

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



**John Frederick Herring Jnr (Doncaster 1815 - Doncaster 1907)**

## **A Peaceful Day in the Farmyard**

oil on canvas

36.2 x 60.9 cm (14¼ x 24 in)

In this carefully balanced composition by John Frederick Herring Jnr, three sturdy farm horses are presented against the blue sky and sun-dappled fields of a summer's day. Pigs root around by a hut and chickens peck at the ground in perfect harmony with their equine friends. In the distance, an expansive verdant landscape and the detail of a cottage with a thin wisp of smoke coming from its chimney completes the idyllic countryside scene.

Herring Jnr's considerable artistic ability can be seen in his meticulous brushwork and sensitive depiction of animals ranging from large working beasts to small fowl. [Farmyard Scene](#), in the Tate gallery, is conceived in a similar manner to the present work, although the horses, pigs and ducks are arranged in a slightly different formation. The horses are bridled and ready to begin work or perhaps they have just returned from the fields. An air of tranquillity and contentment pervades the scene as in *A Peaceful Day in the Farmyard* and again the horses are portrayed as noble creatures effortlessly in command of their surroundings.

Herring Jnr was the eldest surviving and most talented son of John Frederick Herring Snr (1795-1865), a prolific and financially successful sporting and animal painter who achieved prosperity with his portraits of racehorses. The father was also a competent landscape and figure painter and clearly transmitted these multiple abilities to his son. Herring Jnr specialised mainly in farmyard scenes, collaborating occasionally with other artists such as Alexander F. Rolfe. His works are stylistically very close to those of his father, so much so that both artists reportedly accused each other of plagiarism, which led to an early break down of their relationship.

Known to the rest of his family as Fred, Herring Jnr signed his earliest work 'J. Fred Herring', sometimes adding Jnr. to his signature. He began to exhibit at the Royal Academy in 1863 where he exhibited: *The Farm - Autumn* (1863), *Farm-yard* (1864), *Watering the Team* (1869), *The Homestead* (1871) and *A Farm Yard* (1872) among others.

Although consistently true to his father's example in painting sporting and animal pictures, as Herring Jnr's artistic prowess developed, his style changed to incorporate looser brushwork and wider views.

The placement of farm animals at the banks of a stream or in a farmyard, were characteristic of his work.

### **Artist description:**

John F. Herring, Jr. was born to the well-known 19th century artist John F. Herring, Sr., who at the time, was considered one of England's great sporting and equestrian artists, patronised by the English aristocracy. The father's mastery of the brush, and popularity with the nobility, served his son, Herring, Jr., well. Early on, John, Jr. was exposed to fine painting and wealthy patrons.

Recent reference books state that Herring, Sr.'s first child was named "John Frederick Herring, Jr." and was born on June 21, 1815, later baptized on October 22, 1815. However, another child was born in 1820 and also named "John Frederick Herring, Jr." (baptised in 1821). The assumption is that the first Herring child died and the second, born in 1820, is the artist we know of today.

John Herring, Jr. developed a love for painting, a passion also shared by his brothers Charles and Benjamin. Three of the four brothers became artists, painting in the same style as their father, often collaborating on a single painting.

In the years after 1836, Herring, Sr., feeling threatened by the teenage John Herring, Jr.'s ability and growing popularity, began incorporating the tag "SR" at the end of his signature.

John Herring, Jr. continued painting, in the tradition of his father, the sporting and animal pictures; however, as his artistic prowess improved, his style changed: he loosened his brushwork and widened his landscape views. The placement of farm animals along the banks of a stream or within a farmyard were characteristic of the work of John F. Herring, Jr.