



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

JASPER FRANCIS CROPSEY (1823-1900)

Early in his career, Jasper Francis Cropsey was placed on the same tier as the most venerated Hudson River School painters. A critic of the National Academy of Design's exhibition of 1847 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."¹

Cropsey was born and raised on a farm in Staten Island and trained as an architect. He was apprenticed for five years to New York architect Joseph Trench, and went on to successfully practice architecture alongside painting. Most notably, Cropsey designed his own Gothic Revival estate, known as 'Aladdin,' in 1867; a villa for railroad industrialist George M. Pullman in 1874; and a Queen Anne style home for W. H. Webb in 1887. Recognizing his talents in drawing and painting, Trench supplied Cropsey with artist's materials and funded his lessons in watercolor with the now obscure British painter Edward Maury. Cropsey received further encouragement from the painters William T. Ranney (1813–1857), William Sidney Mount (1807–1868), and Henry Inman (1801–1846), who prompted him to submit his work to the National Academy of Design. Cropsey was elected an associate of the NAD in 1844 and a full member in 1851, between which he attended the NAD Life School and traveled and sketched throughout England, Scotland, Italy, and France, further perfecting his skills.

A sensitivity to the minutest natural details characterized Cropsey's paintings of the 1840s, 1850s, and early 1860s, linking him to the first generation of Hudson River School artists and to John Ruskin's ideal of 'truth to nature.' In fact, Cropsey was exposed to Ruskin's teachings during his nearly seven year stay in England (1856–1863), and went on to correspond regularly with and receive praise from the English artist and theorist.² In the mid-1860s, there was a visible shift in Cropsey's approach to recording nature. Without abandoning his earlier style of crisply drawn form, he began to depict the American landscape with a greater feel for the macrocosmic, giving precedence to atmosphere and light over solid form and replacing the vignette with the panorama.

¹. *Literary World* (May 8, 1847): 347. Quoted in W. S. Talbot, *Jasper Francis Cropsey, 1823–1900* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970), 18.

². Talbot, *Jasper Francis Cropsey*, 30.