



JASPER FRANCIS CROPSEY (1823-1900)

The Island Cottage, American Scene, 1848

Oil on canvas

16 x 25 inches

Signed and dated 1848, inscribed "Rome," lower left

ALTERNATE TITLES: *Island House; Island Home*

PROVENANCE: Mrs. Edgar, by 1848

REFERENCED: Letter, John M. Falconer to JFC, New York, October 3, 1848 (Newington-Cropsey Foundation) as Island House; letter, John M. Falconer to JFC, New York, October 29, 1848 (Newington-Cropsey Foundation) as Island Home; Yarnall and Gerdtz 1986, p. 885, no. 21462.; Speiser, Anthony M. and Kenneth W. Maddox, Jasper Francis Cropsey: Catalogue Raisonne Volume 1, 1842-1863, (Hastings-on-Hudson: Newington-Cropsey Foundation, 2013), cat. no. 116, pp. 63-64.

RELATED WORKS: *The Island Cottage, American Scene* (1847), collection of W. R. Lejee, 1848, exhibited Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA, 1849, no. 88.; *The Island Cottage* (1849), collection of Mr. Gillett, 1849, exhibited Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1849, no. 330.

Jasper Francis Cropsey was recognized early in his career for his notable talent as an artist of the Hudson River School, a group of artists who rallied behind the British art critic John Ruskin and his belief in the value of "truth to nature." Cropsey's early work was defined by his skillful renderings, and for painstakingly re-creating the most minute of natural details in his paintings. *Island Cottage, American Scene* is one such artwork. While the general quality of the landscape's topography—as well as its compositional similarity to a series of cottage scenes that dominated

Cropsey's oeuvre between the years 1845 and 1848—underscores its American subject matter, probably depicting the Catskill region of upper New York. The painting's inscription reads “Rome” beside Cropsey's signature. However, this painting is not an Italian subject. Rather, it is one in a series of three American scenes that share this composition. Specifically, the present painting is the second version of this scene. Cropsey shipped first in this series, entitled *The Island Cottage* (painted in 1847) from Italy to America in February of 1848. The second was painted in 1848 and shipped home in the fall of that year. The third was painted sometime in 1849. The February 1848 shipment of paintings (containing the first *Island Cottage*) was received by John Ridner—Cropsey's dealer of sorts—in New York, before being sent on to Philadelphia. The artist John M. Falconer later wrote a letter to Cropsey regarding these scenes, in which he referenced the original *Island Cottage*, specifically:

*... how old feeling waked up with that Elm the old mill those ducks & the bit of rush & water plants—neatly painted Cropsey! What teaches like nature? What success but results from perseverance!*¹

Island Cottage, American Scene, 1848—the present painting and second in the series—fits Falconer's description of its predecessor: an umbrageous elm tree rises up from the sandy shore of some quiet lakeside, with ducks wading in the shallow water of the foreground and cottages—possibly a mill as well—are shadowed by the uprising foliage. A sailboat lies beached at the water's edge, and the setting sun casts a pink glow on the clouds and foliage, conveying the warmth and true tranquility of the moment. Cropsey's rendering of light effects, judicious use of natural color and attentive devotion to realistic representation marks his technique as unique as it is nuanced. While Falconer's description of *Island Cottage's* imagery is a close match to *Island Cottage, American Scene*, the measurements are not consistent. Therefore, it is likely that the latter painting represents the second version. This is confirmed by the inscription: Cropsey composed the painting in 1848, while in Rome, and shipped it to America in the fall of that year. The inscription, “Rome,” in the corner of *Island Cottage, American Scene* therefore refers to the

¹ Letter, John M. Falconer to JFC, New York, September 4, 1848 (Newington-Cropsey Foundation)

location it was painted, rather than the subject it depicts. A third version of this scene was painted in 1849.

The fact that Cropsey painted this scene more than twice, is not unusual. In fact, as Kenneth W. Maddox points out in the *Catalogue Raisonné* on the artist, this motif was used judiciously by Cropsey in the years preceding his trip to Italy in 1848.² Works such as *Landscape with Cottage* (1845), *The Cottage at Greenwood Lake* (ca. 1847) have distinct compositional similarities that relate to the design of *Island Cottage* and its predecessor, *Island Cottage, American Scene*. Other examples include *Twilight*, *View in Sullivan County* (1845), *Landscape (The Passing Shower)* (1846), *Nameless River* (1846) and *Old Homestead, Greenwood Lake* (1846).



LEFT: Jasper Francis Cropsey, *Landscape with Cottage*, 1845, oil on canvas, 15 ½ x 22 in., signed and dated lower left on rock: J. F. Cropsey / 1845, Newington-Cropsey Foundation



RIGHT: Jasper Francis Cropsey, *The Cottage at Greenwood Lake*, ca. 1847, Oil on canvas, 14 ½ x 22 in., dated lower right center: 184[7]?, Newington-Cropsey Foundation

Even during these early years in his career, Jasper Francis Cropsey—who had begun his professional life as an architect—was already being placed in the company of some of the most

² Speiser, Anthony M. and Kenneth W. Maddox, *Jasper Francis Cropsey: Catalogue Raisonné Volume 1, 1842-1863*, (Hastings-on-Hudson: Newington-Cropsey Foundation, 2013



highly venerated painters of the Hudson River School. One critic, writing on the National Academy of Design's 1847 exhibition, commented:

*Mr. Cropsey is one of the few among our landscape painters who go directly to Nature for their materials... and it is no disparagement to the abilities of those veterans of landscape art, Cole and Durand, to prophesy that before many years have elapsed, he will stand with them in the front rank, shoulder to shoulder.*³

Cropsey's 1848 *Island Cottage, American Scene* was painted just one year after this commentary in *Literary World*; every detail of its execution confirms the praise was well-deserved.

³ *Literary World*, May 8, 1847, p. 347, cited in W. S. Talbot, *Jasper Francis Cropsey, 1823-1900* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 18.