

**William Huggins (1820-1884)**

**SHEEP BY A MOUNTAIN STREAM, NORTH WALES, 1880**

Oil on wood 60 x 44.8 cm

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William Huggins was born in Liverpool in 1820. He studied at the Liverpool Mechanics Institute, where he won a prize at the age of 15 for an historical subject. He entered the Liverpool Academy Schools in 1835, the year he first exhibited there, becoming an Associate in 1847 and a Member in 1850. He resigned in 1856 in protest at its enthusiasm for Pre-Raphaelitism, but exhibited there in the 1860s and with the rival Liverpool Society of Fine Arts. He exhibited in London at the Royal Academy 1842-75, the British Institution and the Society of British Artists, and at the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition 1871-78. He is best known as a painter of animals, which he studied avidly at the Liverpool Zoological Gardens as well as keeping a houseful of pets.

William Huggins was one of the most important and interesting Victorian artist to have lived in the Chester district. He lived in Chester at 4 The Groves from 1861 until 1878 or '79, although he also took houses in North Wales in 1876 and 1878-79. By 1881 he was living 5 miles from Chester at 90 Holme Street, Tarvin. He spent the last two years of his life 2 miles from Chester at Rock House, Christleton, where he died and was buried in 1884.

This landscape was probably painted near Maentwrog and Tan-y-bwlch, not far from Ffestiniog. Although Huggins is best known as an animal painter, this picture demonstrates his great originality as a painter of landscapes. It is also an exceptionally successful example of the very individual technique which he frequently used from the 1850s. This involved applying several layers of bright translucent colour over a white ground, which shines through the rich surface in the same way that white paper illuminates watercolours.

His approach contrasted markedly with the conventional practice of painting on a dark background, working from dark to light. In this sense he was the heir of Turner, who frequently worked on a light background. Surprisingly, in view of his public rejection of the movement in 1856, Huggins was probably influenced by the early Pre-Raphaelites in the use of glowing colours over a brilliant white ground, although he did not emulate their meticulous brushwork.