

Alice Boyd



SOLD

Steps to the Studio, Penkill

Reference: 10942

# KAREN TAYLOR

## FINE ART

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### Dimensions:

Height: 31 cm / 12¼ in

Width: 22.20 cm / 8¾ in

Signed with monogram l.r. and dated July 1875, watercolour over pencil with scratching out, the original mount inscribed: Steps to the Studio, Penkill/Steps that lead to pleasant days/And work that needs nor blame nor praise, in the original reeded frame

31 x 22.2 cm.; 12 ½ x 8 5/8 inches

### Provenance

Bonhams London, 31 March 2021, lot 33

Alice Boyd was one of the most talented women in the Pre-Raphaelite circle. In March 1859 she became a pupil of William Bell Scott who was Master of the Government School of Design in Newcastle. Her work has traditionally been overshadowed by Scott's.

Boyd and Scott fell in love, and, with his wife Letitia, divided their time between Penkill and the Scott's London home, living in a menage à trois.

He first visited the ancestral home she shared with her brother Spencer Boyd in July 1860. In 1865, following Spencer's death, Alice became laird of Penkill, the romantic castle perched on a promontory overlooking the Penwhapple burn five miles from Girvan in Ayrshire.

Boyd painted several watercolours and oils outside her studio in the grounds of Penkill. She converted part of the stable block into a studio for herself and Bell Scott to use during the summer. The inscription on the original mount of the present work: Steps to the Studio, Penkill/Steps that lead to pleasant days/And work that needs nor blame nor praise, reflects a happy and productive working environment. The elaborately drawn peacock and roses and foliage, reminiscent of William Morris wallpaper, bear testament to the emerging Aesthetic movement.

Boyd and Bell Scott entertained other members of the Pre-Raphaelite group at Penkill, and it was here that Dante Gabriel Rossetti found some solace in his most bleak moments of melancholia. The Penwhapple Burn inspired his poem The Stream's Secret, begun when he was staying at Penkill in 1869.

His sister Christina delighted in the views of Ailsa Craig and the Clyde from the window in her turret bedroom and Alma-Tadema showered every morning in the freezing torrents of the Penwhapple waterfall. William Holman Hunt sent souvenirs to Penkill as gifts for Alice, Arthur Hughes was a frequent visitor and William Morris is believed to have designed four embroidered panels which hung in the passage from the banqueting hall. Penkill has been described as having a 'relaxed atmosphere of art and animals, whisky, friends and endless talk' (Country Life, 21 March 1991, p. 118).

Penkill was a centre of the Pre-Raphaelites until 1885 when Bell Scott had an angina attack and was almost bedridden

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until his death five years later. Alice lived there for another seven years.

Christie's sold many of the contents on 15 December 1991 and the castle is now a private residence.