

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)

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.

THOMAS SIDNEY COOPER WAS A PUPIL OF THE celebrated Belgian *animalier* Eugène Verboeckhoven (see inventory), 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* (fig. 1) 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 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 inventory), 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 Sidney



Eugène Verboeckhoven, *Guarding the Lamb*, 1837,
Private Collection (Figure 1)

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.

