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### Autumn Sunset at Greenwood Lake, New York

**Date:** 1876

**Artist:** Jasper Francis Cropsey, American, 1823-1900

**Dimensions:** image: 12 3/16 x 20 3/16 in. (31 x 51.3 cm) frame: 21 x 29 x 3 1/2 in. (53.3 x 73.7 x 8.9 cm)

**Medium:** oil on canvas

**Credit Line:** Gift of Elizabeth Upjohn Mason and Lowell B. Mason, Jr.

**Autumn Sunset at Greenwood Lake, New York, 1876**, painted by Jasper Francis Cropsey, is representative of many of his greatest works. It is in the Kalamazoo Institute of Art's Permanent Collection. Cropsey's style of underlying structures is precise, and calculated from start to finish. Trained as an architect, and beginning early in his childhood to explore his artistic talents, he is very intentional about every part of his paintings. For most of us, if we attempted a painting like this, it would create something stilted, or dead, without expression, but not with Cropsey's work. The masterful use of color, the bringing of vibrant color of all different hues, without any clashing of them is what brings his paintings alive. We take this skill for granted, because we are used to seeing scenery in photographs, which record the harmonies of nature, light, and atmosphere. To paint this so successfully is surely the work of a master. Cropsey specialized in autumn landscape, because of the range of color, and thus emotion he was able to achieve through the effects of it on the canvas. Viewers of his time were captivated by the lush, rich color, and detail of the paintings. Typical of the Hudson River School Artists, also was their treatment of light. They used the sunlight, intense glowing light in their paintings to create in the viewer a sense of wonder or awe. The feeling that they were tiny in the big, world, that we are small before our Maker, which is God. This was what Cropsey wanted us to see and feel. This was akin to the worship they felt, and what they wanted to convey to the viewer. Cropsey believed that nature was a showing, or manifestation of God, and that as such, his form of

painting the landscape, was the highest form of art because it captured that beauty for people to see it. They felt they were recording the fingerprint of God as it was happening in time and space. Thus it could show a larger meaning beyond just scenery. It was also a patriotic movement in that they didn't just paint European scenes, but began to do distinctly American landscape. The Hudson River School Artists drew attention to the beauty here on our own American soil, drawing attention to the unspoiled, wild and rugged nature. Eventually because of the heightened awareness in the public eye, caused by these master work paintings being shown, our National Parks became important as a way to protect and cherish our natural resources. This was our country's first expression of concern and love for the environment.

Jasper Francis Cropsey was born on February 18, 1823, the first of later to be eight children, born to Jacob and Elizabeth Cropsey on their farm, in Rossville, Staten Island. His family from the Cropsey side were of German-Dutch ancestry, and were prominent in the Dutch Reformed Church. On his mother's side, the Cortelyous, were from French Huguenots, and were foundation members of the Moravian Church of New Dorp, Staten Island. The Christian religious way of life was prominent in their home, in bringing up their children, as well as teaching them a healthy work ethic. These elements were part of Jasper Cropsey's whole life and art career, as is evidenced by his letters and writings.

During his childhood, Jasper (called "Frank" by friends and family) continually had difficulty with poor health. During these times when sequestered at home, he began to teach himself how to draw. His interest was primarily architecture and scenes. He also built models with hand tools. A model house he built when he was 13, was entered at the Mechanic's Institute Fair in 1837, winning first prize, as well as some local fame, thereafter being named the "boy that built the house."

Within a year he became apprenticed to an architect firm in Manhattan, Joseph Trench's, signing on for a duration of 5 years. Within 18 months of working with the firm, he became entrusted with most of the office's finished drafts, earning a room in which to explore further his skills, as well as being given art materials. While in Manhattan he began visiting the National Academy of Design, where art works of early American landscapes were displayed. He enjoyed viewing the oil paintings of Thomas Cole so much that it inspired him to take up oil painting during his time after working hours. He soon was able to display his work beside Cole's and Durand, and other early Hudson River Artist's works. By the age of 21, he became the youngest member on an Associate level, to be brought into the National Academy of Design. He began then to devote much of his time to landscape painting. He studied watercolor, as well as life drawing under Edward Maury (British) and also was influenced by Ranney, and Mount, who were prominent genre painters of that time. Jasper left the Trench office, having completed his apprenticeship in 1842. He supported himself by architectural commissions, continuing to study landscape. Two paintings of Greenwood Lake were the fruit of sketching trips to this location in New Jersey, as well as meeting his future wife, Maria Cooley in West Milford, N.J., at her home there. These paintings were shown in 1843 at the American Art Union. They married in 1847, after which they embarked for Europe, first traveling in Great Britain, moving through France, Switzerland, and then ending up in Rome, Italy with other American artists' there.

The Cropsey's returned to America in 1849, and Jasper went first to the White Mountains, and then in N.Y. city rented a studio. From this base, he would travel through the state, and sometimes to New Hampshire, and Vermont. He would also tutor art students. One of his students, David Johnson (1827-1908) later gained some notoriety as a landscape artist. By the 1850's Cropsey Art career took off, and he became known as a leader in the Hudson River School, along with Kensett, Durand, and Church. He was elected a full member of the National Academy of Design in 1851.

In 1855, he traveled to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. There he created 2 paintings, asked by Henry Tappan (the college president) to paint a scene of the college campus, and the Detroit Observatory.

The Cropsey's left New York for the second trip, bound for England in June 1856. They remained for seven years. They made their home in a studio in London, Kensington Gate. There they made friends of such notables as Sir Charles Eastlake, John Ruskin, and Lord Lyndhurst. In visiting the galleries and Museums there, he was able to view the major Landscape artists there, such as John Constable, and J.M.W. Turner. There Cropsey finished the painting called: *Autumn-On the Hudson River (now residing in the National Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C.)* and painted American scenery for the British, and also fulfilled commissions of English scenes for U.S. patrons (sending them overseas), while enjoying and sketching the Isle of Wight and the Dorset Coast. Jasper and Maria Cropsey were invited, and presented to Queen Victoria at St. James Palace in 1861.

The Cropsey's again returned to the United States in 1863. Prosperous, during this time, Jasper traveled to Gettysburg, and painted the battlefield. In 1866, he founded, with 10 other artist-members, the American Society of Painters in Water Colors. He again worked on architectural designs by commission, and created what was to be his most famous, the passenger stations for the Gilbert Elevated Railway, done in the "Queen Anne" style, that ran along New York's Sixth Avenue. He also designed and built a Gothic Revival style mansion for himself, called Aladdin, which he later had to sell, (and which has since burned). At the end of the 1860's the style of painting which had been so lucrative, began to lose its fashion, and by the 1870's was out of favor with the public.

In 1875, Jasper painted "Greenwood Lake, Autumn, on the Hudson." In this piece there is about 1/3 from the left, two trees, together, and below is a man and woman sitting together on the rocks. It isn't too far fetched to say that Greenwood Lake was a place of romantic attachment for Jasper, as he had met his wife, Maria there around 1842, over 30 years previously. In comparison, it is very like the one done in the following year. In 1876, when he was 53 years old, he painted, "Autumn Sunset at Greenwood Lake, New York," which is in the Kalamazoo Institute of Art's Permanent Collection. At this time then, Cropsey's fortune was waning. He is in financial straits. He knows that his art is out of style. The painting, if I could attempt to read it in a symbolic way or give it an interpretation...It has three sets of "two's". The trees together on the left, flourishing, under the clear sky. The two cows in the center, but now there are clouds coming. There is a large boulder in the front. These look like symbols of hardship and trouble, yet Jasper and Maria still have each other, and God, symbolized by the golden sunlight, is still

shining upon them. The islands in the water are hazing out in the atmosphere...we cannot see them clearly, just as Jasper cannot see his future clearly. The storm clouds are coming in. He and Maria are getting older, the future cannot be known, but together or apart, no matter what happens, God is still there, with them, shining on them with favor, love and hope. That is how I would interpret it, but maybe the reader, or someone else viewing it would have a different interpretation. Even if we don't try at all to give it meaning, it is a gloriously beautiful painting.

In 1884 they were at a point where they had to move from the large mansion. They cut their losses, and sold and auctioned off whatever they could. They were then able to buy another house in 1885 to suit their means. Jasper designed and built a studio addition, then in his early 60's, and still very active, at Hastings-on-Hudson, which they named "Ever Rest," (and is now a museum run by the Newington-Cropsey Foundation, housing the largest collection of Cropsey's work on permanent display). The studio addition has a large, very tall cupola, with many windows running its full length. The windows face north, giving an artist continuous, bright, ambient light during the day, the best lighting to paint by. A sizeable room, it also served as a sitting room, a place to sit in front of the inglenook fireplace, entertain each other on the piano, perhaps to entertain guests as well.

It was in this home and studio that Cropsey continued painting for the next 15 years, both in oil and in watercolor, working primarily from sketches gleaned from their earlier travels, or of local vistas close to home. In 1893 Jasper Cropsey had a stroke, after which he began to favor watercolor predominantly, until he passed away on June 22, 1900, at 77 years old. Jasper's wife, married for 54 years, Maria, passed away in 1906.

Jasper Francis Cropsey, his art having fallen out of favor, died without notoriety. However, during the 1960's and 70's, his work was discovered, and began again to be appreciated. Most major American museums have some of his works. The list includes: The White House, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The National Gallery of Art, The Kalamazoo Institute of Art, The Detroit Institute of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Timken Museum of Art in San Diego, The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, The Honolulu Museum of Art in Hawaii, The Princeton University Art Museum, The Denver Art Museum in Colorado, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art among others.

