

# WILLOW GALLERY



## Autumn Glory

John Atkinson Grimshaw (1836–1893)

Oil on canvas, signed and dated 1887+

Canvas size: 24 x 36in / 61 x 91cm

Frame size: 33.5 x 45.5in / 85 x 115cm

### PROVENANCE

Collection of James O Fairfax

With Christopher Wood, London

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

John Atkinson Grimshaw was a British landscape painter. Born in Leeds, he remained in the north of England for most of his life. He first began painting while working as a clerk for the Great Northern Railway, and in 1861 he left his job and decided to become a full-time artist.

Grimshaw's early works were true to the Pre-Raphaelite style, with painted landscapes of accurate colour and lighting, and vivid detail. By the late 1860s he had begun to experiment with moonlit scenes, initially concentrating on rural areas before including cityscapes and docksides. He often painted images that typified seasons or a type of weather with city and suburban streets and moonlit views of the docks in London, Leeds, Liverpool, and Glasgow featuring largely in his art. By applying his skill in lighting effects, and unusually careful attention to detail, he was often capable of intricately describing a scene, while strongly conveying its mood. It was in these paintings that Grimshaw found his vocation. The architecture and industry of the new cities could be softened and romanticised in moonlight, with the gas lights giving them a warmth and attractiveness so lacking in daylight. His ability to give the new sprawling urbanisation of Victorian England a timeless and haunting quality was hugely popular. As Whistler famously commented; 'I considered myself the inventor of nocturnes until I saw Grimmy's moonlight picture.' Grimshaw's lease of the grand Knostrop Hall in 1870 reflected both his success and the romantic light in which he saw the world, and features in many of his popular paintings of suburban moonlit lanes. Built near Leeds in the late 17th century, the house was a source of some pride, and its slightly careworn appearance was perfect for the romantic notion of time passing, and the gentle descent into decay.

In 1880, Grimshaw gave up the lease of his other house in Scarborough, which he had rented since 1876, and began to make regular visits to London. Why he did this at this point in his life can be assumed to be a result of a mysterious financial crisis that he faced in 1879. 1880 was also the year in which the renowned dealers Agnews ended their association with him, and it seems that he saw his trips to London as a means to increase his output and profile at the same time as diversifying his subject matter. Certainly the number of paintings that he produced increased during this period, giving credence to the theory that his finances had suffered.

It is unclear how many trips Grimshaw made to the capital, but several paintings dating from 1880, 1882, 1883, and 1884 suggest that there were regular visits. During the first half of the 1880s, he concentrated on scenes of the Thames, with associated London landmarks, bathed in his idiosyncratic moonlight. These appear to have been well-received, and in 1885, he moved into Anderson's Hotel, a central location, in order to find a studio space. Shortly thereafter, he moved into Studio 5 in the Trafalgar Studios block in Chelsea, an excellent location for meeting other artists and dealers, and giving him the best possible chance for success in his new environment. It was here that Grimshaw met Whistler, amongst others, and he quickly took advantage of his new location by having two paintings accepted for the 1885 Royal Academy exhibition, with further paintings accepted by the Grosvenor Gallery, Arthur Tooth and Sons, and the Institute of Painters in Oil Colours. After a brief two-year stay in the capital, Grimshaw returned to his beloved Knostrop, presumably with his financial situation more secure, and he remained there until dying of cancer in 1893.

Grimshaw's work can now be seen in galleries all over the world including the Tate Gallery in London and the Leeds Museum. One of the country's most desired and collected Victorian artists, his peerless ability to capture the beauty in an era of great social and economic

change has made him the definitive painter of nocturnal Victorian cityscapes.

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Monday - Friday 9:30am - 6pm or by appointment

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