

Study of a Sunrise

John Ruskin



Description

John Ruskin (1819-1900)
Study of a Sunrise

Watercolour and bodycolour over traces of pencil
24.1 by 32.2 cm., 9 ½ by 12 ½ in.

Provenance:

Harold and Nicolette Wernick;
Nicolette Wernick, her sale, Christie's, 16th June 2010, lot 81, where bought by the present owner

Exhibited:

Springfield Museum of Fine Art, Massachusetts, 19th Century English Art from the Collection of Harold and Nicolette Wernick, January to March 1988, no.35

Ruskin was fascinated by the beauty and constantly changing effects of the natural world and recorded several dramatic studies of the sun both rising and setting. Indeed Ruskin is recorded as habitually watching the dawn and leaving his supper, from quite a young age, to watch the sunset. His father wrote to a friend about this habit saying, 'he visits as regularly as a soldier does his evening parade.' (Cook and Wedderburn, Works, vol. III, pp. xxii-xxiii). In later life, he had a turret window specially constructed at Brantwood, to allow him to see the dawn sky.

In his series of lectures, *The Two Paths*, Ruskin encourages his students to 'rise early, always watch the sunrise and the way the clouds break from the dawn' (*The Two Paths*, 1858-9, p. 154). He believed that by trying to capture such views, artists were offered the opportunity to study and record the entire natural spectrum of colour and its subtle gradations from one colour to another, in one place and with a constantly changing emphasis on the range of possible colour combinations. Furthermore the fleeting nature meant that the spectator had a limited amount of time in which to do this, thus it served a secondary valuable purpose. As he grew older, Ruskin began to differentiate between the value of sunrise and sunset, believing the former to be more crucial for artistic study. He felt that the slightly subdued range of colours, caused by the frequent veil of mist was of greater importance.

Two sunrises were shown at the 1879 exhibition of Ruskin drawings at Messrs Noyes & Blakeslee, Boston, October 1879: no. 89 Sunrise from Denmark Hill (1868) and no. 90 Study of Sunrise.