



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

JASPER FRANCIS CROPSEY (1823-1900)

Italian Sunset, 1874

Oil on board

4 1/8 x 2 3/8 inches

Signed and dated 1874, lower right

Early in his career, Jasper Francis Cropsey was already being placed in the company of some of the most highly venerated painters of the Hudson River School. A critic, commenting upon the National Academy of Design's 1847 exhibition, wrote, "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's talent for painstakingly re-creating the most minute natural details defined his early work and linked him with the first generation of Hudson River School artists, all of whom shared Ruskin's belief in the value of 'truth to nature.'² When Cropsey returned to New York in 1863, following a six-year stay in London, a definite shift in his approach to landscape had taken place. Without entirely abandoning his devotion to accuracy, Cropsey began to emphasize atmosphere and light over solid form.

Interestingly, Cropsey actually began his artistic career as an architect. After growing up on Staten Island, he was apprenticed for five years to New York architect Joseph Trench. Cropsey designed his own Gothic Revival estate, known as 'Aladdin,' in 1867. *Italian Sunset*, which prominently features a crumbling bell tower, very much reflects the artist's lifelong love of structural beauty; the architectural elements also allow Cropsey to play with the way in which the vibrant colors of a sunset reflect and gleam off of stone walls.

1 *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.

2 Cropsey was exposed to Ruskin's work while in England and went on to correspond regularly with and receive praise from Ruskin. See Talbot, 30.