LOT 68
WILLIAM DYCE, R.A., H.R.S.A.
1806 - 1864
WELSH LANDSCAPE WITH TWO WOMEN KNITTING
signed with initials l.r.: WD
oil on prepared board
35.5 by 50.5 cm., 14 by 20 in.

ESTIMATE 200,000-300,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 541,250 GBP

PROVENANCE
Christie’s, 30 October 1964, lot 123, bought by Mrs Charlotte Frank;
Mrs Charlotte Frank, London, where bought by Sir David Scott, 31 October 1965 for £950.

EXHIBITED
Maas Gallery, London, English Romantic Paintings, 1800-1900, 1965, no. 8;
Detroit Institute of Arts and Philadelphia Museum of Art, Romantic Art in Britain - Paintings and Drawings 1760-1860, 1968, no. 191;
London, Royal Academy, Jubilee Exhibition, 1976;
Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, Sunshine and Shadow - The David Scott Collection of Victorian Paintings, 1991, no. 21;
On loan to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge 2007/2008

LITERATURE
Allen Staley, The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape, Oxford, 1973, p. 166, pl. 95b;
Marcia Pointon, William Dyce 1806-1864, 1979, pp. 174, 194, illustrated as pl. 61;

CATALOGUE NOTE
'The old woman is warning the girl against getting too involved with Ifor Jones attractive though he is. I once showed this picture to the headmistress of a big English girl's school and told her my interpretation. She looked at it and said "Of course she won't pay the slightest attention" and I expect she was right. There is a lovely evening light atmosphere about this picture with the new moon just visible above the characteristic Welsh landscape' Sir David Scott

This is one of the most celebrated of all the paintings in the Scott collection, and one that has been shown in a succession of exhibitions of Victorian art, in Britain and North America. In 1992 Lady Scott described in a letter how her 'late husband bought the picture from Mrs Frank years & years ago and [how] it remained his favourite painting all his life'.

In the late summer of 1860 Dyce took his family on holiday to north Wales, staying at Llanrwst on the river Conwy. As on the island of Arran the previous year, the painter took this opportunity to sketch landscape and nature subjects. Although landscape - with or without figures - was not his principal source of income, he was aware of the commercial possibilities of such work, and was delighted to be able to defray the costs of the vacation by painting saleable subjects while away. As he wrote to his brother-in-law: 'I have got some materials which I hope to turn to good account [...] these trips for change of air always pay. I made £400 by my trip to Ramsgate two years ago [when he painted Pegwell Bay, Tate] and £620 by my last year's trip to Arran, and I hope to make an equally good thing out of
the Welsh excursion’. Whether or not the present subject was actually painted in Wales that September, or as seems more likely done on the basis of sketches and perhaps photographs in Dyce's studio in London later in the year, it clearly represents a choice of subject that might appeal to anyone with an interest in the people and landscape of the Welsh mountains.

Two women, the older of whom sits on an exposed rock while the younger stands, are observed knitting in the open landscape. Both are intent upon their work, and there seems to be no communication between the two. They are both dressed in elaborate folk costume, with the younger of the two wearing a distinctive tall hat, of a kind which in the period would only in fact have been worn on special occasions. Despite its undeniable strangeness, the painting is a celebration of a community and way of life that remained quite separate in the middle years of the nineteenth century, and which attracted great interest.

Marcia Pointon has compared this painting to that of Pegwell Bay (Tate), and has concluded that it is likewise intended as a meditation on the passage of time, ranging from the momentary and diurnal, as represented by human activities and the cycle of day and night, to the near-eternal, as suggested by the motif of eroded rock surfaces and the knowledge of astronomy. The patience required for knitting is in itself seen as a metaphor of the apparent slowness of the passage of time, and Pointon has also suggested that the contrast between the figures of the younger and older model is also part of this system of comparative degrees of antiquity.

Dyce's particular enthusiasm for the Welsh mountain landscape is expressed in the delicate treatment of the setting. The family's base at Llanrwst during the 1860 sojourn offered 'beautiful but not wild scenery - much like Perthshire', but 'a mile or two's walk brought us into every variety of Welsh scenery'. The view here seems to be towards Snowdon, which may be the mountain in the extreme distance at the centre of the composition. The treatment of the exposed rock surfaces of the foreground is a reminder of the fascination that Dyce felt for the new science of geology, and the knowledge of geological types that he had gained from his reading of textbooks such as Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology (1830-33).

There are related landscape studies in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and the Hamburg Kunsthalle.