

Henry Farrer (1844 - 1903)

Sunset Glow, circa 1885

signed lower left

watercolor on paper

17" x 23"

Henry Farrer, who came to America from England in 1862, is recognized as playing an important role in the development of watercolor during the second half of the nineteenth century. He contributed annually to the exhibitions of the American Water Color Society over thirty-seven consecutive years, beginning with the Society's inaugural event in 1867. Later in his career, critics for the *New York Times* consistently made example of Farrer's work "as a barometer of the ups and downs of the American watercolor movement" (1).

Farrer was a self-taught artist, in contrast to his older brother Thomas C. Farrer (1838 – 1891), an American Pre-Raphaelite who studied with John Ruskin (1819 - 1900) in London and was a founding member of the Association for the Advancement of Truth. Henry Farrer's work, such as *Sunset Glow*, shows the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites in its brilliant use of light, fidelity to nature, and emotional evocation. By 1875 Farrer took a departure from the hyper-clarity and bright hues of his earlier watercolors and began to utilize a more tonal palette. Paintings from this transitional phase of his career are "symptomatic of a general trend occurring within the American watercolor movement at this time [and reflect] a growing preference for the art of J. M. W. Turner (1775 - 1851)" (2). Consequently, artists began to incorporate softly modulated atmospheric effects in lieu of minute detailing. Critics welcomed this transformation in Farrer's work, and the hazy tonality from this period defined his watercolors for the rest of his career.

Sunset Glow showcases a narrow range of muted colors in the more freely painted style for which he became known. The glow of the setting sun makes a strong statement against the soft greens and grays of the meadow. In the middle ground, a man sits at the edge of the reflective stream. As evidenced by the variation of light, color, and form, all of which contribute to a compelling sense of tranquility, Farrer seems to have greatly profited from the influence of Turner.

Farrer exhibited at the National Academy of Design, the Brooklyn Art Association, the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, and the 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle. He was a member of the Artists Fund Society, the Royal Society of Painters-Etchers in London, and a founder of the New York Etching Club. He lived and worked in Brooklyn until his death in 1903.

Provenance: From the trade to the gallery.

Bibliography:

Stephanie Wiles, "A Survey of Watercolors by Henry Farrer" in *Master Drawings*, vol. 40, no. 4, Nineteenth Century British and American Drawings (Winter, 2002), 317.

Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerds, *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1985), 262.