Road/ Kensington
oil on canvas
49.5 by 39.5 cm., 19 by 15 1/2 in.

ESTIMATE 600,000-800,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 1,038,050 GBP

PROVENANCE
Robinson, Fisher & Harding, Willis's Rooms, Pall Mall, c.1926 (unsold at 15 guineas; bought after the sale by Sir David Scott for 14 guineas).

EXHIBITED
London, Foyles Art Gallery, Painters of the Victorian Scene, 1953, no. 1;
London, Agnew (in co-operation with the Victorian Society), Victorian Painting 1837-1887, 1961, no. 15;
Arts Council of Great Britain, Victorian Paintings, 1962, no. 2;
Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, Victorian Exhibition, 1965, no. 5;
Sheffield, Mappin Art Gallery, Victorian Painting, 1968, no. 77;
Washington DC, National Gallery of Art, The Treasure Houses of Britain - Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting, 1985, no. 560;
London, Agnew, 1991, no. 10;
Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, Sunshine and Shadow - The David Scott Collection of Victorian Paintings, 1991, no. 10;
On loan to Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, 2007 to 2008

LITERATURE
Graham Reynolds, Painters of the Victorian Scene, London, 1953, p. 84, illustrated as fig. 62;
John Hadfield, Every Picture Tells a Story: Images of Victorian Life, 1985, illustrated p. 32;
Mary Cowling, Victorian Figurative Painting - Domestic Life and the Contemporary Social Scene, London, 2000, pp. 20, 22, illustrated p. 21;
Sotheby's, Pictures from the Collection of Sir David and Lady Scott, 2008, pp. 120-123;
This picture will be illustrated in the forthcoming catalogue Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts, to accompany the exhibition of the same title to be held at The Yale Center for British Art and The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge in 2009

CATALOGUE NOTE
'There she is, all dressed up for her walk, in her lovely little bottle-green velvet pelisse and ostrich feather hat, but the rain has started (you can see the drops on the window pane) and she looks out disconsolately, wondering if it will clear. (The flowers outside the window will tell gardeners what time of year it is!)' Sir David Scott
'It is, to my mind, a very pleasing bit of work, telling its own simple story, quite PreRaphaelite in its representational detail which repays close study. Look, for instance, at the rain drops on the window and the flowers, Jasmine and Fuchsia, the Fuschia not yet in bloom, which tell us that the time of year is about July; to say nothing of the lovely clothes the little girl is wearing. How disappointed she looks as she stands there on a chair gazing out at the approaching storm - no mere passing April shower.' Sir David Scott

This is one of the most enduring and well loved of all images of Victorian childhood, and - of all the paintings in the Scott collection - was the one in which Sir David took most particular delight. He gave a careful reading of the different elements of the composition, on the basis of which he constructed the painting's narrative. We see the child through the glass of a sash window, with glazing bars and window frame forming a grid across the composition, and lending a sense of incarceration to the subject. Sir David's view was that the weather conditions were worsening, although in fact the light of the sun shines - perhaps momentarily - on the girl's face and clothes. Nonetheless, it seems clear that the order has been given that she will not go out, and disappointment may be read in the downcast expression of her face.

The painting is recognised as the masterpiece of the French-born artist of genre and child subjects, Sophie Anderson. Its quality of realism is quite extraordinary, with the colours and textures of the fabrics, and the varieties of plant that grow around the window, treated in a way which is utterly convincing and - in the context of the 1850s, when Pre-Raphaelitism was operating as a reforming influence on contemporary art - entirely modern. The physical appearance of domestic life changed dramatically in the mid-Victorian period. New dyes and ways of treating cloth were introduced, so that the clothes people wore identified them of their generation in a way that was disturbing to more conservative opinion. The child who is the subject of No Walk To-Day is observed objectively and without disapproval or approbation as the pampered product of a generation and a class of inordinate wealth. People's homes, likewise, took on a new look, as the great tide of Victorian plutocracy gathered force. Here, the artist makes an artistic virtue of a building material unknown earlier in the century - plate glass. The panes of the sash window would have struck the eye of most Victorians as strange on account of their sheer flatness, with the consequence that they can only be detected by the presence of droplets of rain on their surfaces. The artist seems to have observed English life during this period of epic social change brought on by the rapid accumulation of wealth, with a subtle and candid eye, and was capable of works of art that are both celebrations and deceptively critical. The quality of tenderness and intimate sympathy of observation manifest in the painting seem to imply that it represents a person to whom the artist was deeply attached.

Our knowledge of Sophie Anderson (née Gengembre) depends principally on a brief entry in Ellen Clayton's English Female Artists (1876). She was born in Paris, the daughter of an eminent French architect and his English wife. Her childhood was spent in the French countryside and in Paris, but in about 1848 the family left for the United States, probably fleeing the political unrest that had broken out in Europe that year. In America she established a successful portrait practice. She met her husband, Walter Anderson, a painter of domestic subjects there, and in 1854 moved with him to England, setting up house at 7 Harriet Cottages in Dalston, a semi-rural enclave off the Kingsland Road in Hackney. No information is forthcoming about any children born to her and her husband. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to suppose that the child represented was their daughter, who had presumably been born in America and who appears in other paintings by Anderson in the period that she lived in England after 1854, such as Tying the Shoelace, Windfall and Ladybird, Ladybird. The address given on the reverse of No Walk Today is that of 21 Merton Road in Kensington where, according to the record of her exhibits at the Royal Society of British Artists, she and her husband lived between 1856 and 1857. The picture was presumably painted in the late 1850s as Anderson had moved to Lincoln's Inn Fields by 1863.

The work's early history is not known and Sophie Anderson's connections with other artists in London in the 1850s and 60s (in 1871 she left England to live on the island of Capri, remaining there for twenty years) are not documented. The Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt may have known the present painting, as his later work Master Hilary - The Tracer (Fig 1. Lord Lloyd-Webber Collection) shares many motifs with it. Not only does it represent a child seen through the casement of a window, and with the sheets of glass invisible (a strange enough choice of subject, and
therefore sufficient to suggest a connection in itself), but also includes two particular floral types shown in Anderson's painting - jasmine and Japanese anemones.

No Walk To-Day may be regarded as one of the icons of the renewed appreciation of Victorian art. It was included in the remarkable exhibition of Victorian paintings that was staged at Agnew's in Old Bond Street in 1961, put on to help publicise and raise money for the Victorian Society which had been founded by John Betjeman and others in 1958. Loans to the exhibition came principally from private collections and included John Brett's Val d'Aosta, Edward Burne-Jones's Perseus and the Graiae, Richard Dadd's The Gardener, William Dyce's Henry VI at the Battle of Towton, and William Holman Hunt's The Awakening Conscience. The painting was used as an image on the poster that Agnew's produced for the exhibition (Fig 2). Five years later it appeared again as the cover illustration for Graham Reynolds's seminal book Victorian Painting (Fig 3). Then in 1985 it was seen and appreciated by an international audience when it was included as one of the few Victorian paintings in the exhibition The Treasure Houses of Britain at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.