



John William NORTH (Walham Green 1842 - Stamborough 1924)

The Hayloft

Watercolour and bodycolour, with scratching out. Laid down.
Indistinctly signed(?) and dated 67 at the lower left.
230 x 284 mm. (9 x 11 1/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, DC.

John William North spent much of the 1860's working at Halsway Manor, near Crowcombe in Somerset, where he had rented rooms alongside Fred Walker. This watercolour is likely to depict a scene in the Quantock Hills and the surrounding West Somerset countryside, an area which accounted for almost all of North's landscape subjects in the 1860's. This was a period during which North began to achieve a measure of both financial success as an illustrator, but by 1867 – the date of the present sheet – he seems to have given up his illustration work in favour of a full-time career as a landscape watercolourist and, occasionally, painter. As Christopher Newall has noted, 'The watercolours that North painted in the 1860s owe much to his experience as a designer of illustrations, retaining a coherent and linear compositional structure, matched with intense colour and careful observation of detail.'

Provenance:

Kenneth Augustus Muir Mackenzie, 1st Baron Muir Mackenzie GCB, London
Anonymous sale, Exeter, Bearne's, 7 November 2006, lot 458
Peter Nahum, London, in January 2008
Christopher Cone, Whitby.

Literature:

London, Royal Academy, Winter Exhibition, 1928 (lent by Lord Muir Mackenzie).

Artist description:

John William North was one of a group of artists, including his friends Frederick Walker, George John Pinwell and George Hemming Mason, who were known as 'The Idyllists', due to their penchant for rustic genre scenes. As one recent scholar has noted of the Idyllists, 'Their purpose was to evoke the day-to-

day experience of the countryside with absolute simplicity and authenticity, dwelling on the familiar and the touching without resorting to cloying sentimentality.' North and Walker met as apprentices in the studio of the wood engraver Josiah Wood Whymper, and each began his career as an illustrator, producing numerous designs for engravings to be published in various magazines and books. They often went on sketching trips together, and remained lifelong friends. North exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in the late 1860's and was elected an associate member of the Old Water-Colour Society in 1871. In later years he divided his time between studios in Somerset, London and Algeria, and exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery and the New Gallery.

Working primarily as a landscape painter and illustrator, North was recognized as a gifted draughtsman and a fine colourist. As Frederick Walker once wrote of his close friend North's watercolours, 'he is most sincere over it, each inch wrought with gem-like care', while in 1928 the scholar Forrest Reid opined that, 'To modern taste North's broader, truer method is infinitely more satisfying than the painstaking minuteness of a Birket Foster, but in his own day his work never attained popularity, and was underrated even by his fellow-artists...His own conscientious, sincere, and quiet work was of a kind that makes its way slowly.' Watercolours by North are today in the collections of the British Museum and Tate Britain in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and elsewhere.