

Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, *Dog Guarding a Basket of Grapes with a View of Heiligenstadt and the Danube in the Distance*
1793 - Vienna - 1865

oil on canvas
25 ¼ by 31 ½ inches (64 by 80 cm.)
signed and dated lower left on a rock: 'Waldmüller 1836'

- provenance: Possibly acquired directly from the artist by Anton Mayer;
Collection of Franz Xavier Mayer, Vienna;
Norbert Mayer, Vienna;
Dr. Karl Ruhmann, Vienna, thence by descent in the family until 2016
- exhibited: Vienna, Akademie für Bildende Künste. Exhibition, 1837, No. 208.
Vienna, Galerie Miethke, 1904, no.14.
Innsbruck, *Österreichische Malerei des 19 Jahrhunderts aus Privatbesitz*, 1907,
No. 87, ill. 85.
- literature: Bruno Grimschitz, *Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller*, Salzburg, 1957, P.318,
No. 467 (ill.)
Friedrich von Boetticher, *Malerwerke des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, vol. II/2,
4 Edition, Hemsbach 1979, P. 968, No. 32.
Rupert Feuchtmüller, *Ferdinand George Waldmüller 1793-1865*,
Vienna/Munich 1996, p. 469, WV No. 519 (ill.)
- note: Following the Congress of Vienna in 1815, which put a final end to the Napoleonic conflicts that had ravaged Europe for the previous two decades, Vienna, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the associated Germanic states enjoyed a relative calm until 1848. The term Biedermeier refers to a variety of art forms which flourished during this time period. Many artists avoided political and historic subjects and rather chose to concentrate on domestic themes and local landscapes. Along with the portraits by artists such as Friedrich von Amerling, landscapes by the likes of Friedrich Gauermaier and Thomas Ender, the genre scenes and landscapes by Waldmüller came to define the age.

Waldmüller himself arose from modest beginnings; his ancestors coming from farming and domestic serving families. Though he enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts in 1807 and later was made a teacher there in 1819, he had a difficult relationship with the Academy. He advocated a close observation of nature that was at times at odds with the Academy's classical curriculum of instruction. The artists' early output consisted primarily of portraits and numerous copies after Old Master paintings. Portrait commissions were to be a mainstay of Waldmüller's livelihood through the 1850s and he was able to attract many notable sitters.

While he continued to be successful courting Viennese aristocracy for important commissions, by the 1830s Waldmüller began to produce the landscapes and

genre scenes of the Austrian countryside for which he now is most famous. His landscapes are almost exclusively from areas outside the city of Vienna. Many depict the mountains and valleys around the spa town of Bad Ischl high in the *Salzkammergut*. The relatively few works that are of Vienna focus on the massive trees of Prater, the alluvial island park along the Danube. Similarly, his genre paintings revolve, almost exclusively, on scenes of daily life of the farming families in the countryside. Though Waldmüller produced a number of impressive still lifes in his career, the genre was never a large part of his output. In his early forays, he produced still lifes not dissimilar from canvases by his kinsman Franz Xavier Petter with the inclusion of exotic elements such as pineapples and parrots.

Dog Guarding a Basket of Grapes with a View of Heiligenstadt and the Danube in the Distance is dated 1836. From his sketchbooks, we know that Waldmüller took rooms in Heiligenstadt around July of 1834 and recorded the surrounding countryside. The town of Heiligenstadt was a small community known for its viniculture on the outskirts of Vienna. It was a popular destination for the Viennese citizenry to spend a day in the country exploring the Weinerwald or visiting a Heuriger, or wine garden, many of which dotted the countryside. In Waldmüller's day, it was a short carriage ride from the center of Vienna. It is, perhaps, best known for Beethoven's Heiligenstadt Statement. The composer spent a summer there in 1802 and wrote a deeply moving letter decrying the toll his incipient deafness was taking on his gifts and the increasing isolation that ensued.

In the present work, Waldmüller clearly establishes the location of the wine country with a view of the onion-domed Heiligenstadt church and the Danube in the distance. In the foreground he has presented the fruits of the region - a basket of grapes. With near granular clarity he displays the variety of winemaking grapes overflowing the basket with the unseen laborer's pastel plaid kerchief and harvesting knife in the foreground. The figure of a perky and alert dog stands guard at the left.

Waldmüller was not necessarily known as a specialist in animal painting. In his farming scenes, there may occasionally appear the odd cow or chicken, but the focus is primarily on the people. However, his keen powers of observation do allow him to make convincing renderings of the animals. In several of his portraits, particularly those of children, he included the family dog (fig. 1).

The breed of dog in this painting conforms primarily to the phenotype of a Chihuahua. The sickle shaped tail and erect ears, muzzle and eyes are consistent with that of the modern smooth-coated variety of the breed. However, based on the basket he guards, he would be a bit large compared to the present day breed. According to most histories, the origin of the breed dates back for centuries to Central America. However, there are suggestions of a similar breed established in Malta dating back to the Renaissance. There have been attempts to show the breed's existence in Europe through artistic documentation; most astonishingly, in Botticelli's *Scenes from the Life of Moses* in the Sistine Chapel (fig. 2). As for the existence of a Chihuahua in Austria in 1836, it is not out of the realm of possibility, even for a dog of Mexican origin. It must be remembered, that less than 30 years later, the ill-fated Maximilian, younger brother of Emperor Franz Joseph, was to sit on the throne of Mexico. It would be intriguing to know if there was some sort of diplomatic/trade tie that may have brought this animal to Austria at the time.

The present work may have been acquired directly from the artist by the brewer Anton Mayer. Waldmüller painted portraits of Mayer and his wife Luise Mayer (fig. 3 & 4) in 1836, the same year that this work was executed.

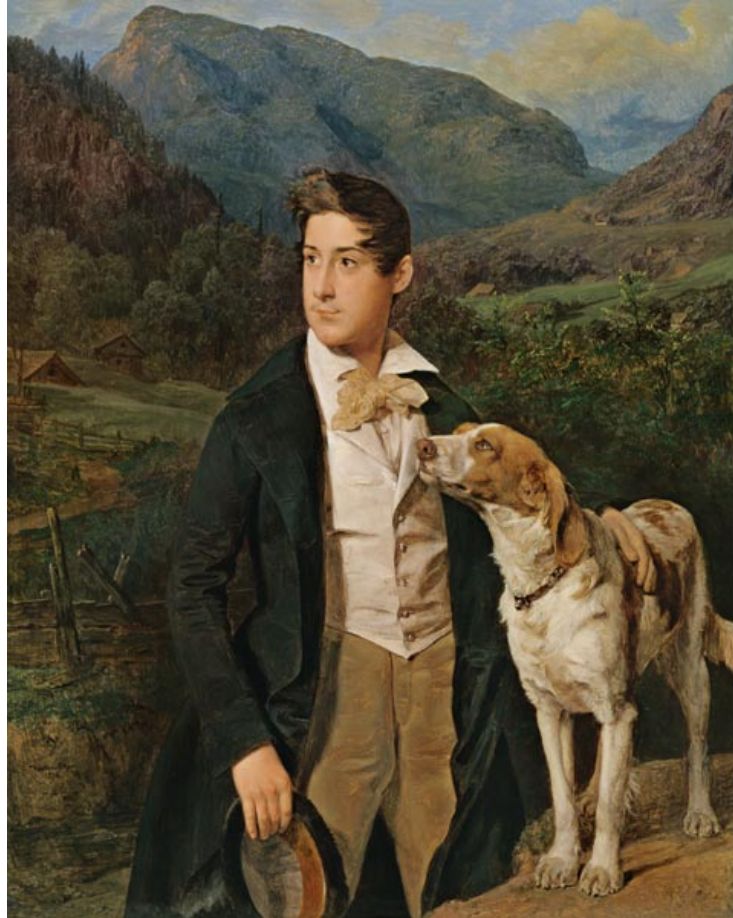


Fig. 1

Ferdinand George Waldmüller, *Portrait of Ferdinand Waldmüller, the Artist's Son in a Landscape by Ischl*. 1836 (Munich, Neue Pinakotek)



Fig. 2

Sandro Botticelli, *Scenes From the Life of Moses*, 1482 (detail) The Vatican, Sistine Chapel



Fig. 3

Portrait of Frau Luise Mayer, 1836,
München, Neue Pinakothek



Fig. 4

Portrait of Herr Anton Mayer, 1836
Nürnberg, Städtische Kunstsammlungen