



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS  
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

**VOLUME ONE**

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With an essay by Richard Rand  
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,  
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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## John Crome

English, 1768–1821

### 96 | Sheds and Old Houses on the Yare c. 1803

Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 63.3 cm

Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton

2007.8.64

A ramshackle cottage by the edge of a river was a typical subject for John Crome throughout his career. Although few of the artist's works are dated, *Sheds and Old Houses on the Yare* has been generally accepted by Crome scholars as an example of his early style and, therefore, dating before 1805.<sup>1</sup> The present title derives principally from the near-exclusive association of this artist with Norwich and its environs, rather than from any topographical accuracy that might make the site identifiable.

*Sheds and Old Houses* exhibits the qualities that distinguish Crome's early work. As C. H. Collins Baker has pointed out, it is executed on a coarse-weave canvas and with a nearly monochromatic palette, much

like *The Cow Tower on the Swaneery Meadow* (Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery), which is also datable to this period.<sup>2</sup> In works of his artistic maturity, such as *Mousehold Heath, Norwich* (c. 1818–20; Tate Britain, London) or *The Poringland Oak* (c. 1818–20; Tate Britain, London), the influence of Richard Wilson (1713/14–1782) is apparent, as well as that of the seventeenth-century Dutch painters Jan van Goyen, Jacob van Ruisdael, and Meindert Hobbema. In contrast, the prevailing influence on these early works is that of George Morland (1763–1804), who depicted an altogether humbler side of country life.

Also known as Old Crome to distinguish him from his artist son John Berney Crome (1794–1842), the Norwich-born artist is a central figure of what has been called the Norwich School of Artists. As the founder and first president of the Norwich Society of Artists, Crome instructed a circle of students and amateurs, including James Stark (1794–1859), to whom the variously read inscription on the lining of the present painting refers (see Technical Report).<sup>3</sup> Despite the collective name for the artists who practiced in the largest city of East Anglia and exhibited at the first regional artists' society to hold annual displays, recent analyses have shown that, in fact, there is little

to distinguish the painting practice of Crome and his fellow East Anglians from other British landscape painters of the time.<sup>4</sup>

While in the eighteenth century Thomas Gainsborough bemoaned the fact that to make a living as an artist he was obliged to paint portraits rather than the landscapes that were his preference, in the nineteenth century, careers such as Crome's demonstrate the growing market for depictions of the English countryside. Much has been written that has sought to explain this phenomenon, linking the rise in status of landscape painting to literary movements, philosophical trends such as the picturesque, and the industrialization of Britain with its concomitant urbanization. Perhaps the most important of these changes to the social and economic profile of Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century was the emergence of a new class of art patrons who could afford the modest but discretionary sum of fifteen guineas that Crome typically received for his most affordable work.<sup>5</sup> EP

**PROVENANCE** James Stark, Norwich (d. 1859);<sup>6</sup> W. Wilde (possibly by 1860); possibly L. or C. F. Huth; sale, Christie's, London, 30 June 1906, no. 119, as *Building and Sheds on a River*, sold to Gooden; Gooden (from 1906); Sir Leicester Harmsworth, Baronet (in 1921); [Tooth & Co., London, sold to Mackintosh, 1950]; Harold Vincent Mackintosh, Viscount Mackintosh of Halifax, Norfolk (1950–d. 1964); Constance Mackintosh, Viscountess Mackintosh of Halifax, his wife, by descent (1964–d. 1975); John Mackintosh, Viscount Mackintosh of Halifax, her son, by descent (from 1975); [Oscar & Peter Johnson, Ltd., London, sold to Manton, 6 May 1980]; Sir Edwin A. G. Manton, New York (1980–d. 2005); Manton Family Art Foundation (2005–7, given to the Clark); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007.

**EXHIBITIONS** Possibly Norwich 1860, no. 67 as *Sprowston, Barn and Sheds*; Norwich 1921, p. 34, no. 35, as *Sheds and Old Houses*, lent by Sir Leicester Harmsworth, Bt.; Norwich–London 1968, no. 17, lent by Constance, Viscountess Mackintosh of Halifax.

**REFERENCES** Mackintosh Collection Catalogue 1960–64, MSS, p. 53; Baker 1921a, pp. 30, 51, 115, 163, pl. III; Baker 1921b, p. 254; Clifford and Clifford 1968, pp. 179–80, pl. 60b; Goldberg 1978, vol. 1, pp. 30, 44, 173–75, 236, 294, no. 10, vol. 2, pl. 10.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a coarse, open-weave linen layer with irregular threads and a thread count of 13 threads/cm. Cusping of the edge threads suggests that the artist prepared the canvas. There appear to be two old linings, one cut close to the edge of the image and the lower

one holding them all onto the five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. The weave of the darkened lower lining is 23 threads/cm, and the middle fabric has a thread count of 19 threads/cm. There is a black ink or paint inscription on the back that may have been copied from the back of the original fabric. Part of the inscription is illegible, and parts of it have been wiped away along with the surrounding grime. It is best viewed in ultraviolet light and appears to read: "A S[. . .] Mill John Crome [Norwich?] Bt from his pupil Mr Stark [by Mr. Wilde?]."

The thinly applied paint layer is very dark due to either the lack of a ground layer or a very thin gray ground combined with solvent abrasion. The lining adhesives may also have darkened the original fabric as they aged. The ultraviolet fluorescence of the varnish is very dense, and tests indicate that the coating is quite brown in color, both suggesting considerable age. Old grime is embedded in some impastos, and broad retouches can be seen in the sky and building peaks. The irregular thread sizes and coarse weave are very pronounced in the surface reflectance. No underdrawing was detected under either magnification or infrared light. Many passages look like mere washes of color, although they may also have been abraded in an early cleaning. The light passages of the sky seem to be dry scumbles on the surface, and only the white forms have soft, rounded impastos.

1. C. H. Collins Baker, Crome's first systematic cataloguer, dated the painting to c. 1803 (Baker 1921a, p. 163). In their 1968 catalogue, Derek and Timothy Clifford expanded the range, stating it is "probably before 1800, certainly before 1805" (Clifford and Clifford 1968, p. 179). Norman Goldberg dated it to c. 1802–3 (Goldberg 1978, vol. 1, p. 173).
2. Baker 1921a, pp. 30, 50–51. As with the Clark picture, there has been some disagreement over the dating of *Cow Tower*, with possibilities ranging from 1790 to 1805. See Goldberg 1978, vol. 1, pp. 169–70.
3. Goldberg transcribed the inscription as "Sp . . . Mill by J. Crome; bt. from his pupil Mr. Stark," but noted that the location is probably not Sprowston Mill. See Goldberg 1978, vol. 1, p. 173.
4. See Hemingway 1992, p. 196, as well as essays by Andrew Hemingway and David Blayney Brown in London 2000.
5. In London 2000, p. 13, Andrew Hemingway noted that at the height of his career, Crome could sell his paintings for between fifteen and fifty guineas. Compare these prices to those of J. M. W. Turner, whose work in the decade of the 1810s fetched in the hundreds of guineas.
6. According to inscription on reverse.