

John William Waterhouse, R.A., *An Orange Garden*
Rome 1849 – 1917 London

oil on canvas, 1889-90
24 7/8 by 15 inches (63 by 37.8 cm)
signed lower right: 'J.W. Waterhouse'

provenance: The artist;
with Thomas Agnew & Sons, London, acquired directly from the above, 1 February 1890;
Dr. Alfred Palmer, JP (1852–1936), Reading, Berkshire, acquired directly from the above, 20
February 1890;
Private collection, UK;
Private collection, Scotland, acquired directly from the above by the owner, c. 1975, until 2020

literature: Anthony Hobson, *The Art and Life of JW Waterhouse RA 1849-1917*, London, 1980, no. 287, p.
195.

note: *An Orange Garden* is a key example of the small number of picturesque genre scenes that J.W. Waterhouse began—and possibly completed—on the Italian island of Capri. In this charming idyll, he demonstrated his capacity to transform a seemingly ordinary scene of modern life into a lyrical vision of color and light. As with his other Capri works, Waterhouse made this small enough to carry home to London in order to sell it through his gallery there, rather than to impress critics and the public at the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition, where he had already made his name with larger compositions inspired by history and legend.

The Capri pictures have generally been overlooked—another reason why the rediscovery of *An Orange Garden* deserves attention. To date it has been known only through an entry in the stock book kept by Agnew's, the London gallery that represented Waterhouse around this time, and another in Anthony Hobson's seminal monograph and catalogue raisonné of 1980.

Italy was at the very heart of Waterhouse's life and art. He was born in Rome to two British artists during the tumultuous year of 1849, when French troops besieged the Eternal City. His parents did not return to London until 1854, so it is possible that their son, nicknamed "Nino" (the Italian diminutive of "Giovanni," or "John"), learned Italian and spoke it for the rest of his life. (He never stopped using the nickname.) The artist first returned to Italy as an adult in 1877 and fell in love with Pompeii, which is in easy striking distance of Capri. Waterhouse visited Italy regularly thereafter, spending time in Rome and Venice in 1886 and 1887, and it is certain that he had stayed on Capri by 1889, when his pupil Herbert Draper (1863–1920) sought advice about accommodations there.

A decade ago, Waterhouse's great-nephew, John Physick (1924–2013), kindly gave me an 1887 edition of Baedeker's popular guide to Southern Italy and Sicily, the title page of which Waterhouse had neatly inscribed with his own name (Figs. 1, 2). This volume had passed down through the family, and though it contains no other annotations, its survival underscores the artist's affection for this region's scenery, people, and associations with history and myth.

An Orange Garden is in extraordinarily fine condition considering its age and the fact that it has passed entirely through private hands. On the reverse of its clean, unlined canvas appears the stamp of Winsor & Newton, the still-extant London artists' supplier on which Waterhouse relied. It is likely that he brought a quantity of blank canvases around this size with him to Capri in the summer of 1889 and began painting *An Orange Garden* there in the company of his artist-wife, Esther Kenworthy Waterhouse (1857–1944).

An Orange Garden showcases Waterhouse's characteristically lively brushwork and several distinctive hallmarks of his manner. Most notable is the stone staircase that connects the scene's upper and lower halves, functioning almost like a ladder. He had learned to master this compositional technique by studying the paintings of Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912), the older Academician with whom he was sometimes confused early in his career. Staircases appear throughout Waterhouse's art of the 1870s and 80s; illustrated here, for example, are the similarly sun-drenched *Diogenes* (1882, Fig. 3) and the gloomier *Mariamne* (1887, Fig. 4).

Like Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse revered the imperfections in historic architecture that subtly evoke the past; here the worn steps, cracked paving stones, and weathered walls suggest the antiquity of this house and garden. Yet unlike Alma-Tadema, whose archeological rigor demanded the recording of every detail, Waterhouse typically pursued the more painterly tradition of *non finito*; note how the righthand side of the staircase recedes and dissolves into an almost abstract area of brushstrokes beyond the tree trunks. Another kind of expressiveness enlivens the thick lashes of white and off-white paint in the edges of the girl's apron, the center of which Waterhouse rendered so thinly that we can glimpse the oranges within it.

Speaking of oranges, the only area of this painting that required minor stabilization during conservator Simon Parke's recent inspection was at the left side of the basket of oranges. Here, it seems, Waterhouse characteristically failed to let his paint dry fully before applying another layer; this error typically results in minor craquelure. In 1899, when Waterhouse was notified of this problem in his large *The Favourites of the Emperor Honorius* (1883), he replied, "...it is evident the thinly painted transparent shadows have cracked over some more solid paint underneath. The best thing to do I should think is that a little water colour might be used to hide them, and it certainly could do no harm." His advice is still useful to conservators today.

Equally characteristic are the varied lake pigments that Waterhouse scattered throughout the composition to delight viewers and to guide their eyes where he wanted them: note how the verticality of the stretching figure's pink skirt guides us down the staircase to the rich mauve kerchief of the little girl, whose pretty face is as crucial to the composition as the basket of brilliantly hued oranges at the bottom of the stairs. Aiding in the artist's directing of our vision are the terracotta planters placed strategically atop the wall and behind the basket of oranges.

Also helping to link the composition's upper and lower halves are the orange trees' writhing trunks and branches, a motif that fascinated Waterhouse throughout his life, not only because trees are the only entity that live in the air, on the earth's surface, and beneath it, but also because he associated them with the feminine life-force. Illustrated here are two expressions of this fascination: an undated drawing from his sketchbook showing a model's head juxtaposed (rather alarmingly) with a tree branch (Fig. 5), and *A Hamadryad* (1893, Fig. 6), in which a tree-nymph emerges from her trunk.

Because Waterhouse's surviving correspondence is scarce, the thirteen sketchbooks that John Physick inherited and then generously donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum offer precious evidence of how his great-uncle planned some of his most important paintings. They show us that Waterhouse worked hard to orchestrate the compositions of both *An Orange Garden* and *The Orange Gatherers*, a slightly larger variation from the same period. (See more about the latter

below.) Illustrated here is one of several pencil drawings (Fig. 7) showing how Waterhouse moved figures to suit his compositional intentions.

As with all of his Italian genre scenes, here Waterhouse presents not grubby peasants, but attractive models, hired locally, who would strike his British viewers as exotically Italian, but not too much so. The maiden reaching upward wears a golden earring, while her companion leaning down has taken the time to place a red flower in her hair and harmonize the yellows in her patterned blouse and ruffled skirt. Waterhouse painted similar-looking women in at least eight Venetian scenes (1886–87), and it is possible that while in Venice he heard from fellow artists that Capri would be a suitable workplace in the summers of 1888 and 1889. (Like many members of the Royal Academy of Arts, Waterhouse traveled abroad after its all-important Summer Exhibition had opened in May.)

During the late 1870s and the 1880s, Capri became popular with artists from around the world thanks to its breathtaking scenery, sunny climate (cooler than Rome's thanks to ocean breezes), blue-green water, and abundant models. Pictures were produced there by such important contemporaries as Frederic Leighton, Walter Crane, Elihu Vedder, and John Singer Sargent. Illustrated here, for example, is the latter's *Ricordi di Capri* (1878, Fig. 8), which depicts an outdoor staircase and young girls, as *An Orange Garden* would do more than a decade later. In his 1907 memoir, Crane recalled that, "Studios and artists abounded at Capri, and the inhabitants were well used to being requisitioned as models. Capri was supposed to have been colonised by the ancient Greeks, and certainly some of the types among the Capri girls were very suggestive of Greek origin."

It is likely Waterhouse was drawn to Capri not only as a delightful place to spend the summer, but also as a setting to experiment with decorative compositions that would challenge him aesthetically and ultimately earn him money once they were sold back in Britain. Particularly encouraging for Waterhouse may have been the interest in Capri shared by his neighbor and best friend, the artist William Logsdail (1859–1944), whose 1891 painting *Narcissus, Oranges, and Lemons* (Fig. 9) shows young women harvesting oranges. This now-unlocated work was illustrated in a large, unsigned 1892 article about Logsdail in *The Art Journal*, in which the author praises the fecundity of Mediterranean nature.

Like Logsdail, Waterhouse created his own distinctive variations on the popular paintings of their fellow Englishman George Clausen (1852–1944), who scored a success in 1890 when his *The Girl at the Gate* (1889, Fig. 10) was purchased for the nation by the Chantrey Bequest, an honor that had been accorded to Waterhouse's *The Magic Circle* four years earlier. Clausen was no Academy-wannabe (though he was elected into its ranks in 1895); rather, he was a disciple of the rule-breaking French naturalist Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884) and a founding member of the New English Art Club, which advocated for French modernism in the face of the Royal Academy's resistance to it. A key example of Bastien's approach is *Pauvre Fauvette* (1881, Fig. 11), illustrated here.

Rather than revisiting Bastien's pale peasant children enduring hard labor, Clausen sweetened that motif to suit the tastes of British collectors. He and Waterhouse probably came into contact through their mutual friend, Frank Bramley, who worked near Clausen in the Cornish artists' colony at Newlyn. In *An Orange Garden*, the almost-photographic clarity of the little girl's face owes something to Bastien's juxtaposing of hyper-realistic flesh within otherwise loosely brushed surroundings. Waterhouse's most important exploration of this naturalist conjunction is *The Lady of Shalott* (Fig. 12), the large imaginative composition for which he won acclaim at the 1888 Summer Exhibition. Though *An Orange Garden* does not illustrate a specific story, its naturalistic manner would have been instantly recognizable to sophisticated London observers, who would also appreciate the poetic undertones that almost all Italian subjects conveyed at this time.

Though Capriote women won praise for their brown complexions and blue-black hair, Waterhouse modified those features to appear less swarthy. Another Academician who lightened Italian skin tones was Luke Fildes, as seen in his Venetian *An Al-Fresco Toilette* (1889, Fig. 13), which centers on a red-haired beauty who looks more Scottish than Italian. Having grown rich making art, Fildes himself purchased Waterhouse's *Flora* (exhibited 1891, Fig. 14), which contains the same blue Roman shade seen in *An Orange Garden* but swaps in archeological props to resituate the model in antiquity.

An Orange Garden can be even better understood in the context of Waterhouse's other Capri scenes. Among them are what Hobson inventively titled *Two Little Italian Girls by a Village*, which shows the dome of Capri's Santo Stefano church in the distance. This painting is more likely *Under the Olives, Capri* (Fig. 15), which Waterhouse exhibited in London and Birmingham in 1889. It features the same little girl from *An Orange Garden* wearing the same mauve kerchief, and even a basket of oranges.

Among the other relevant titles dated as "c. 1890" in Hobson's catalogue are *At Capri, or Al Fresco Toilet at Capri, or The Toilet* (no. 79, Fig. 16), *Buildings at Capri* (82), *Capri Rocks* (83), *Rocks at Capri I* (84), *Rocks at Capri 2* (85), and *A Street in Capri* (86). Also pertinent are *Study of Trees and Rocks, Capri* (which appeared at Phillips on 31 October 1989) and *Lady on a Balcony, Capri* (Fig. 17), which was deaccessioned by the "Museum of the Arts, Fort Lauderdale," and offered at Sotheby's on 5 November 2012. (The latter features the same blue Roman shade and latticed trellis seen in *An Orange Garden*.)

The commercial impetus behind *An Orange Garden* becomes apparent when we consider the fate of two other Capri paintings. On 20 November 1889, Waterhouse received a payment of £367 from Agnew's for the larger *The Toilet*. Worth roughly £48,000 today, this sum surely incentivized Waterhouse to bring *An Orange Garden* to Agnew's on 1 February 1890, about ten weeks later. There he was paid the handsome sum of £283.10. As oranges are harvested on Capri between May and October, it is likely that Waterhouse put the finishing touches on *An Orange Garden* in his Primrose Hill studio sometime between October 1889 and late January 1890.

Just nineteen days after the artist delivered it, Agnew's sold *An Orange Garden* to Dr. Alfred Palmer (1852–1936), a member of the Quaker family that owned the large Reading-based bakers Huntley & Palmer, Ltd., which still exists. Now in the Getty Research Institute, an Agnew's stock book shows that the firm charged Palmer £270. This means they absorbed a modest loss on the painting, so we can only speculate that Agnew's wanted to curry favor with this wealthy client. The second son of H&P's driving force, George Palmer (also a major art collector), Alfred was a trained engineer (D.Sc.) responsible for the building and maintenance of its biscuit-making machinery. In the portrait illustrated here he appears as the first president of the Council of the University of Reading (Fig. 18), where his father's mansion—The Acacias—still stands at the center of the campus. In the 1900 edition of *The Year's Art*, Alfred and his father were listed among the most important art collectors in Berkshire, of which Reading is the county seat. Alfred was not shy about his acquisitions; in 1887, for example, he was cited as the lender of Henry Woods's painting, *Preparations for the First Communion*, to the Royal Jubilee Exhibition in Manchester.

The Palmer family's fame and influence in 1890 are difficult to appreciate today, so it might be helpful to draw a parallel with the Sainsbury family now. As evidence of H&P's ubiquity throughout the British Empire, illustrated here is a H&P biscuit tin cleverly designed to resemble a shelf of books (Figs. 19, 20).

In 1887 the leading critic M.H. Spielmann described this era as one “in which [artists’] reputations were made by the dealers, ... the recognized authorities in art.” Driving their business were collectors, whose “one idea,” the *Punch* caricaturist Harry Furniss remembered, “was to buy pictures, larger, dearer and more of them than [their] neighbor possessed. It was no longer Art for Art’s sake, but pictures for profit’s sake.” The Agnew family originated in the newly rich city of Manchester, and thus ascertained well the needs of their nouveau-riche clients, validating and refining their tastes.

Circulating contemporary and historical stock among his London, Manchester, and Liverpool branches, the personable William Agnew (1825–1910) probably introduced himself to Waterhouse in the early 1880s. Agnew befriended many artists, yet his voluminous correspondence reveals no communication with Waterhouse involving anything but business.

The firm’s ledgers suggest how—for a long stretch of the 1880s and 90s—Agnew’s relieved Waterhouse from having to find buyers for his smaller, less ambitious non-narrative scenes. For example, on the opening day of the prestigious Grosvenor Gallery exhibition in May 1886, Agnew’s bought *A Flower Market, Old Rome* (1886) from Waterhouse on behalf of their client T.J. Hirst. The following April they bought *A Back Street in Venice* (1887) and sent it to be shown at the Grosvenor Gallery, where it failed to sell. Waterhouse had already been paid, so he probably did not worry that Agnew’s had to keep seeking a buyer until the following November.

William Agnew succeeded so brilliantly that he was knighted in 1895. He proved particularly useful to Waterhouse and other leading Academicians as a member of the fine art committees for major exhibitions. For the 1887 Royal Jubilee Exhibition in Manchester, he supervised the loan of three Waterhouse paintings, including works owned by Hirst and Sir Henry Tate, another major client. For the 1893 Chicago world’s fair, Agnew served on a powerful committee that included Sir Frederic Leighton PRA and Alexander Henderson.

Alexander Henderson (1850–1934, Fig. 21) matters a great deal in this context. Around the time that Palmer bought *An Orange Garden*, his Berkshire neighbor Alexander Henderson acquired the slightly larger *Orange Gatherers* mentioned above (Hobson no. 288, Fig. 22). This also depicts three figures, but one of the women has been replaced by a girl, and the youngest is seated in the foreground. One year younger than Waterhouse, Henderson was a self-made financier and railway executive who epitomized the modern commercial capitalist. He had amassed a fortune by 1889, when he joined the gentry by acquiring Buscot Park in Berkshire (now Oxfordshire). As the Palmers were one of Berkshire’s leading families, and the Hendersons one of its richest, it is likely that Alfred Palmer and Alexander Henderson encountered each other through county politics and society; at various times both served as High Sheriff of Berkshire and as Justice of the Peace. In her diary for June 1893, Maud, the sociable 18-year-old daughter of the famous *Punch* cartoonist Linley Sambourne, recorded an extended visit to the Palmers at Wokefield Park (near Mortimer) and then the Hendersons at Buscot Park (near Faringdon).

From the 1880s Agnew’s helped Henderson build a diverse collection of Old Masters and contemporary English and French art. In 1890 he stunned the world by buying (for the then-astronomical sum of £15,000) Edward Burne-Jones’s *Briar Rose* cycle from Agnew’s, which had recently attracted more than 1,000 visitors per day to see the cycle at its Manchester gallery. In 1902 Henderson attained a knighthood, and by that time he was already encouraging other members of his large and successful family to join him in becoming Waterhouse’s primary source of patronage. (He became Baron Faringdon in 1916, and his sister-in-law represented the Hendersons at the artist’s funeral the following year.)

As leading clients of Agnew’s, Henderson and Palmer also rubbed elbows in the art world. In 1897, both were listed as “subscribers” (sponsors) of a major exhibition at London’s Guildhall Gallery, *The Art of Painting in the Queen’s Reign*, to which Palmer loaned Alma-Tadema’s *An*

Earthly Paradise (1891). The fact that another Capri picture, *Under the Olives* (illustrated above), descended through the Henderson family raises the intriguing question of which family began to acquire Waterhouse's Capri scenes first.

An Orange Garden contains Waterhouse's first known experimentation with the juxtaposing of two women at work in nature—specifically, reaching up and leaning down to collect fruits or flowers. This motif sustains the traditional view that women enjoy a particularly harmonious relationship with nature, and had been addressed by artists for centuries, including the gleaners of Jean-François Millet and Jules Breton, and more recently Burne-Jones's *March Marigold* (1870, Fig. 23).

Waterhouse used this motif with increasing frequency from the 1890s, culminating in 1906–14 with a large group of paintings inspired by the myth of Persephone picking flowers in the Vale of Enna. Illustrated here are three examples—*Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May* (1909, Fig. 24), *Gathering Almond Blossom* (c. 1909–12, Fig. 25), and one of several loose drawings in which women harvest fruit while a man looks on (Fig. 26). This is not to say that flower-picking women interested Waterhouse only if they lived in the past: *Gathering Flowers in a Devonshire Garden* (1892–93, Fig. 27) was made at Croyde, North Devon, two years after *An Orange Garden*.

Finally, it is worth noting that *An Orange Garden* and the other Capri paintings helped close one chapter of Waterhouse's artistry and open the next. In the V&A sketchbooks, we find several compositional drawings of the Capriote orange harvesters adjacent to careful delineations of bird wings (Fig. 28). The latter are his earliest ruminations on the fearsome bird-women who populate *Ulysses and the Sirens* (Fig. 29), the paradigm-shifting masterpiece that Waterhouse unveiled at the Academy's Summer Exhibition of 1891. It was off the coast of Capri that Homer's hero is believed to have confronted these femmes fatales, so it makes sense that Waterhouse's permanent shift toward this and other Greek myths occurred during a stay on Capri.

In the summer of 1890, for the first time since 1874, Waterhouse did not exhibit a picture at the Academy. One reason may be that his father died in January 1890, and it is possible that he and his wife spent more of that year in Italy than usual so that he could make studies for *Ulysses and the Sirens*. The paucity of Waterhouse's records and correspondence means that we will never be certain, but given the beauty and mythic heritage of Capri, it is possible that the couple got to know this enchanting island even better in the months after *An Orange Garden* was sold.

- Peter Trippi, author of *J W Waterhouse* (Phaidon Press, 2002) and co-curator of *J W Waterhouse: The Modern Pre-Raphaelite* (2008–10, exhibited at the Groninger Museum; Royal Academy of Arts; and Montreal Museum of Fine Arts)

Captions

1. Binding of Baedeker's guide to *Southern Italy and Sicily* (1887 edition); collection of Peter Trippi
2. Title page of Baedeker's guide to *Southern Italy and Sicily* (1887 edition); collection of Peter Trippi
3. J.W. Waterhouse, *Diogenes*, 1882, oil on canvas, 208.3 x 134.6 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
4. J.W. Waterhouse, *Mariamne*, 1887, oil on canvas, 259 x 180 cm, private collection
5. J.W. Waterhouse, Study of Branches with a Woman's Head, 1890s, pencil on paper, 19.7 x 12.7 cm, Sketchbook E.1-1949, p. 17, Victoria and Albert Museum, London
6. J.W. Waterhouse, *A Hamadryad*, 1893, oil on canvas, 160 x 61 cm, Plymouth Art Gallery
7. J.W. Waterhouse, Two studies for *The Orange Gatherers*, c. 1889–90, pencil on paper, 12.7 x 19.7 cm, Sketchbook E.1-1949, p. 12, Victoria and Albert Museum, London
8. John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), *Ricordi di Capri*, 1878, oil on panel, 35 x 26.7 cm, private collection
9. William Logsdail (1859–1944), *Narcissus, Oranges, and Lemons*, illustrated in *The Art Journal*, November 1892, in "Mr. Logsdail and Lincoln," p. 325.
10. George Clausen (1852–1944), *The Girl at the Gate*, 1889, oil on canvas, 171.4 x 138.4 cm, Tate, London

11. Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884), *Pauvre Fauvette*, 1881, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 125.7 cm, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow
12. J.W. Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott*, 1888, oil on canvas, 153 x 200 cm, Tate, London
13. Luke Fildes (1843–1927), *An Al-Fresco Toilette*, 1889, oil on canvas, 173 x 108 cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight
14. J.W. Waterhouse, *Flora*, 1891, oil on canvas, 73 x 33 cm, private collection
15. J.W. Waterhouse, *Under the Olives* (?), c. 1889, oil on canvas, 61 x 38 cm, private collection
16. J.W. Waterhouse, *The Toilet*, 1889, oil on canvas, 85 x 49 cm, private collection
17. J.W. Waterhouse, *Lady on a Balcony*, c. 1889, oil on canvas, 53.5 x 31 cm, private collection
18. A.S. Cope (1857–1940), *Portrait of Alfred Palmer, D.Sc.*, 1927, oil on canvas, 123 x 100 cm, University of Reading
19. Huntley & Palmer biscuit tin designed to resemble a shelf of books, private collection
20. Underside of Huntley & Palmer biscuit tin designed to resemble a shelf of books, private collection
21. William Orpen (1878–1931), *Portrait of Alexander Henderson, 1st Lord Faringdon*, 1924, oil on canvas, 125.6 x 100.2 cm, Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park, Oxfordshire
22. J.W. Waterhouse, *The Orange Gatherers*, 1889–90, oil on canvas, 118 x 82 cm, private collection
23. Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *The March Marigold*, 1870, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 76.2 cm, private collection
24. J.W. Waterhouse, *Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May*, 1909, oil on canvas, 101 x 82.5 cm, private collection
25. J.W. Waterhouse, *Gathering Almond Blossom*, c. 1909–12, oil on canvas, 95 x 61 cm, private collection
26. J.W. Waterhouse, Study of women gathering fruit, undated, pencil on paper, dimensions unknown, private collection (ex-collection John Physick)
27. J.W. Waterhouse, *Gathering Flowers in a Devonshire Garden*, c. 1892–93, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 50.7 cm, private collection
28. J.W. Waterhouse, Study of a bird's wing adjacent to a study for *The Orange Gatherers*, c. 1889–90, pencil on paper, 12.7 x 19.7 cm, Sketchbook E.1-1949, p. 49, Victoria and Albert Museum, London
29. J.W. Waterhouse, *Ulysses and the Sirens*, 1891, oil on canvas, 100.6 x 201.7 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne