

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



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

## **A Summer Evening**

signed 'T. S. Cooper' (lower right)

oil on canvas

72.4 x 92.2 cm (28½ x 36¼ in)

Bathed in a soft and creamy evening light, a squire is out riding his white horse and checking on his fields. A beautiful shepherdess sits below him with a quiet and disciplined looking sheepdog at her side. The Victorian ideas of social status cannot be overlooked here; the high position of the squire compared to the lowly status of the shepherdess, and the calm but perhaps overly docile nature of her dog seems to strengthen this mood of servility.

As Kenneth Westwood has pointed out, Thomas Sidney Cooper repeats the motif of a mounted figure in a work of 1847, *Drovers Halting, on their Way over the Mountains* (Westwood, O.1847.2).<sup>1</sup> Westwood also clarifies that the present work is not to be confused with the 1845 work of the same title (O.1845.22), which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1846, as has been previously, erroneously, stated.<sup>2</sup>

*A Summer Evening* is a striking example of Thomas Sidney Cooper's skill as a painter of cattle. Furthermore, Cooper's work references the influence of the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painters Paulus Potter (1625-54) and Albert Cuyt (1620-91), who are known to have greatly inspired his work. Known as the English 'Paul Potter', Cooper was impressed by the Dutch master of the pastoral landscape. Throughout the seventeenth century the motif of the animal piece had become increasingly important and Potter was among the most influential of the Dutch artists in developing this genre. Potter, like Cooper, was particularly well known for his representations of cattle and had been revolutionary in

his successful utilisation of animals alone as the primary focal subject, seen for example *Four Bulls* (Galleria Sabauda, Turin).

The influence of the work of Cuyp on Cooper can be appreciated in Cuyp's [\*Young Herdsman and Cows\*](#). Indeed, there are direct connections in the palette used, whilst the presence of a still river bank contributes to the impression of pastoral tranquillity. Furthermore, Cooper seems to appropriate elements of Cuyp's compositional structure by creating a vast sense of space by silhouetting the cattle against the sky.

Cooper was born in Kent, in 1803, and having shown great artistic promise as a child he enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy in 1824. In the early years he gave art lessons to private individuals in order to maintain a living and in 1827 was given a formal post as an art teacher in Brussels. Although he lived in Brussels for just four years, this period shaped Cooper's style tremendously. His friendship with Eugène Verboeckhoven, the Belgian animal painter certainly inspired his choice of subject matter, as well as introducing him to the Dutch animaliers of the seventeenth century. The Victorian taste for works by these Dutch artists undoubtedly contributed to Cooper's contemporary popularity. He returned to England in 1831 and built his reputation as one of the most distinguished Victorian painters of sheep and cattle. The majority of his works were 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. Cooper was elected ARA in 1845 and RA in 1867.

We are grateful to Kenneth Westwood for his expertise.

<sup>1</sup> Westwood, K.J., *Thomas Sidney Cooper C.V.O., R.A.: His Life and Work*, (David Leathers Publishing, Somerset, 2011), vol. 1, p.235. <sup>2</sup> Ibid.

#### **Provenance:**

Anonymous sale; Phillips, 13 December, 1976, lot 78 (where recorded as being dated 1846); with Richard Green, 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.235, no. O.1846.4, & vol.2, p.120, plate 94.

#### **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.