

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**William James BLACKLOCK (London 1816 - Dumfries 1858)**

## **A Figure Resting in a Woodland Clearing**

Watercolour.

Inscribed By Blacklock on the verso.

213 x 198 mm. (8 3/8 x 7 3/4 in.)

A stylistically similar watercolour by Blacklock of 'The Weir at Henley', dated 1842, is in the British Museum. Also comparable is an undated watercolour of Furness Abbey in the collection of the Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Kendal in Cumbria.

## **Artist description:**

Relatively little is known of the painter William James Blacklock, and even his entry in the Dictionary of National Biography appears to be replete with errors. The son of a bookseller, he was apprenticed as an engraver and lithographer to a printer in Carlisle, who was to publish the young artist's views of the newly built Newcastle to Carlisle railway in 1839. Blacklock was trained as a painter at the Carlisle Academy of Arts, and exhibited once there and, from 1836 onwards, at the Royal Academy in London. He exhibited almost yearly at the Royal Academy until 1855, showing a total of thirty-six works, and also at the British Institution. He showed mainly landscapes in the Lake District and the north of England, with a particular penchant for views of historical castles and abbey buildings.

His work was much admired by John Ruskin, who wrote of him in his book *Modern Painters* that 'some of the best and most substantial renderings of the green and turfy masses of our lower hills are to be found in the drawings of Blacklock.' He was also much praised by some of his fellow artists, notably J. M. W. Turner and David Roberts, who bought one of his landscapes. Among the collectors who purchased his paintings were Edwin Bullock, James Leathart and the MP William Gladstone.

In the mid 1850's, however, Blacklock began to suffer problems with his eyesight, and also began exhibiting signs of mental illness and undergoing an epileptic fit. In 1855, the last year that he showed at

the Royal Academy, he was admitted to the Royal Mental Institution in Dumfries. He ceased to paint, and died in 1858, at the age of forty-two. Within a few years Blacklock's work had lapsed into obscurity.

His work, which remained quite rare, was neglected and largely forgotten by later generations of scholars and connoisseurs.

A large group of paintings and drawings by Blacklock is today in the Carlisle Art Gallery, and others works are in the collections of the museums in York, Kendal, Newcastle and Dublin, but there is nothing by the artist in the Tate or the Victoria and Albert Museum, or in the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven.