

# S P H I N X F I N E A R T



**Thomas Sidney Cooper (Canterbury 1803 - Vernon Holme 1902)**

## **Mountain Sheep**

signed and dated 'T.S. Cooper/1845' (lower right)

oil on panel

34.5 x 45.5 cm (13½ x 17¾ in)

on a C. Roberson panel.

Thomas Sidney Cooper was a pupil of the celebrated Belgian *animalier* Eugène Verboeckhoven and his work had a profound influence on Cooper's choice of subject matter, an association that has so far been little explored in British art. *Mountain Sheep*, whilst characteristically Cooper in painterly execution, shows compositional links to Verboeckhoven's [Guarding the Lamb](#) completed in 1837. Cooper, like Verboeckhoven, has chosen three centrally placed sheep with two submissively seated and the other protectively standing, while paying detailed attention to the facial features. Furthermore, Cooper has also experimented with the contrast of light and shade, a common feature in Verboeckhoven's work.

Born in Canterbury, Kent, in 1803, he was encouraged to become an artist by Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830) and the animal painter Abraham Cooper (1787-1868). In 1823 he entered the Royal Academy Schools, and subsequently taught art in Brussels (1827-31) where he met Eugène Verboeckhoven. Following the political disturbance that led to Belgian independence in 1830, Cooper returned to London in 1831 to embark on a very long and successful career as an *animalier*. Such was the standard of his work that Cooper was commissioned by Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort to paint pictures of the Royal herd of pedigree Jersey cows, the results of which they were, reportedly, delighted with. Cooper's paintings were almost exclusively of sheep and cattle, earning him the nickname 'Cow' Cooper to distinguish him from Abraham 'Horse' Cooper. He also painted animals in landscapes by other artists, notably Thomas Creswick (1811-1869) and [Frederick Richard Lee](#), see for example Lee's *Cattle on the Banks of a River* (1855; Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery), reviving a practice common amongst the seventeenth-century Dutch school.

Cooper used some of his wealth to build a number of charitable almshouses for the poor in Chantry Lane, London. In 1882 he created an art school at his home and studio in Canterbury, called the

‘Canterbury Sydney Cooper School of Art’. The art school still exists today, although it has since been renamed the University of Creative Arts. Cooper had an extremely prosperous career as a painter, spanning over seventy years, until his death in 1902.

### **Provenance:**

Probably A. Cowpe, as *Sheep - Stormy Weather* (according to Westwood);  
probably his sale, Christie's, 18th July 1958, lot 54 (58gns to Cobb), as *Sheep - Stormy Weather*  
(according to Westwood);  
Thomas Agnew and Sons Ltd., London.

### **Literature:**

Kenneth J. Westwood, *Thomas Sidney Cooper C.V.O., R.A.: His Life and Work*, (David Leathers Publishing, Somerset, 2011), vol.1, p.234, no. O.1845.23, probably, p.233, no. O.1845.18, vol.2, p.120, plate 93.

### **Artist description:**

Thomas Sidney Cooper was encouraged in his ambition to become an artist by Sir Thomas Lawrence and the animal painter Abraham Cooper (no relation; 1787–1868). He entered the Royal Academy Schools, London, in 1823. He subsequently taught art in Brussels where he met Eugene Verboeckhoven, whose work had a profound influence on him. Through Verboeckhoven he came to appreciate the work of such 17th-century Dutch painters as Aelbert Cuyp and Paulus Potter. In 1831 he returned to London, exhibiting at the Royal Society of British Artists. He exhibited 48 pictures at the British Institution between 1833 and 1863. The majority of his work was, however, exhibited at the Royal Academy; from 1833 to 1902 he exhibited 266 works there without a break, and he remains the longest continuous exhibitor in the Academy's history. He was elected ARA in 1845 and RA in 1867.

Cooper's paintings were almost exclusively of cattle (he was nicknamed 'Cow' Cooper to distinguish him from Abraham 'Horse' Cooper) and sheep, for example *Landscape, with Cows and Sheep* (1850; Egham, University London, Royal Holloway & Bedford New College). He produced one history painting, *The Defeat of Kellerman's Cuirassiers at Waterloo* (1846; Birkenhead, Williamson Art Gallery & Museum). He also painted animals in landscapes by other artists, notably Frederick Richard Lee (1798–1879) (e.g. Lee's *The Chequered Shade*, 1854; London, Forbes private collection). Despite his preoccupation with animal painting and his prodigious output the quality of Cooper's work remained surprisingly high. The contents of his studio were sold at Christie's, 12–15 April 1902.

### **Collections**

Thomas Sidney Cooper is represented in the following collections: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Royal Academy of Arts Collection, London; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Tate Gallery, London; The Wallace Collection, London; Manchester City Art Gallery; Brighton Museum and Art Gallery; Fitzwilliam Museum at the University of Cambridge; Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetu, New Zealand; Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, Birkenhead, amongst others.