

**Thomas Hartley CROMEK (London 1809 - Wakefield 1873)**

**Study of Plants, Ariccia**

Watercolour, over traces of a pencil underdrawing.

Signed, inscribed and dated T.H. CROMEK / Ariccia / 11 Augt. 1845. at the bottom centre.

183 x 208 mm. (7 1/4 x 8 1/8 in.)

The present sheet was drawn during the summer of 1845 at Ariccia, a town near Lake Nemi in the Roman Campagna, south of the city. Cromek often made sketching expeditions around the Campagna, including the towns of Ariccia, Frascati and Tivoli. Depicted in this watercolour is a flowering plant known as the great or common mullein (Verbascum thapsus), found throughout Europe and Asia but particularly common around the Mediterranean. The leaves of the mullein, which can grow to up to two metres in height, have long been used in traditional herbal medicine.

Among stylistically comparable nature studies by Cromek is a drawing of A Branch with Leaves, among the many watercolours by the artist today in the possession of his great-grandson, Wilfrid Warrington. A similar watercolour study of a mullein, inscribed and dated ‘Ariccia July 29, 1848’ is also in the collection of Cromek’s descendants.

**Artist description:**

Much of what is known today of Thomas Hartley Cromek’s life and career is based on a journal he wrote, entitled Reminiscences at Home and Abroad, 1812-1855, which only came to light in the latter half of the 20th century. (The manuscript remains unpublished, and is in the possession of one of the artist’s descendants.) The son of an engraver and editor, Cromek was educated in Wakefield in Yorkshire, later completing his studies in Leeds. He first travelled to Italy in 1830, accompanying his mother to Florence and Rome, where she had gone for her health.

He was to spend much of the next twenty years living and working in Italy, mainly in Florence and Rome. He met and befriended several English artists, including Clarkson Stanfield and John Frederick Lewis, and gave drawing lessons to several distinguished English visitors, including, in November 1837,

Edward Lear. Cromek made two trips to Greece, in 1834 and 1845. In 1849 he was forced to leave Rome by the outbreak of the First Italian War of Independence, and he returned to England for good. Cromek seems to have produced almost no paintings after 1860, as his health gradually failed, and he died in relative obscurity in Yorkshire.