



# A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art as I originally planned it, but I found some lectures that I gave a few years ago. Rather than delete them I decided to use Claude, Heygen and ElevenLabs to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice and face to give them.

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Philip James de Loutherbourg, *Coalbrookdale by Night*, detail, 1801, Science Museum

## 23-14 VICTORIAN LANDSCAPE PAINTING PART 2

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This week we move deeper into the philosophically charged territory of Victorian landscape, beginning with Burke's concept of the sublime and tracing its consequences across a century of paint. From de Loutherbourg's industrial furnaces and Martin's apocalyptic heavens, through Turner, Constable, Palmer, and the Pre-Raphaelites, to Whistler's pure atmospheric sensation and the plein air naturalism of Steer and La Thangue — this talk charts how British painters understood, challenged, and ultimately transformed the idea of landscape itself.



Salvator Rosa (1615-1673)  
*Rocky Landscape with a Huntsman  
 and Warriors*  
 c. 1670

Salvator Rosa (1615-1673), *Rocky Landscape with a Huntsman and Warriors*, c. 1670

In Part 1 we established that landscape is never neutral — it carries social, political and aesthetic weight. This week we move into more philosophically charged territory, beginning with the concept that arguably shaped Romantic landscape more than any other: the **Sublime**. The idea reaches back to antiquity. The treatise *\*On the Sublime\**, attributed to **Pseudo-Longinus** and dated somewhere in the first or third century CE, was the earliest sustained attempt to theorise overwhelming aesthetic experience. But the writer who truly set the modern terms was **Edmund Burke**, whose *\*Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful\**, published in **1757**, redefined how artists and thinkers understood untamed nature. Burke identified seven qualities — darkness, obscurity, deprivation, vastness, magnificence, loudness, and suddenness — and crucially argued that both beauty and the sublime invoke pleasure, making them companions rather than opposites. This was a sharp break from earlier thinking: before Burke, going back as far as **Augustine of Hippo**, the ugly was considered formless, and therefore scarcely real at all. Some artists anticipated this shift before Burke wrote a word. **Salvator Rosa**, the Italian Baroque painter active across Naples, Rome, and Florence in the seventeenth century, was read by Romantic theorists as a precursor to the sublime — his rugged, turbulent landscapes a vehicle of terror, where **Claude Lorrain** offered only classical harmony and luminosity.

## Notes

The idea of the sublime goes back to antiquity and one of the earliest writers was Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 1st or 3rd century CE. In the modern era the sublime is typically traced back to Edmund Burke's book *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), the thrill and danger of untamed nature. Burke identified seven aspects - darkness, obscurity, deprivation, vastness, magnificence, loudness and suddenness. It was associated with terror, infinity, immensity, awe, horror and despair. Feelings invoked by journeys across the Alps in the 18thC. Greatness beyond calculation.

However, the work of some artists pre-dates Burke's work. Salvator Rosa is often mentioned as a precursor to Romanticism and the sublime.

Romantic theorists saw Salvator Rosa (e.g. *Rocky Landscape with Huntsman and Warriors*) as sublime as his landscape was a vehicle of terror compared with Claude Lorrain (born Gellée, c. 1600-1682) as the antithesis of the sublime as he represented classical beauty, elegance, harmony and luminosity.

## Notes

Before Burke (back to Augustine of Hippo) the ugly lacked form and was therefore non-existent. Burke said that both beauty and the sublime invoke pleasure and are therefore not opposites. Burke harks back to Plato in so far as the ugly can create intense emotions that are ultimately pleasurable.

Burke's sublime predates Romanticism but both place importance of the irrational and upon human feelings as opposed to reason. The Romantic Sublime includes works by Turner, such as *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842) and by John Martin, such as his *Last Judgement Triptych*.

Salvator Rosa (1615 – March 15, 1673) was an Italian Baroque painter, poet, and printmaker, who was active in Naples, Rome, and Florence. As a painter, he is best known as "unorthodox and extravagant" as well as being a "perpetual rebel" and a proto-Romantic.





Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740-1812)

*Coalbrookdale by Night*

1801

Science Museum, London

Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740-1812), *Coalbrookdale by Night*, 1801, Science Museum, London

We established Burke's framework on the previous slide — now we can see it applied directly to paint and fire. **Philip James de Loutherbourg's** painting of **1801**, *\*Coalbrookdale by Night\**, shows the Madeley Wood Furnaces in Shropshire, owned by the **Coalbrookdale Company** between 1776 and 1796. The work now hangs in the **Science Museum** in London, and it has come to stand as a defining image of the **Industrial Revolution** — the moment when human industry itself became a source of sublime terror. De Loutherbourg understood exactly what he was doing. The furnaces blaze with the darkness, vastness, and suddenness that Burke had catalogued. This is not beauty — it is overwhelming force. And that distinction matters especially in the **Age of Enlightenment**, when reason was expected to master every experience. The sublime, by definition, exceeded rational accounting: it was, as the notes here put it well, painting the unpaintable. **Barbara Claire Freeman** has drawn a productive distinction between a feminine sublime — awe, rapture, metaphysical infinity — and a masculine sublime rooted in terror and domination. De Loutherbourg's furnaces are unambiguously masculine. By the later nineteenth century this register largely fell away, displaced by beauty and scientific realism — a shift we will trace through the slides ahead.

### Notes

The painting depicts the Madeley Wood (or Bedlam) Furnaces, which belonged to

the Coalbrookdale Company from 1776 to 1796. The picture has come to symbolize the birth of the Industrial Revolution in Ironbridge. It is held in the collections of the Science Museum in London. The blazing furnaces, the heat and the danger instil a sense of awe and terror. These are aspects of the sublime.

Edmund Burke's description of the sublime was an important concept as it was beyond reason and this was in an Age of Enlightenment when everything was subject to reason. It is when words fail us and involves painting the unpaintable and a oneness with nature. These days it is used to indicate a well executed performance, such as a good tennis shot or a delicious meal but in the eighteenth century it was an aesthetic experience distinct from beauty.

The earliest writer about the sublime is Longinus (also called Pseudo-Longinus as his real name is unknown, he lived in the 1st or 3rd century CE and wrote *On the Sublime*) who saw it as an aspect of eloquence, the ability to uplift the soul of the audience and provide a sense of joy such that they thought they had produced what they heard. Other examples are the Bible (Longinus used it to provide examples), Dante Alighieri's (1265–1321) *Divine Comedy* and John Milton's (1608-1674) *Paradise Lost*. The Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) were very concerned with the sublime.

Modern theorists such as Barbara Claire Freeman have distinguished between the feminine sublime involving feelings of awe, rapture and the spiritual and metaphysical infinity of nature and the masculine sublime concerned with terror and domination. This painting is an example of masculine sublime.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the sublime was abandoned by artists for reasons of taste, an interest in beauty and scientific realism.

Some argue the sublime has returned in terms of the interest in horror and horror films.

See <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/alison-smith-the-sublime-in-crisis-landscape-painting-after-turner-r1109220>



Philip James De Loutherbourg  
(1740–1812)  
*An Avalanche in the Alps*  
1803  
Tate Gallery

Philip James De Loutherbourg (1740–1812), *An Avalanche in the Alps*, 1803, Tate Gallery

That masculine register of terror and domination finds one of its most concentrated expressions in de Loutherbourg's *\*An Avalanche in the Alps\**, painted in **1803** and now held at the **Tate**. Where *\*Coalbrookdale by Night\** staged the industrial sublime, here the threat is purely geological — indifferent, ancient, and absolute. The composition works through radical disproportion. A group of travellers, rendered at near-miniature scale, are caught beneath a wall of cascading snow and rock. De Loutherbourg gives roughly equal visual weight to the white mass of the avalanche and the dark cliff face behind it, and that contrast is itself the argument: nature as a system of violent forces in which human presence registers as almost nothing. This is precisely what **Burke** had meant by vastness and obscurity working together to produce terror rather than pleasure. The art historian **Christine Riding**, writing for the Tate's research series on the sublime, situates works like this within a broader British fascination with Alpine catastrophe that intensified after the **French Revolutionary Wars**, when the Alps became both a physical and symbolic frontier. The diminutive figures do not simply indicate scale — they signal the collapse of **Enlightenment** confidence that reason could hold nature to account.

## Notes

de Loutherbourg's *An Avalanche in the Alps* gives a sense of the massive scale of

the natural world compared with the minute human presence. This is created in this composition by means of a contrast between the diminutive figures and the vastness of their surroundings and by the dramatic contrast of the white snow and the dark rocks.

## References

For more information see <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime>

and <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-and-nigel-llewellyn-british-art-and-the-sublime-r1109418>





John Martin (1789-1854)  
*The Great Day of His Wrath*  
1851-1853  
Tate Britain, London

John Martin (1789-1854), *The Great Day of His Wrath*, 1851-1853, Tate Britain, London

The collapse of Enlightenment confidence that de Louthembourg staged in rock and snow finds its most extreme theological form in the work of **John Martin**. Where de Louthembourg's catastrophe was geological, Martin's was cosmic — drawn directly from the Book of **Revelation** and the terror of divine judgement. Martin's **Judgement Series**, three vast canvases completed in the early **1850s**, depicts the end of all things: cities hurled into the abyss, skies torn open, mountains displaced from their foundations. His son recorded that the imagery was partly ignited by a night journey through the **Black Country**, whose dense coal seams and furnace glare recalled nothing so much as hell made visible. The connection to Coalbrookdale is geographic as well as imaginative. The scale Martin deploys is staggering — architecture and human figures alike reduced to specks beneath churning heavens. The art historian **John Barrell** observed that catastrophic and apocalyptic visions acquired a remarkable common currency in this period, and Martin was their most extravagant practitioner. The Royal Academy dismissed the work as vulgar. By the twentieth century Martin was known simply as **Mad Martin**, and in **1935** all three paintings sold for seven pounds. The **Tate** reunited them in **1974**, reassessing them as defining statements of the Romantic sublime.

## Notes

The sublime was often associated with biblical stories and John Martin produced three paintings of the Last Judgement, the Judgement Series inspired by Revelation, the last book of the New Testament.

This was Romantic and conveyed the sublime forces of nature and the helplessness of man to combat God's will.

An entire city (according to some Babylon) is being torn down and thrown into the abyss.

One art historian wrote, 'Catastrophic and apocalyptic visions acquired a remarkable common currency'.

His son said he was inspired to paint it after a journey at night through the Black Country (north-west Birmingham with a 30' coal seam, the thickest in Great Britain). Coalbrookdale was just west of the Black Country.

The Book of Judgement is sealed with seven seals (white horse, red horse, black horse, pale horse, "under the later", sixth, interlude, seventh introduced the trumpets) and as each is broken terrifying events occur. When the sixth seal is broken:

... and, lo, there was a great earthquake' and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. (Revelation 6:12-14)

The seven seals are followed by the seven trumpets, then the seven spiritual figures, the seven bowls, Babylon, Marriage Supper of the Lamb, Judgement of the Beast, Devil and Dead, the New Heaven and Earth and New Jerusalem.

The three pictures became famous after his death were toured around England and America.

They were described as 'The most sublime and extraordinary pictures in the world valued at 8000 guineas' but they quickly became outmoded to the Victorians and failed to find a buyer. The Royal Academy regarded them as vulgar.

By the twentieth century he had fallen into obscurity and was known as 'Mad Martin'.

In 1935 the three paintings were sold for £7. They were reunited by the Tate in 1974.

For more information see <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/martin-the-great-day-of-his-wrath-n05613>



J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851)  
*Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*  
1844  
National Gallery, London

J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, 1844, National Gallery, London

From the cosmic annihilation of Martin's heavens, we arrive at a very different confrontation with the modern world — **J. M. W. Turner's** *\*Rain, Steam and Speed\**, exhibited at the **Royal Academy** in **1844**. The painting shows the **Great Western Railway** crossing **Maidenhead Bridge**, designed by **Isambard Kingdom Brunel** and completed in **1838**. The bridge's shallow brick arches were the widest and flattest ever attempted, and many engineers predicted they would collapse. Turner chose a structure that was itself an act of technological audacity. The locomotive tears out of the picture plane in a cone of golden haze, and the question the painting refuses to settle is whether we are celebrating or mourning what it brings. A small **hare** races ahead of the engine in the lower right — the fastest creature in the pre-industrial world, now made redundant in a single generation. On the river below, figures dance in afternoon light, a remnant of Arcadian England receding into the mist. Turner's technique intensifies the ambivalence. The train is barely a material object; it is energy, dissolution, weather. **John Ruskin**, Turner's great champion, wrote that no one before him had painted light as a force rather than a quality. Here that force is inseparable from the machine driving through it.

### Notes

This is an example of one of Turner's late landscapes. It is not clear whether some

of his late landscapes are finished works that were intended to be displayed but this is clearly the case with *Rain, Steam and Speed*.

Turner redefined landscape painting by pushing the boundaries of how we appreciate colour and light. In this painting, a conventional interpretation is that it is a celebration of power and progress and the new scientific age. It shows Maidenhead Railway Bridge, across the River Thames between Taplow and Maidenhead and the view is looking east towards London.

The bridge was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-1859, died aged 53 of a stroke) and completed in 1838. The Great Western Railway was one of a number of private British railway companies created to develop the new means of transport.

A tiny hare appears in the bottom right corner of the painting. Some have interpreted this as a positive statement about technology as the train is able to outrun what was the fastest animal before the steam train. Others see the hare running in fear of the new machinery and Turner warning us of the danger of man's new technology destroying the beauty of nature. My view is that this is a masterpiece precisely because it contains both contradictory interpretations.

The other interesting element of the picture is the boat on the river. It looks possible that this is an artist on the river with a parasol to keep off the sun and sketching a group of wild, bacchanalian dancers on the shore. Is this this Turner saying he prefers a bucolic scene of dancers to the new technology or are they celebrating the wonders of the new form transport that was changing the face of Britain? Again it is up to you to decide.





William Dyce (1806-1864)  
*Pegwell Bay, Kent - a Recollection of  
 October 5th 1858*  
 ?1858–60  
 Tate Britain, London

William Dyce (1806-1864), *Pegwell Bay, Kent - a Recollection of October 5th 1858*, ?1858–60, Tate Britain, London

From Turner's dissolution of the locomotive into light and weather, we turn to a painting that grounds the sublime not in speed but in deep time. **William Dyce's** *\*Pegwell Bay: A Recollection of October 5th 1858\**, exhibited at the **Royal Academy** in **1860**, is one of the most quietly unsettling works of the Victorian period. Dyce was a man of unusual breadth — born in Aberdeen in **1806**, trained at the Royal Academy Schools and in Rome, later appointed Superintendent of the **Government School of Design**, and accomplished enough in physics to publish a prize-winning essay on electro-magnetism. That scientific seriousness is written into every inch of *\*Pegwell Bay\**. The painting shows his wife, her sisters, and his son collecting shells and fossils on the Kent coast. The chalk cliffs are rendered with the precision of a geological survey, their **flint-encrusted strata** recording millions of years of sedimentation. Above the figures, barely visible, arcs the trail of **Donati's Comet**, discovered in **1858** and not due to return for roughly two thousand years. **Charles Lyell's** *\*Principles of Geology\**, published between **1830** and **1833**, had already forced educated Victorians to reckon with a timescale that dwarfed Scripture. The *\*Illustrated London News\** dismissed Dyce's exactitude as producing "a rapid descent from the sublime to the droll" — but that tension was precisely the point.

## Notes

This painting has been analysed in various ways. One interpretation is that it is about time and it therefore invokes feelings of the sublime concerning the vast age of the earth. Critics at the time described it as a travesty of the sublime because its microscopic detail prevents an overall unified view.

It shows the middle class interest in geology. Charles Lyell had published his *Principles of Geology* in three volumes between 1830 and 1833, and the entire scientific community was interested in the controversial attempt to reconcile the implications of geological time with Biblical scripture.

The variety of ages in the figures may represent the passage of time, while the setting sun and the autumnal chill in the air serve as a reminder of death.

Dyce's painting was the product of a trip he made in the autumn of 1858 to the popular holiday resort of Pegwell Bay near Ramsgate, on the east coast of Kent. It shows his wife, her two sisters and his son gathering shells and fossils.

The artist's interest in geology is shown by his careful recording of the flint-encrusted strata and eroded faces of the chalk cliffs.

The barely visible trail of Donati's comet in the sky places the human activities in far broader dimensions of time and space. The artist-scientist on the right is holding a telescope.

Discovered by Giovanni Donati on June 2, 1858, after the Great Comet of 1811 it was the brightest comets to appear during the 19th century. It has a period of about 2,000 years.

The geologically unstable cliffs along much of England's south coast were (and still are) a paradise for those in search of fossils, including the famous fossil hunter Mary Anning (1799-1847) of Lyme Regis, who is credited with the discovery of the first plesiosaur skeleton.

The *Illustrated London News* considered the work to be

'a very curiosity of minute handiwork ... being painted in the finest of fairy like lines ... with a completeness and exactness which render every microscopic detail palpable to the naked eye'

but concluded that the ultimate effect of such representation was 'a rapid descent from the sublime to the droll'.

Bio:William Dyce

William Dyce (1806-1864) was born in Aberdeen, Scotland. After studying at the Royal Academy Schools in London and in Rome, Dyce became well

known for his paintings, and between 1837 and 1843 was Superintendent of the Government School of Design. He later won a competition to complete fresco paintings for the newly rebuilt Houses of Parliament, a project that occupied him almost until his death. However, Dyce was also interested in intellectual and scientific pursuits, for example, writing a prize-winning essay on electro-magnetism in 1830.

As a deeply devout High Anglican, Dyce probably intended these figures to elicit feelings of wonder in the viewer – an idea that connects with the poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge's notion of the sublime in which individual consciousness is subsumed by a sense of the eternal. On the other hand, the estrangement between the figures and between the figures and the scene could be seen to undermine the reference to the sublime.



John Constable (1776-1837)  
**The Hay Wain**  
1821  
National Gallery, London

John Constable (1776-1837), The Hay Wain, 1821, National Gallery, London

The comet trailing over Pegwell Bay places Dyce squarely within a broader Romantic inheritance — and this is the moment to step back and define what Romanticism actually means as a movement. At its core, Romanticism was a reaction: against the rationalism of the **Enlightenment**, against industrialisation, and against the Classical hierarchies that had governed European art since the Renaissance. It placed intense emotion at its centre — awe, horror, and the experience of **the sublime** in untamed nature. Its peak runs roughly from **1800 to 1850**, though its roots stretch back to the wilder landscape painting of the **1760s**, and its influence lingers well beyond mid-century. **Turner** and **Constable** are its great English landscape exponents, but the movement also produced mystical visionaries like **William Blake** and **Samuel Palmer**. The Pre-Raphaelites grew directly from its medievalism — and Ford Madox Brown's *\*The Last of England\** carries Romanticism's defining sense of alienation even within its unflinching realism. **Constable's** *\*The Hay Wain\**, awarded the **gold medal in Paris in 1824**, shows this tension beautifully: technically radical in its broken light and flecks of white, yet depicting a rural England that was already obsolete. An artist could be revolutionary in method while remaining conservative in vision — and it is exactly that contradiction our next example demolishes entirely.

## Notes

What do we mean by Romantic? Painting based on the artists feeling, a reaction

against the Industrial Revolution and the aristocratic Age of Enlightenment. Placed new emphasis on intense emotion, horror, terror and awe particularly when facing sublime nature. At its peak from 1800 to 1850.

Spontaneity was important and a rejection of the rational and Classical and a revival of medievalism.

Romanticism first showed itself in landscape painting. From the 1760s artists turned to wilder landscapes and storms. For example, Turner and Constable. Some Romantic artists verged on the mystical such as William Blake and Samuel Palmer.

Francis Goya (1746-1828, Spanish) is perhaps the greatest Romantic painter.

The medievalism of the pre-Raphaelites grew out of an interest in the Romantic movement. Dreamy evocations of chivalry and romantic love. They were both Realists but also in their individual subjectivity, rebellion against authority, rejection of idealisation they were Romantic.

Brett misjudged Ruskin's Romantic, nature-worship and failed to see that Ruskin demanded Turner's imaginative, transformative genius.

The sense of the artists alienation from society shown in Ford Madox Brown's *Last of England* makes it a Romantic as well as a realist work.

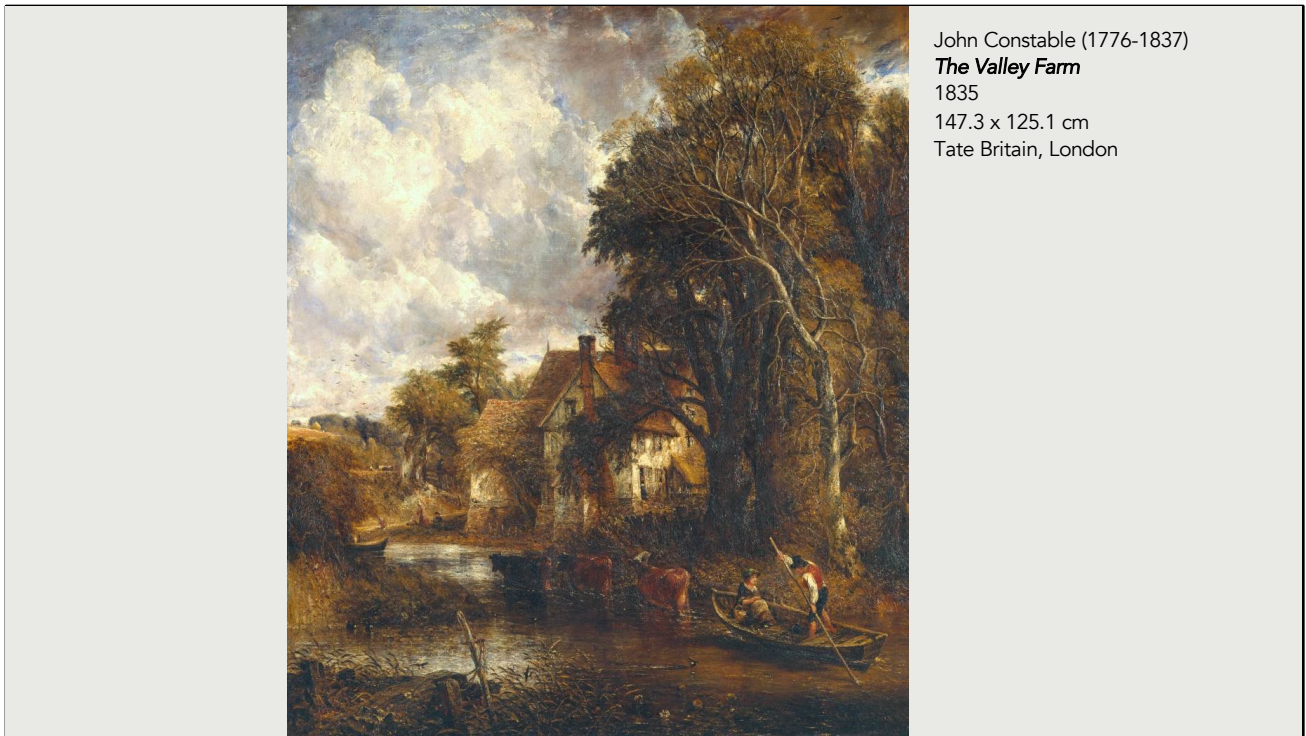
Romantic poets and novelists such as Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819).

Realism was a rejection of Romanticism.

This painting by Constable is Romantic and picturesque but was very innovative from the point of view of the techniques used but conservative in terms of the representation of land. The technique was increasingly criticized by English critics during the 1820s but *The Hay Wain* was awarded the gold medal when it was shown in Paris in 1824. English critics complained about the bright colours which were not used by the Old Masters and the flecks of white paint that were described as distemper or snow. In terms of its subject matter we see farm labourers in the far distance manually cutting and lifting the corn. Farms were increasingly being automated and manual labour like this was 20 years out of date as Constable would have been well aware.

An artist could therefore be innovative in their style but conservative in their subject. Let us look at an artist that was innovative in both, particularly in his later years after he had become successful.





John Constable (1776-1837), *The Valley Farm*, 1835, 147.3 x 125.1 cm, Tate Britain, London

That contradiction — revolutionary method, conservative vision — finds its most poignant expression in **Constable's** last major landscape. \**The Valley Farm*\*, painted in **1835**, shows **Willy Lot's cottage** from the opposite bank to \**The Hay Wain*\*, returning to the same beloved corner of **Suffolk** that had defined his career. It is the work of a man revisiting old ground, quite literally. Constable laboured over the picture obsessively, and his enthusiasm for the result was genuine — but the critics were merciless. One wrote that he "ought to be whipped for thus maiming a real genius for Landscape." The surface is heavily worked, almost turbulent, and many felt the freshness that had won Paris's **gold medal** eleven years earlier had curdled into something effortful and overwrought. And yet **Robert Vernon**, one of the period's most significant collectors, bought it immediately for **three hundred pounds** — the largest single price Constable received in his lifetime. Vernon paid that sum for a house at **50 Pall Mall**, and when he later gifted his collection to the **National Gallery in 1847**, \**The Valley Farm*\* came with it. There is something fitting in that trajectory: a painting dismissed as a failure becoming a cornerstone of the national collection.

### Notes

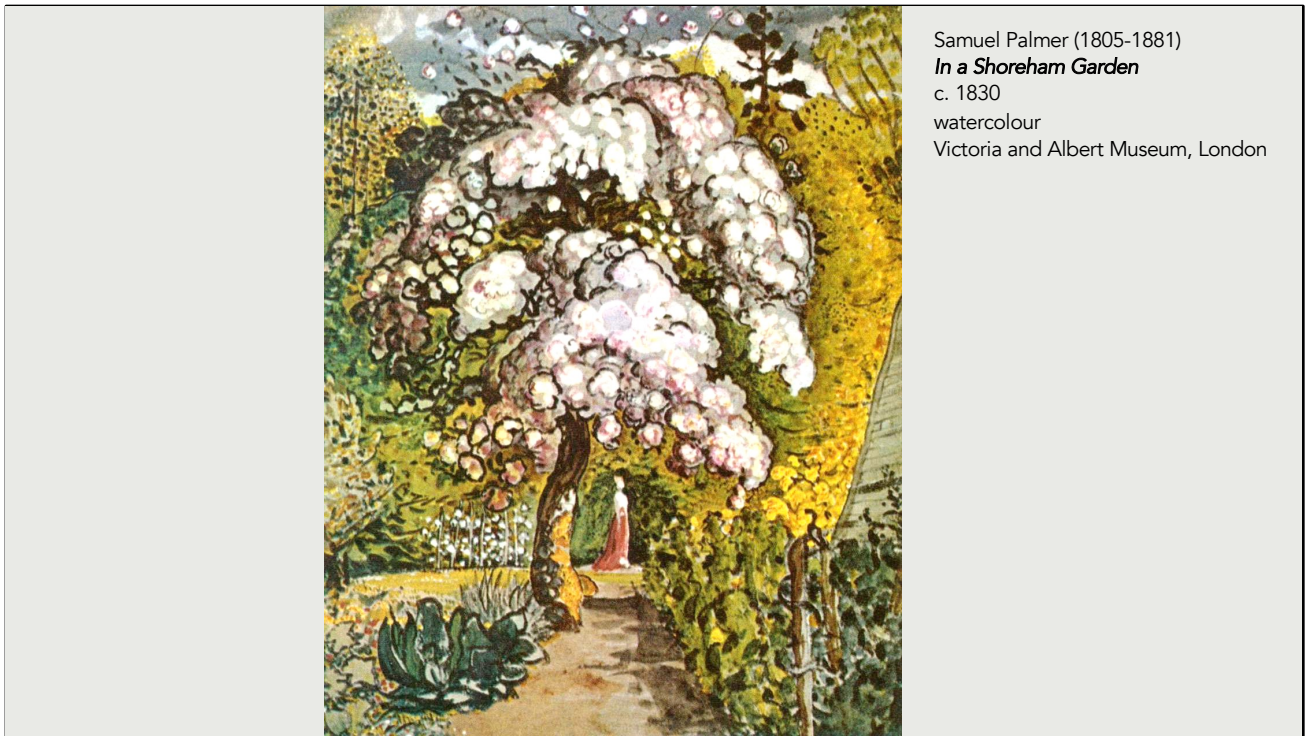
This was painted a year before his death and shows Willy Lot's cottage from the other side. It came to represent the 'natural' way of life of the Suffolk countryside.

Tate: "Constable devoted a large amount of time to reworking The Valley Farm, and there is, in this painting, a sense of the aging artist attempting to revive old images and past emotions. Constable himself was extremely enthusiastic about the results, but when the picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1835 it was not well received and one critic wrote, 'He ought to be whipped for thus maiming a real genius for Landscape' (quoted in Parris and Fleming-Williams 1991, p.378). Nevertheless Constable sold the picture in the same year to the notable collector Robert Vernon (1774-1849) for his new house at 50 Pall Mall. Vernon paid him £300, the largest price Constable had ever received for a picture. It was later included in Vernon's gift to the National Gallery, London, in 1847."

## References

For more information see <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-the-valley-farm-n00327/text-summary>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-the-valley-farm-n00327/text-summary>



Samuel Palmer (1805-1881)  
*In a Shoreham Garden*  
 c. 1830  
 watercolour  
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), *In a Shoreham Garden*, c. 1830, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

From Constable's Suffolk to the mystical valleys of Kent — we move now into quite different imaginative territory. **Samuel Palmer** was, in every sense, a visionary. He first exhibited at the **Royal Academy** at just fourteen, and by seventeen had met **John Linnell**, who introduced him to **William Blake** in **1824**. The encounter proved transformative. Palmer already had mystical tendencies from childhood, and Blake intensified them profoundly. From **1826 to 1835** Palmer lived at Shoreham in Kent, where he became the centre of a Blake-inspired circle called **the Ancients**. The work he produced there — dense, moon-drenched, almost hallucinatory — stands entirely apart from mainstream Victorian landscape. **Graham Sutherland**, deeply influenced by Palmer, called him "essentially the English Van Gogh," a comparison **Kenneth Clark** also made. His politics were fiercely reactionary — a high Tory who believed ancient institutions like the Anglican Church were sacred — yet his art was genuinely revolutionary. After returning to London in **1835** and marrying **Hannah Linnell** in 1837, the visionary intensity faded and he settled into conventional topographical work, largely to support his family. The Shoreham legacy nearly vanished entirely. Palmer's son **Alfred Herbert Palmer** burnt sketchbooks, notebooks, and original works over several days in **1909**, wishing to spare them what he called "a more humiliating fate."

## Notes

The Romantic and the mystical.

Welcome back.

This is Samuel Palmer's In a Shoreham Garden.

Samuel Palmer was another born artist, although he had little formal training he first exhibited at the Royal Academy when he was only 14.

In 1822, when he was 17 he met the artist John Linnell who introduced him to William Blake in 1824.

Like Blake, Palmer had visionary experiences from childhood and the effect of Blake was to intensify his inherent mystical leanings.

In 1826, he moved to Shoreham, near Sevenoaks, where he became the central figure of a Blake-inspired group of artists known as the Ancients.

Palmer was an old-fashioned high Tory, he thought the Tories gave 'liberty to the poor' but the Whigs were more cruel than the worst papists. He was deeply distrustful of any revolutionary principles. The ancient institutions, such as the Anglican Church, were sacred.

In 1832 he wrote a pamphlet in support of his local Tory candidate who came last in the poll.

Although his politics were reactionary his art was revolutionary.

Graham Sutherland who was influenced by Palmer described him as 'essentially the English Van Gogh', a comparison also made by Kenneth Clark.

## Notes

### Voting Reform

By the 1830s dissent had grown into the Swing Riots and part of the discontent was with the voting system. Birmingham and Manchester had no MPs to represent them yet Old Sarum returned two MPs to represent an abandoned medieval town. Lord Grey's Whig Government presented a reform bill in 1831 but it was rejected and eventually despite opposition the Great Reform Act of 1832 was passed. It gave the vote to only 18% of the total adult male population (in towns everyone whose home's rateable value was over £10 pa). Seats with less than 2,000 voters were removed.

### Samuel Palmer – Visionary Landscapes

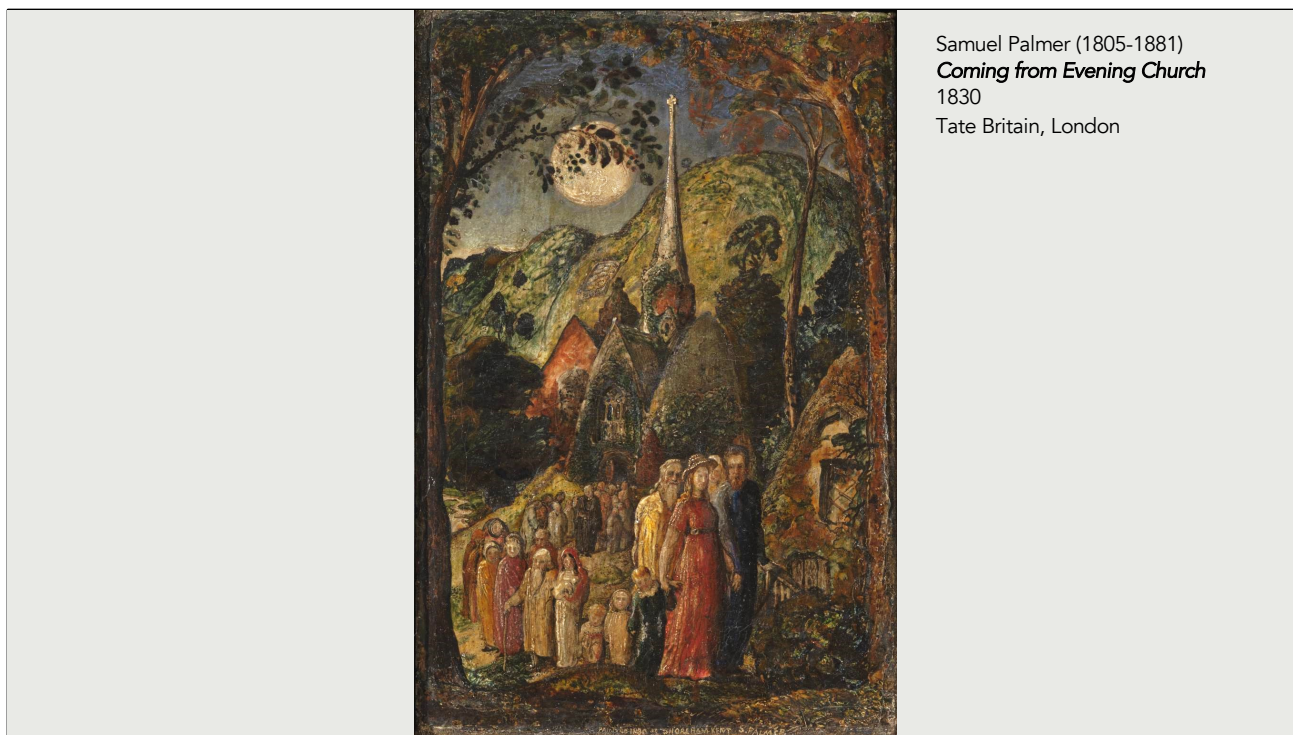
Samuel Palmer was an important artist whose most original period was when

he worked in Shoreham, near Sevenoaks in Kent. He purchased a rundown cottage he called 'Rat Abbey' but later moved to a Queen Anne house called Waterhouse, which still stands. He lived in Shoreham there from 1826 to 1835, producing some of his greatest work. He had little formal training but first exhibited Turner-inspired works at the Royal Academy at the age of fourteen. He met William Blake in 1824 and his Shoreham work is influenced by Blake's visionary and mystical approach.

In Shoreham he fell in love with fourteen-year old Hannah Linnell, daughter of the then famous artist John Linnell and married her when she was nineteen. In 1832 what he described as his 'primitive and infantile feeling' began to fade and after returning to London in 1835 and marrying Hannah Linnell in 1837 we went on a two-year honeymoon to Italy. When he returned the break with his visionary period was complete and he painted more conventional topographical and pastoral paintings for the rest of his life. It is generally assumed he painted this way in order to sell the paintings more easily in order to support his wife and children. Tragically his eldest son died at the age of 19, a blow from which he never recovered.

Samuel Palmer was largely forgotten after his death. In 1909, many of his Shoreham works were destroyed by his surviving son Alfred Herbert Palmer, who burnt "a great quantity of father's handiwork ... Knowing that no one would be able to make head or tail of what I burnt; I wished to save it from a more humiliating fate". The destruction included "sketchbooks, notebooks, and original works, and lasted for days". It was not until the 1950s that his reputation began to recover and his rediscovered Shoreham work had a powerful influence on many English artists including Graham Sutherland and Eric Ravilious.





Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), *Coming from Evening Church*, 1830, Tate Britain, London

That inscription at the bottom of *Coming from Evening Church* is easy to overlook, but it repays close attention. Palmer wrote "**1830, Shoreham, Kent, S. Palmer**" — one of the very few times he dated a painting — and **1830** was precisely the year the **Swing Riots** first reached Shoreham. The painting shows parishioners enveloped and sheltered by a dense, almost breathing landscape, and yet the countryside Palmer was romanticising was, at that very moment, in open revolt. The Swing Riots grew from decades of rural misery. Bad harvests between **1802 and 1809**, combined with Napoleonic trade blockades, had ground agricultural workers into poverty. **Andrew Meikle's threshing machine**, developed around **1786**, compounded matters by displacing the hand-threshing that sustained labourers through winter months. In **1830**, beginning in East Kent — close to Shoreham — rioters destroyed over a hundred threshing machines in three weeks and burned haystacks across southern England, all in the name of the fictitious **Captain Swing**, whose threatening letters were sent to farmers, magistrates, and parsons alike. Two thousand people were eventually tried. **252 were sentenced to death**, though only **19 were actually hanged**, and **481 were transported to Australia**. Palmer's luminous, otherworldly vision was painted directly against this violence.

## Notes

Samuel Palmer moved to the rural village of Shoreham and founded an artistic community.

There he produced his now most famous works such as *Coming from Evening Church*.

At the bottom Palmer has painted '1830, Shoreham, Kent, S. Palmer'. He very rarely added the date to a painting. Surely this is his recording a time of change to his beloved Shoreham. This painting shows his view of the countryside, as enveloping the parishioners and protecting them.

They are infused with a sense of other worldly beauty and painting was produced in 1830 the year the Swing Riots first reached Shoreham.

To explain the Swing Riots I need to first set the scene

Between 1802 and 1809 the harvest had been terrible at the same time that France was imposing a blockade on food imports.

In Nottingham in 1811 the first smashing of textile machinery (popup) took place and the revolutionaries became known as Luddites.

The name was possibly based on a youth called Ned Ludd who first smashed a textile machine in 1779. This became expanded into a legend of General or King Ludd who lived in Sherwood Forest.

In the countryside rural workers were worse off than textile workers. The introduction of farm machinery resulted in machinery being destroyed and hay ricks burned. This was done in the name of Captain Swing and letters like this (popup) from Captain Swing were sent to farmers and magistrates threatening them with violence. They became known as the Swing Riots. (This letter was sent to Dr. Agnus of Kings College Cambridge and we have it as it was forwarded to Lord Melbourne the Home Secretary.)

This was at the same time as the Tolpuddle martyrs. In 1834 a group of six found guilty of illegally swearing oaths of allegiance and transported to Australia. A petition with 800,000 signatures led to their release.

It was also the time of the Great Reform Act which was eventually passed in 1832.

So, all these idyllic landscapes in the first part of the nineteenth century were produced against a background of rural riots

## Notes

Palmer lived in Shoreham for 7 years.

## Swing Riots

A shepherd and shepherdess tend their flock while harvesters gather the ripe corn by the light of the moon. Palmer was disillusioned by the less than idyllic countryside at the time. It began with the destruction of threshing machines in 1830 in East Kent near to where Palmer lived. In three weeks over 100 threshing machines had been destroyed, hay ricks were burned down and cattle maimed.

Andrew Meikle (1719–1811) was an early mechanical engineer credited with inventing the threshing machine, a device used to remove the outer husks from grains of wheat. He also had a hand in assisting Firbeck in the invention of the Rotherham Plough (much lighter and the first to be made in factories). This was regarded as one of the key developments of the British Agricultural Revolution in the late 18th century. The invention was made around 1786, although some say he only improved on an earlier design.

They were known as the Swing Riots and were led by the fictitious Captain Swing whose signature was appended to threatening letters sent to farmers, magistrates and parsons. One of the main reasons for the Swing Riots were the Enclosure Acts. These Acts removed land that had been used for centuries by poor people to graze animals and grow their own produce and so achieve independence. The Church also demanded cash payment of a tithe for the parson from everyone whether they were a member of the Church or not. The cash levy was rigorously enforced whether the poor person could afford it or not.

Only one person is recorded as having been killed during the Swing Riots, a rioter killed by a soldier or farmer but 2,000 were brought to trial, 252 sentenced to death (though only 19 were actually hanged), 644 imprisoned and 481 transported to Australia. The aim was a minimum living wage not to overturn society although many people blamed the French as the French revolution of July 1830 broke out a month before the Swing Riots started. Ultimately the Swing Riots succeeded as they put pressure on the government that led to the Reform Act of 1832 and the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

It is interesting that although the Riots spread across the countryside and Constable mentions that he could see ricks burning almost every night there is no or little evidence of the social unrest in the landscapes of the period. If anything, Constable's landscapes reflect the farming conditions of twenty

years previously when workers would be hired for a year at an annual hiring fair or mop rather than the one week contracts introduced later. In Turner's 1809 drawing 'Harvest Home' he shows the farmer and his family celebrating the harvest alongside the workers, something that had stopped by the 1830s as a gulf developed between the farmers and their workers.

### Luddites

Textile workers who protested about labour-saving machinery from 1811 to 1817. It started in Nottingham in 1811. The origin of the name is unknown but may be after Ned Ludd a youth who smashed two stocking frames in 1779. The name evolved into General Ludd or King Ludd, a person who, like Robin Hood, was reputed to live in Sherwood Forest. It was part of a rising tide of working class discontent and was associated with the harsh conditions during the Napoleonic Wars. The agricultural version was the widespread Swing Riots of 1830 in southern and eastern England.

### Tolpuddle Martyrs

In the early 1830s a group of six men formed a friendly society (which was now legal following the repeal of the Combination Act in 1824-5). They refused to work for less than 10s a week when the local rate was 7s a week. A local landowner wrote to Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister, in 1834 invoking an obscure 1797 law prohibiting people from swearing oaths to each other. They were found guilty and transported to Australia. They became popular heroes, 800,000 signatures were collected and they were released in 1836 (except for James Hammett who has a previous conviction for theft). The others moved to London, Ontario where they are buried.

### References

See <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/palmer-the-harvest-moon-drawing-for-a-pastoral-scene-n03699/text-summary>



Samuel Palmer (1805–1881)  
*The Harvest Moon: Drawing for 'A Pastoral Scene'*  
 c.1831-2  
 ink and gouache on card  
 Ashmolean Museum

Samuel Palmer (1805–1881), *The Harvest Moon: Drawing for 'A Pastoral Scene'*, c.1831-2, Ashmolean Museum

Palmer's luminous defiance of rural reality was no accident — it was the product of an extraordinarily compressed period of creative intensity, and understanding the man helps explain the work. **Samuel Palmer** was largely self-taught. He first exhibited at the **Royal Academy** at the age of fourteen, showing work clearly indebted to Turner, but his true formation came in **1824** when he met **William Blake**, then in his late sixties. The encounter was decisive. Blake's visionary, mystical approach to image-making gave Palmer permission to treat landscape as spiritual revelation rather than topographical record. Palmer settled in **Shoreham, Kent**, in **1826**, renting a dilapidated cottage he called **Rat Abbey** before moving to a Queen Anne house known as **Waterhouse**, which still stands. Around him gathered the circle of Blake-influenced artists who called themselves **the Ancients** — a name that signals their deliberate turn away from modernity. His personal life was entangled with Shoreham from the start. He fell in love there with **Hannah Linnell**, daughter of the then-celebrated painter **John Linnell**, marrying her in **1837**. When he returned to London in **1835**, commercial pressure reshaped his art toward safer, more saleable work — a creative contraction compounded, years later, by the death of his eldest son at nineteen, a loss from which he never recovered.

## Notes

Pastoral - man made beauty in nature, became less popular at the end of the 18th century in England but flourished in the US. One exception was Samuel Palmer a follower of William Blake. The group of Blake-influenced artists were known as the Ancients.

Samuel Palmer was an important artist whose most original period was when he worked in Shoreham, near Sevenoaks in Kent. He purchased a rundown cottage he called 'Rat Abbey' but later moved to a Queen Anne house called Waterhouse, which still stands. He lived in Shoreham there from 1826 to 1835, producing some of his greatest work. He had little formal training but first exhibited Turner-inspired works at the Royal Academy at the age of fourteen. He met William Blake in 1824 and his Shoreham work is influenced by Blake's visionary and mystical approach. In Shoreham he fell in love with fourteen-year old Hannah Linnell, daughter of the then famous artist John Linnell and married her when she was nineteen. He returned to London in 1835 and produced more conventional work for the rest of his life in order to sell it more easily to support his wife and children. Tragically his eldest son died at the age of 19, a blow from which he never recovered.





Joseph Mallord William Turner  
(1775–1851)  
*The Fighting Temeraire tugged to  
her last Berth to be broken up*  
1839  
National Gallery, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up*, 1839, National Gallery, London

The Palmer we have just traced — the visionary of Shoreham, gradually worn down by commercial necessity and personal grief — belongs to an older world. **J. M. W. Turner** stood at the same hinge point in history, though he read it differently. Turner was sixty-four in **1838**, born in **1775**, meaning he had lived through the entire arc of the **Industrial Revolution**. Factories, steam power, gas lighting, a rapidly expanding middle class — and alongside all of that, a catastrophic fall in living standards for working people, endemic child labour, and the near-total exclusion of women from public life. When Turner painted *The Fighting Temeraire* in **1839**, that contradictory world pressed on every inch of the canvas. The Temeraire had fought alongside Nelson's Victory at the **Battle of Trafalgar** in **1805**. Decommissioned in **1838**, she was towed fifty-five miles up the Thames to be broken for scrap. Turner romanticised the scene deliberately — the masts were already gone, two tugs did the work, not one, and the blazing sky is his own addition. The great warship appears as a ghost: white, grey, and spectral, drawn by a squat black steam tug. Turner's own caption borrowed from **Thomas Campbell**: "the flag which braved the battle and the breeze." Turner never sold the painting, and bequeathed it to the nation.

### Notes

If you were born in the 1930s or 40s think how much the world has changed. This

was Turner's view as he was 64 in 1838. He was born in 1775, at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1830) and this had brought factories, steam power, gas lamps, affordable consumer goods, and an rapidly growing middle class. In 1839 there was a real feeling that the world was changing fundamentally and changing forever. But there were many terrible consequences, standards of living fell for most people, child labour was expected and women had few rights.

The Temeraire was retired in 1812 and became a prison ship and storage depot and was decommissioned in 1838. She was towed 55 miles up river to London to be broken into scrap.

Regarded by Turner and critics as one of his greatest painting. In 2005 voted Britain's "greatest painting" (BBC poll). He never sold it and bequeathed it to the nation.

The Temeraire came to the aid of the Victory in the battle of Trafalgar (1805). The scene is Romanticized. The masts had been removed, it was pulled by two tugs not one and Turner has added a sunset, or, from the direction, a sunrise.

The great ship is painted in white, grey and brown and looks like a ghost ship that is pulled by a much smaller but stronger black tugboat. Tugboats were so new there was not even a word for them and Turner's use of the word 'tugged' is the first ever recorded use according to the Oxford English Dictionary.

Sailing ships were being replaced by steam and steel so this represents the passing of an age.

Turner used light and loose brushstrokes to invoke an elusive feeling of old age and nostalgia.

Turner modified from a poem by Thomas Campbell's "Ye Mariners of England":

The flag which braved the battle and the breeze  
No long owns her

This was literally true: Temeraire flies a white flag instead of the British flag, indicating it has been sold by the military to a private company.



William Holman Hunt (1827-1910)  
*Our English Coasts, 1852 ('Strayed Sheep')*  
 1852  
 Tate Britain, London

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *Our English Coasts, 1852 ('Strayed Sheep')*, 1852, Tate Britain, London

Turner bequeathed the Temeraire to the nation because he believed landscape carried moral and spiritual weight — a conviction **John Ruskin** made explicit in **Modern Painters**, published from **1843** onwards. Ruskin's instruction to young painters was direct: go to Nature "laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing." **William Holman Hunt** took that instruction literally. Hunt's **Our English Coasts**, painted in **1852**, shows the Lover's Seat, a clifftop beauty spot above Covehurst Bay near Hastings. The composition looks unified, but Hunt assembled it from multiple viewpoints — the cliffs, the sheep, and the foreground were each observed separately, and the butterflies at lower left were painted indoors from a live specimen. That willingness to construct optical truth from discrete observations is entirely characteristic of **Pre-Raphaelite** working method. The painting arrived at a moment of political anxiety. **F. G. Stephens**, critic and Brotherhood member, noted it might be read as a satire on Britain's defenceless coastline, fears sharpened by **Napoleon III's** seizure of power. Hunt reinforced the religious dimension when he retitled the work **Strayed Sheep** for the **Exposition Universelle** of **1855**. Ruskin later declared it the first painting to achieve truly faithful transposition of actual sunlight into pigment.

## Notes

John Ruskin (1819-1900) in *Modern Painters* (1847) urged young artists to ...go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instructions; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth.

Following this advice William Holman created this painting, his greatest and most Pre-Raphaelite landscape. It is the Lover's seat, a beauty spot on the cliffs overlooking Covehurst Bay, near Hastings. Hunt paid attention to natural detail, although the cliffs, sheep and parts of the foreground were all painted from different viewpoints. The butterflies in the left foreground were painted indoors from a live specimen.

F.G. Stephens, a critic and member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, suggested it 'might be taken as a satire on the reported defenseless state of the country against foreign invasion'. In 1852 the press had created fears of an invasion because of Napoleon III's dictatorial régime.

The original frame bore the inscription 'The Lost Sheep', and when Hunt sent the painting to the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855 he changed the title to *Strayed Sheep*, thus underlining the picture's religious symbolism.

Critics noticed the treatment of light and Ruskin wrote in 1883 that

It showed to us, for the first time in the history of art, the absolutely faithful balances of colour and shade by which actual sunshine might be transposed into a key in which the harmonies possible with material pigments should yet produce the same impressions upon the mind which were caused by the light itself.





Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)  
**Pretty Baa-Lambs**  
 1851-9  
 Birmingham Museum and Art  
 Gallery, Birmingham

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Pretty Baa-Lambs*, 1851-9, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham

The painting shown here is **Ford Madox Brown's *Pretty Baa-Lambs***, begun in **1851** and one of the earliest British oils in which figures were posed and painted entirely in the open air. Brown's own diary makes the working method vivid: "The lambs and sheep used to be brought every morning from Clapham Common in a truck. One of them eat up all the flowers one morning in the garden where they used to behave very ill." His second wife **Emma** and their daughter **Cathy** posed for the mother and child — Emma dressed in eighteenth-century costume Brown had to hand from another project. The picture's radicalism registered slowly but forcefully. In **1896**, the critic **R. A. M. Stevenson** told Brown's son-in-law **Ford Madox Hueffer**: "By God! the whole history of modern art begins with that picture. Corot, Manet, the Marises, all the Fontainebleau school, all the Impressionists never did anything but imitate that picture." Stevenson overstates the case, but the remark points to something real: the affinities between **Barbizon painting**, **Impressionism**, and **Pre-Raphaelitism** are considerably closer than the standard national-school histories acknowledge. Brown himself sat slightly outside the Brotherhood — technically never a member — yet his uncompromising outdoor practice made him its most rigorous practitioner.

### Notes

This is one of the first landscapes including models posed and painted outside. His

second wife Emma and their daughter Cathy posed for the mother and child, and Brown hired the sheep from a local farmer. Madox brown wrote 'The lambs & sheep used to be brought every morning from Clappam [sic] common in a truck. One of them eat [sic] up all the flowers one morning in the garden where they used to behave very ill. The background was painted on the common.' He posed Emma in eighteenth century clothing as he had been working on.

His finished picture was one of the most thoroughgoing exercises in the Pre-Raphaelite doctrine of 'truth to nature'. A sense of its shocking novelty is evident even in a comment made over forty years after it was painted by the critic R. A. M. Stevenson. In 1896 he said to the artist's son-in-law Ford Madox Hueffer:

'By God! the whole history of modern art begins with that picture. Corot, Manet, the Marises [three Dutch landscape painters], all the Fontainebleau school, all the Impressionists never did anything but imitate that picture'.

Although this comparison by Stevenson is not strictly accurate it does suggest that affinities between Barbizon, Impressionism and Pre-Raphaelitism are closer than might at first appear.

### Ford Madox Brown

His father was a purser in the Royal Navy and his grandfather a well-known medical theorist. His father married Caroline Madox, an old Kentish family from which Madox brown gets his name. His parents had limited resources and moved to Calais to find cheaper lodgings. Ford Madox brown was born in Calais in 1821. His education was limited as the family moved between Calais and family in Kent. He showed artistic talent and the family moved to Bruges so he could study under Albert Gregorius. From there he moved to Ghent and then Antwerp to study under Egide Wappers. His mother died in 1839, his sister 1840 and his father 1842.

He first exhibited at the RA in 1840 and then completed The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots with his cousin and future wife, Elisabeth Bromley as model. He married in 1841 and their first child died in 1842 and their daughter Emma Lucy was born in 1843. She suffered from consumption (pulmonary tuberculosis) and died in 1846 aged 27 and her way back from Rome. Emma Hill became a frequent model from 1848 and his mistress. They lived together but convention meant he could not marry the illiterate



daughter of a bricklayer. Catherine Emily was born in 1850 and they eventually married in 1853. Oliver Madox brown (1855-1874) known as Nolly showed promise as an artist and poet but died of blood poisoning. It was a crushing blow and they kept his room as a shrine. Another son Arthur was born in 1856 and used as the model for the baby in Work but he died only 10 months old. Lucy and Catherine were competent artists and Lucy married William Michael Rossetti in 1874. Catherine married Francis Hueffer and their son was the novelist Ford Madox Brown and grandparents of the Labour Home Secretary Frank Soskice.

He competed for the Palace of Westminster murals but was not successful but his early work was admired by Rossetti who asked him to become his tutor. Through Rossetti he met the PRB and adopted brighter colours and their realistic style.

He was also influenced by Holbein and by Friedrich Overbeck and Peter Cornelius.

He struggled to find buyers and considered emigrating to India.

In 1852 he started work on The Last of England (inspired by Thomas Woolner emigrating to Australia) and Work. The Last of England was sold in 1859 for 325 guineas. He found patrons in the north including Thomas Plint (supported Work), George Rae, John Miller (Liverpool, tobacco merchant) and James Leathart (1820-95, Newcastle industrialist with lead factory, bought Pretty Baa-Lambs).

He lost his patience with the RA and founded the Hogarth Club in 1858 with William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and Rossetti. He resigned in 1860 and it collapsed in 1861.

He was a founding partner of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. in 1861 and designed furniture and stained glass. It dissolved in 1874 and Morris took over.

The 12 Manchester murals were his last major work, took six years and he finished when he was 72.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)  
**The Hayfield**  
 1855-6  
 Tate Britain, London

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *The Hayfield*, 1855-6, Tate Britain, London

Staying with Brown, we move from the blazing midday glare of **Pretty Baa-Lambs** to something altogether more atmospheric — **The Hayfield**, painted across the summer and autumn of **1855**, and referred to in Brown's own diary simply as the "moon piece." The scene is a twilight view looking east across rolling fields on the **Tenterden estate at Hendon** in Middlesex. A full moon has risen while the setting sun still catches the west face of a distant house — a precise, almost scientific observation of simultaneous light sources. In the left foreground, Brown painted himself resting against a haystack, his equipment scattered around him. He began work at five o'clock each evening, returning to the spot roughly twice a week from late July to early September, and after moving lodgings he sometimes walked the **fourteen miles** there and back. The palette caused immediate controversy. Brown explained in his **1865 catalogue** that prolonged rain had deepened the green of the remaining grass so intensely that the hay appeared, by contrast, "positively red or pink, under the glow of twilight." His dealer **White** refused the picture entirely, claiming the hay was too pink. Brown eventually sold it to his friend **William Morris**, then still an Oxford undergraduate, for **forty guineas**.

### Notes

This dreamlike view of the countryside is by Ford Madox Brown and is called *The Hayfield*. In it he shows us a hayfield in the evening with the full moon risen and the sun just setting in the west.

He painted much of the scene on the spot and had to 14 miles a day twice a week every evening from July to September 1855.

Farm workers sometimes worked by the full moon to gather the corn before the weather changed.

To the left of the picture, a farmer on horseback talks to the haymakers, who have almost completed the day's work. Another farm worker tends the horses, while a group of children await a lift home in the haycart.

The last patch of corn or wheat standing in the fields was known as the "Mell" or "Neck". Cutting it signified the end of the harvest and the beginning of the feast sometimes called the Mell-supper.

It was bad luck to be the person to cut the last stand of corn and so farmers and workers would race against other farms to be first to complete the harvest, shouting to announce they had finished.

In some counties the last stand of corn would be cut by the workers throwing their sickles at it until it was all down, in others the reapers would take it in turns to be blindfolded and sweep a scythe to and fro until all of the Mell was cut down.

It looks here as though the harvest is in and therefore it is time to celebrate.

However, even though he includes himself in the painting as another worker I don't think the celebration will include him as it is getting late and he has seven miles to walk home. Perhaps he will get a cab home, as he admits in his diary he occasional did.

## Notes

The 'moon piece' as Brown called it in his diary.

This is the rural counterpart of the urban labour shown in *Work*.

The total time he spent painting was 100-120 hours.

In September he found the sky had cracked probably because he did not prepare the zinc white underpainting sufficiently well and he had to repaint it.

In keeping with the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic of 'truth to nature', much of this landscape was painted entirely on the spot.

It is a twilight view, looking east across rolling green fields on the Tenterden estate at Hendon in Middlesex.

In the left foreground the artist himself rests against a small haystack, his equipment scattered about him.

A full moon has just risen, and the setting sun strikes a distant house on its west side.

Brown's aim in this picture was to achieve the effect of evening light, 'the wonderful effects...in the hayfields, the warmth of the uncut grass, the greeny greyness of the unmade hay in furrows or tufts' (Surtees, p.145).

He began work at 5pm each evening, returning to the same spot about twice a week from the end of July until early September 1855.

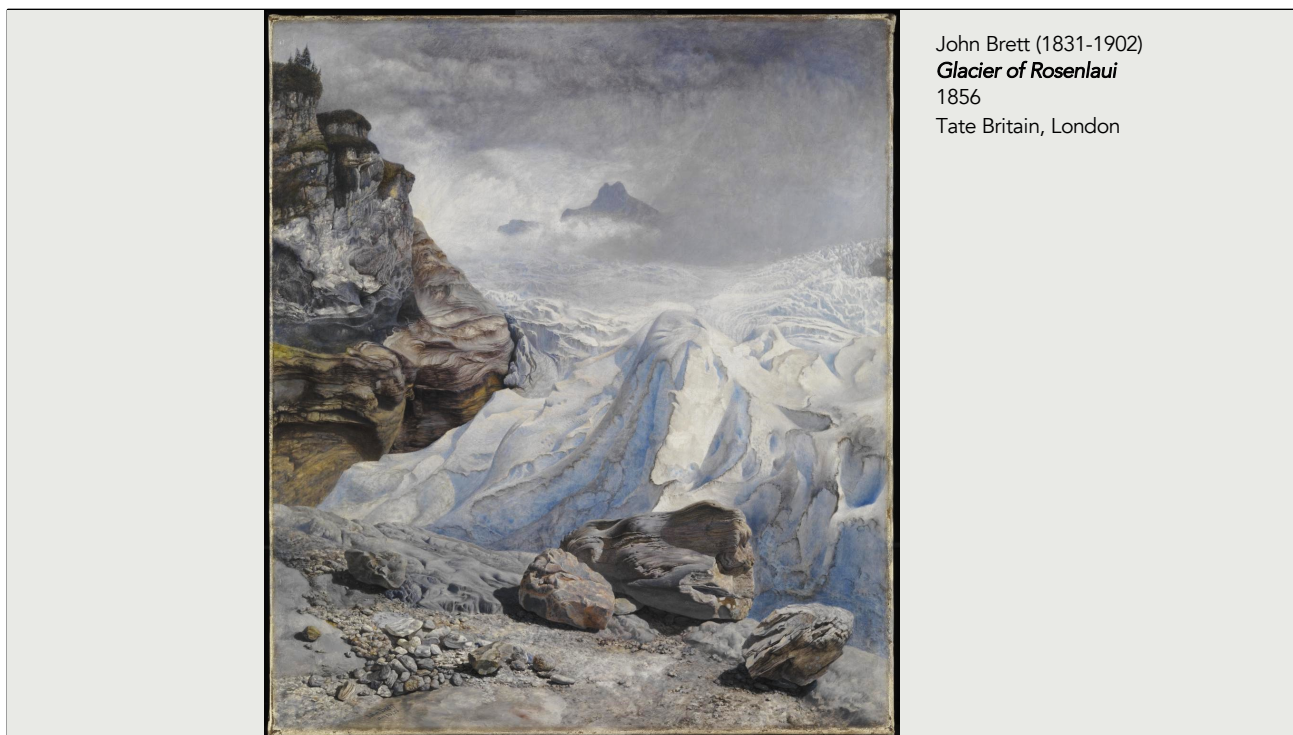
In October, after moving from Finchley to Kentish Town, he returned on several more occasions, and was sometimes forced to walk the fourteen miles there and back.

During the winter months Brown worked in the foreground details. He sketched a hay cart at Cumberland market. He then painted in the artist and his props, working from a set in his conservatory, but he apparently used no models for the farmer, workmen and children.

Many of these later features lack the freshness of the landscape setting.

The picture attracted criticism because of its unusual palette. In his 1865 catalogue Brown explained that 'the stacking of the second crop of hay had been much delayed by rain, which heightened the green of the remaining grass, together with the brown of the hay. The consequence was an effect of unusual beauty of colour, making the hay by contrast with the green grass, positively red or pink, under the glow of twilight' (quoted in Parris, p.134).

Brown's dealer, White, refused to buy the picture, claiming that the hay was too pink. Brown retouched (darkened the hayfield) the picture and later sold it to his friend and fellow artist, William Morris (1834-96), for 40 guineas while Morris was still an Oxford undergraduate.



John Brett (1831-1902)  
**Glacier of Rosenloui**  
 1856  
 Tate Britain, London

John Brett (1831-1902), Glacier of Rosenloui, 1856, Tate Britain, London

The geological precision we saw in Brown's observations of light and grass finds an even more literal expression in **John Brett**, whose practice straddled natural science and painting almost equally. Brett read the fourth volume of **John Ruskin's** *Modern Painters*, published in **1856** and devoted to mountain beauty, and immediately set out to paint the Alps in its spirit. That same summer he travelled to **Rosenloui in Switzerland**, returning with **The Glacier of Rosenloui**, a work of extraordinary attentiveness to geological structure. In the foreground Brett painted a block of granite with scientific specificity; immediately behind it sits a formation of **gneiss**, its characteristic folding curves rendered with the care of a field geologist's sketch. The scale of the scene is anchored by tiny conifer trees along the mountain's crest — without them, the massing glacier and the debris it pushes before it would lose their crushing immensity. This is the **sublime** understood not emotionally but materially: geological time made visible. When Brett returned to London, **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** saw the picture and brought it directly to Ruskin, who was, in his own word, delighted. It was precisely the kind of truth to nature Ruskin had been demanding painters produce — and here, at last, someone had actually done it.

### Notes

John Brett was a scientist and artist who was inspired by John Ruskin's book *Modern Painters*, particularly the fourth volume 'Of Mountain Beauty'.

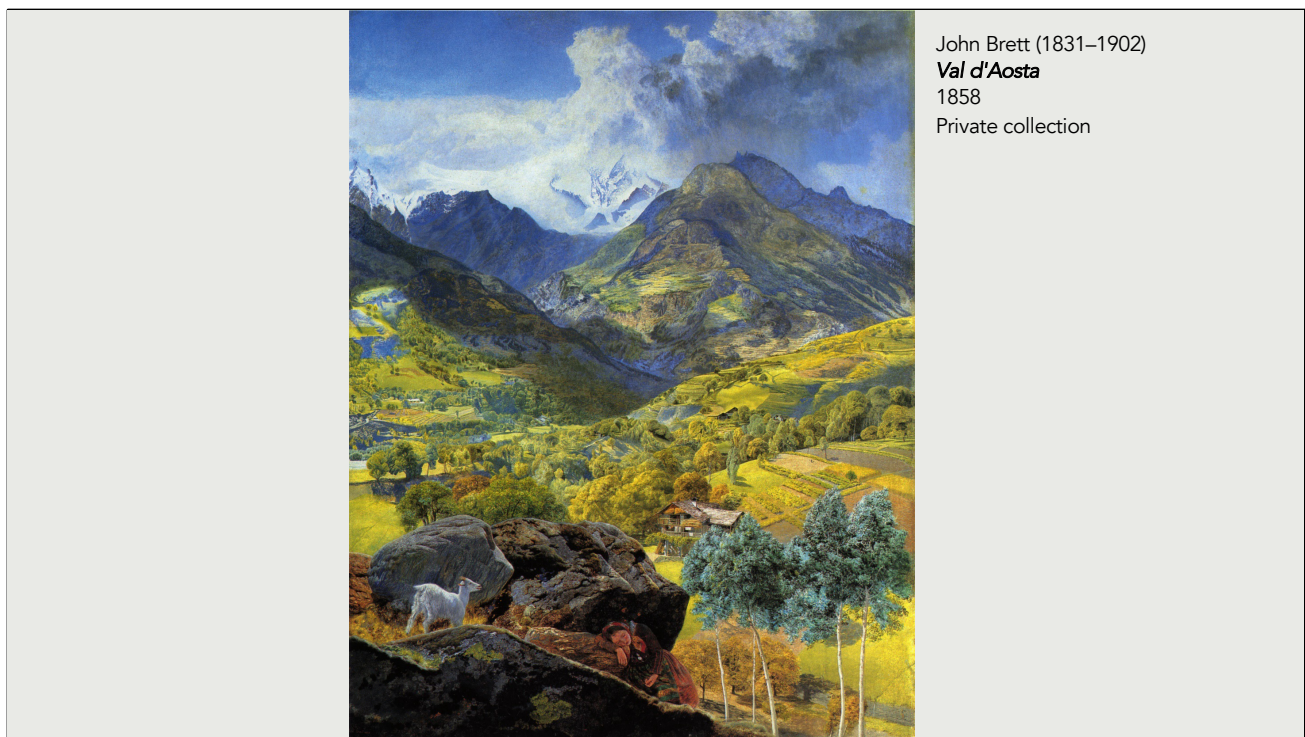


He spent the summer of 1856 at Rosenlauri in Switzerland and painted this scene with a Pre-Raphaelite attention to minute detail.

The boulder in the centre foreground is granite and behind it a block of gneiss with its folding curves.

The picture offers a sublime vision of nature with the massive glacier pushing rocks before it. The massive scale is shown by the tiny conifer trees on top of the mountain.

On his return it was seen by Dante Gabriel Rossetti who showed it to Ruskin who was delighted.



John Brett (1831–1902), Val d'Aosta, 1858, Private collection

Ruskin's delight in *The Glacier of Rosenlauri* did not last long. The following year Brett painted **Val d'Aosta**, and the relationship between the two men reached a breaking point that reveals something fundamental about the limits of Ruskin's own programme. The painting rewards the closest attention — every scrap of lichen, every individual rock face, every furrow in the distant terraced fields is legible. A magnifying glass reveals detail that the eye alone cannot fully resolve. This is **Pre-Raphaelite** observation taken to its absolute extreme. And yet Ruskin turned on it. He wrote that the picture was "Mirror's work, not Man's" — the most damaging thing he could say — and later dismissed Brett as someone who had reduced landscape painting to what he called "mere photography of physical landscape." The accusation is revealing. Ruskin had always wrapped his demand for truth to nature in a framework of moral feeling, of the painter's soul responding to God's creation. What Brett produced was something colder: geological and botanical data arranged across a canvas with scientific impartiality. **Michael Bartram** has argued that Brett essentially called Ruskin's bluff — he delivered precisely the observational rigour Ruskin demanded, and in doing so exposed the mysticism that had always underwritten Ruskin's supposedly empirical aesthetics.

### Notes

John Brett, Val d'Aosta, 1858, private collection

Unfortunately this screen does not do justice to the painting. It could be examined

with a magnifying glass and every scrap of lichen and tiny rock can be seen.

This is perhaps the ultimate Pre-Raphaelite attention to detail. Scientific precision and a strict following of Ruskin precepts, or was it?

Had Brett gone too far? His earnestness seems to go too far—faithful to the point of pedantry, realistic to the point of servitude. Ruskin criticized the work 'Mirror's work, not Man's' and he later wrote about Brett that 'he took to mere photography of physical landscape'.

But was it mere photography or had Brett achieved a level of scientific precision that removed the mysticism surrounding Ruskin's pseudo-science?



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)  
***Chill October***  
1870  
141 x 186.7 cm  
Collection of Lloyd Webber

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Chill October*, 1870, 141 x 186.7 cm, Collection of Lloyd Webber

The tension between emotional truth and observational fact that broke Ruskin and Brett apart finds a very different resolution in the work we turn to now. Where Brett gave Ruskin data, this painting gives us grief — though it wears the disguise of an ordinary afternoon. The **monotone quality** and dying light are not accidents of weather or of plein-air observation. The painter had recently lost his son, and that loss saturates the canvas emotionally even as the scene itself is resolutely unremarkable: no Alpine drama, no sublime precipice, just an ordinary stretch of the material world at dusk. The emotional charge is carried entirely through atmosphere and tone rather than subject. The **Edinburgh Review of 1872** seized on exactly this quality, identifying the painting as evidence of a fundamental shift in landscape practice over the preceding decade. The critic reached for a literary analogy that would have resonated immediately with educated readers: the difference between **Elizabeth Gaskell's** *\*Cranford\** — with its semi-comic, semi-sentimental village characters — and **George Eliot's** *\*Middlemarch\**, peopled with figures, as the critic put it, "whom we might have met any day." The landscape painter, like the realist novelist, had stopped manufacturing beauty and started attending to the world as it actually was.

### Notes

Key point: Convincing as landscape but monotone quality and dying light are

emotional, painted after the death of his son.

In the Edinburgh Review of 1872 the painting is thought to epitomise the change in landscape painting over the previous few years. Instead of the artist creating a particular beautiful scene the artist takes an ordinary aspect of the material world. The critic compares it with the difference between Elizabeth Gaskell's (1810-1865) 'Cranford' (1853) with its semi-comic, semi-serious characters, and George Eliot's (1819-1880, born Mary Ann Evans) 'Middlemarch' (1871-2) with its ordinary, everyday people, 'whom we might have met any day'.



James Abbott McNeill Whistler  
(1834-1903)  
**Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea**  
1871  
Tate Britain, London

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea*, 1871, Tate Britain, London

The shift from landscape as moral witness to landscape as pure sensation could not be more clearly announced than in the work of **James McNeill Whistler**. Where Ruskin demanded that painting serve truth, and by extension virtue, Whistler rejected that demand entirely. The rallying cry was "**l'art pour l'art**" — art for art's sake — first coined as a slogan by the French critic **Théophile Gautier**, and introduced into English critical discourse in **1868** by the critic **Walter Pater** and the poet **Algernon Charles Swinburne**. Whistler's own formulation was characteristically blunt: art should be "independent of all claptrap," standing alone and appealing to the eye without "confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism and the like." This is the first of Whistler's **Nocturnes** — a title suggested by his patron **Frederick Leyland**. Whistler chose the word deliberately: "By using the word 'nocturne' I wished to indicate an artistic interest alone, divesting the picture of any outside anecdotal interest." The view is Battersea looking across to Chelsea, and the tower of **Chelsea Old Church** is just visible to the right. In the foreground, a barge and a fisherman are rendered with extraordinary economy — a debt to **Japanese art** that is visible in both the restricted palette and the sparseness of line.

## Notes

The first person to use 'art for art's sake' ('l'art pour l'art') as a slogan was



Théophile Gautier (1811–1872) and this artistic creed was in defiance of many, such as John Ruskin, who thought the role of art was to serve a moral or didactic purpose. The slogan means that art is valuable simply as art and it justifies itself. Artists may be morally neutral or subversive.

James McNeill Whistler wrote:

Art should be independent of all claptrap —should stand alone [...] and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism and the like. The slogan was first used in England in 1868, by both Walter Pater, the critic, and Algernon Charles Swinburne, the poet.

This is the first of Whistler's Nocturnes, a name suggest by his patron Frederick Leyland. Whistler's aim was to convey a sense of beauty and tranquillity. He wrote,

'By using the word 'nocturne' I wished to indicate an artistic interest alone, divesting the picture of any outside anecdotal interest which might have been otherwise attached to it. A nocturne is an arrangement of line, form and colour first' (quoted in Dormont and MacDonald, p.122).

Whistler had been inspired one evening while returning one evening by steamer from Westminster. He had a procedure for creating these riverscapes. He would go out on a boat rowed by his neighbour and boat builder Walter Greaves at 10 Lindsey Row Chelsea (Whistler lived at 7 Lindsey Row). Coincidentally Greaves father had rowed J. M. W. Turner on the Thames at the same spot. Whistler would look at the scene, turn his back on it and then try to verbally describe it building by building. If he made a mistake he would turn back and relearn the scene before trying again.

Having memorized the scene the next day he would prepare the special 'sauce' he used to paint the picture on a panel. It was essentially a thinned oil paint that was so runny he had to paint on horizontal panels. He would prepare the panels using dark grey paint and then apply the sauce to create a contrasting sense of luminosity. Typically, he would regard most attempts as failures and would start again. The paintings were therefore produced quickly but it took a long time to produce an acceptable picture.

The view is Battersea looking across to Chelsea, and it is possible to make out the tower of Chelsea Old Church on the right which also features in Girtin's watercolour. In the foreground, a low barge and the figure of a fisherman are

indicated with the minimum of detail, and the influence of Japanese art is evident in the restricted palette and the economy of line. The Times (14 November, 1871), wrote,

'painting should not aim at expressing dramatic emotions, depicting incidents of history or recording facts of nature, but should be content with moulding our moods and stirring our imaginations, by subtle combinations of colour.'

### Walter Greaves

Whistler employed Greaves and his brother as studio assistants and taught them to paint in an impressionistic style. Later, when Whistler moved house he broke off contact with them. They had by then abandoned boat building and tried to make a living as artists but fell onto harder and harder times even though Walter Greaves paintings are of high quality. In 1911 his paintings were discovered by a dealer and exhibited creating an overnight sensation. However, when a critic suggested Greaves had inspired Whistler the latter's American friends retaliated and accused Greaves of stealing Whistler's half-finished paintings, finishing them and selling them as his own. Although untrue this damaged his reputation and the exhibition was closed. It was not until 1921 that three prominent artists rescued Greaves and his reputation and they found a retirement home for him at Charterhouse.



James Abbott McNeill Whistler  
(1834-1903)  
**Nocturne, from the First Venice Set**  
1879-80  
Etching and drypoint on wove paper  
Yale University Art Gallery, New  
Haven

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), *Nocturne, from the First Venice Set*, 1879-80, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

Beyond painting, Whistler ranks among the supreme printmakers in the Western tradition — and that is not a casual claim. Place him alongside **Albrecht Dürer**, **Rembrandt van Rijn**, and **Francisco de Goya**, and you have the four artists most consistently named as having transformed the possibilities of the **etching** and **engraving** medium. The technique is worth understanding clearly. In etching, a needle scores through a wax ground on a metal plate; acid, known as the **mordant**, bites into the exposed metal; the wax is removed, ink is pressed into the resulting lines, wiped from the surface, and transferred to paper under pressure. Engraving bypasses acid entirely — a sharp steel tool called a **burin** cuts directly into the plate. Both are forms of **intaglio** printing, meaning the ink sits in the incised lines rather than on raised surfaces as in relief printing. Whistler's printmaking falls into three distinct campaigns. The **French Set** came first, made during his student years in Paris absorbing Realist contemporaries and the Old Masters. The **Thames Set** established his London reputation. Then came the **Venice Sets**, made after the **Ruskin libel trial** left him bankrupt, and widely regarded as his most adventurous graphic work.

### Notes

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), one of the most renowned artists of the 19th century, was one of the great draftsmen and engravers.

There are three periods when Whistler focused on etching and engraving:  
French Set, as a student in Paris, absorbing the lessons of his Realist contemporaries and the Old Masters;  
Thames Set, as an emerging artist in London, forging a name for himself as an etcher;  
Venice Sets, and as a well-known artist in Venice, trying to recover fortune and his reputation following the Ruskin trial and his bankruptcy.

## Notes

The great engravers are the great German printmaker Albrecht Dürer (1471 - 1528), the highly experimental printmaker Rembrandt van Rijn (1606 - 1669), the Spanish artist Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746 - 1828) and James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903).

Etching uses an etching needle to scratch through wax on a metal plate to form the image. The metal plate is then put in acid (called the mordant) which eats lines into the metal where the wax has been scored. The wax is then washed off and ink rolled over the plate. The ink is wiped off leaving it in the lines created by the acid so that when a piece of paper is pressed hard against the plate the ink transfers from the lines onto the paper, creating an etching.

Engraving consists in incising lines into a metal plate using a sharp tool called a burin instead of using acid. Glass and metals can be engraved with a visible design and deep cuts into a metal plate can be used to produce a print using a similar technique to etching. Engraving is a general term that is sometimes used to include etching. It is also sometimes called intaglio as opposed to relief printing. In relief printing the ink sits on the plate and does not go into the lines.



Alfred Sisley (1839-1899)  
**Bridge at Hampton Court**  
 1874  
 Wallraf-Richartz-Museum

Alfred Sisley (1839-1899), *Bridge at Hampton Court*, 1874, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum

Whistler was a figure who straddled the Channel, and **Alfred Sisley** did the same — though in the opposite direction. Born in Paris in **1839** to English parents, Sisley retained British citizenship throughout his life while painting almost exclusively in France. The two facts that define his career are his commitment to **Impressionist** landscape and his poverty. The **Franco-Prussian War of 1870** ruined his father's business, and Sisley spent the rest of his life dependent on sales and patrons who were rarely generous enough. In **1874**, those patrons paid for him to visit England, and the result was nearly twenty paintings centred on the upper Thames near **Molesey**. Kenneth Clark called it a perfect moment of Impressionism, and the phrase sticks because these works have an ease and luminosity that even Sisley rarely surpassed. The painting on this slide shows the **third Hampton Court Bridge**, built between **1864 and 1865** — a stone structure with wrought iron lattice work and four cast iron columns, designed by **E. T. Murray**. It was the fourth crossing on this site, replacing a sequence that began with a Tudor ferry and included two timber bridges. The bridge Sisley painted was itself demolished in **1933**, replaced by the current structure designed by **Edwin Lutyens**.

## Notes

English Impressionism

Sisley was an Impressionist landscape painter who was born and spent most of his

life in France, but retained British citizenship. In 1870 the Franco-Prussian War began and as a result his father's business failed and he had to support himself for the rest of his life from his paintings. He lived in poverty but his patrons paid for him to visit England in 1874 which resulted in nearly twenty paintings of the upper Thames near Molesey. The art historian Kenneth Clark later described it as 'a perfect moment of Impressionism'.

This painting is of the third bridge that was built across the Thames at Hampton Court between 1864 and 1865. It was a stone bridge with wrought iron lattice work and four cast iron columns. The approach walls of this bridge can still be seen at the end of Bridge Road. It was replaced by the current Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) designed bridge in 1933.

### The History of Hampton Court's Bridges

Ferry crossing since Tudor times

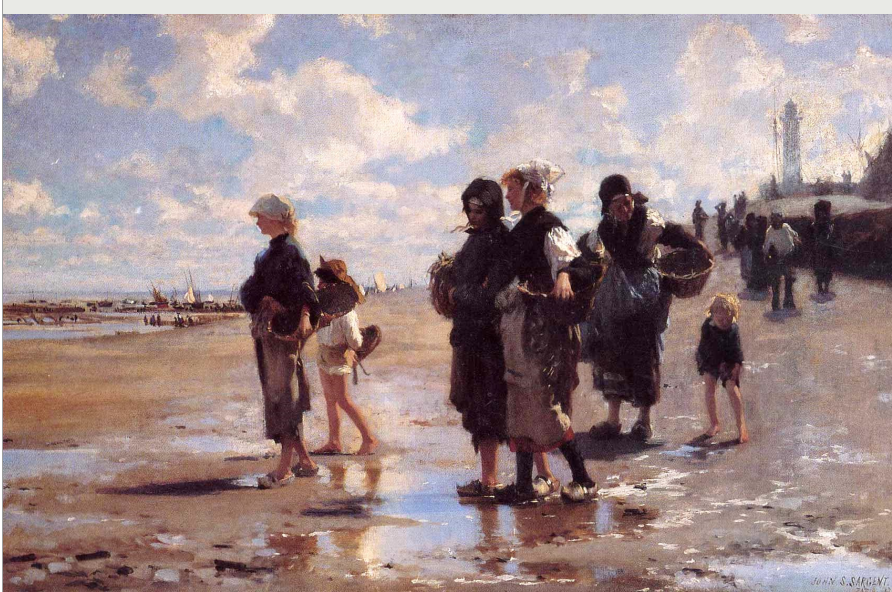
First bridge – 1752-3 owned by James Clarke, seven wooden arches, Chinoiserie design, willow pattern

Second bridge – 1778, eleven arches, described as 'crazy, hog-backed, inconvenient and obstructive of the navigation'.

Third bridge – 1864-5 first stone bridge, designed by E. T. Murray, wrought iron lattice, four cast-iron columns, battlemented approach

Fourth bridge – 3 July 1933, three wide arches, reinforced concrete, red brick and white Portland stone, opened same day as Chiswick and Twickenham bridges. Designed by W. P. Robinson and Sir Edwin Lutyens reflecting Sir Christopher Wren's design of Hampton Court Palace. The Old Castle hotel was demolished and the River Mole diverted into the River Ember.





John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)  
*En route pour la pêche (Setting Out to Fish)*  
 1878  
 National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

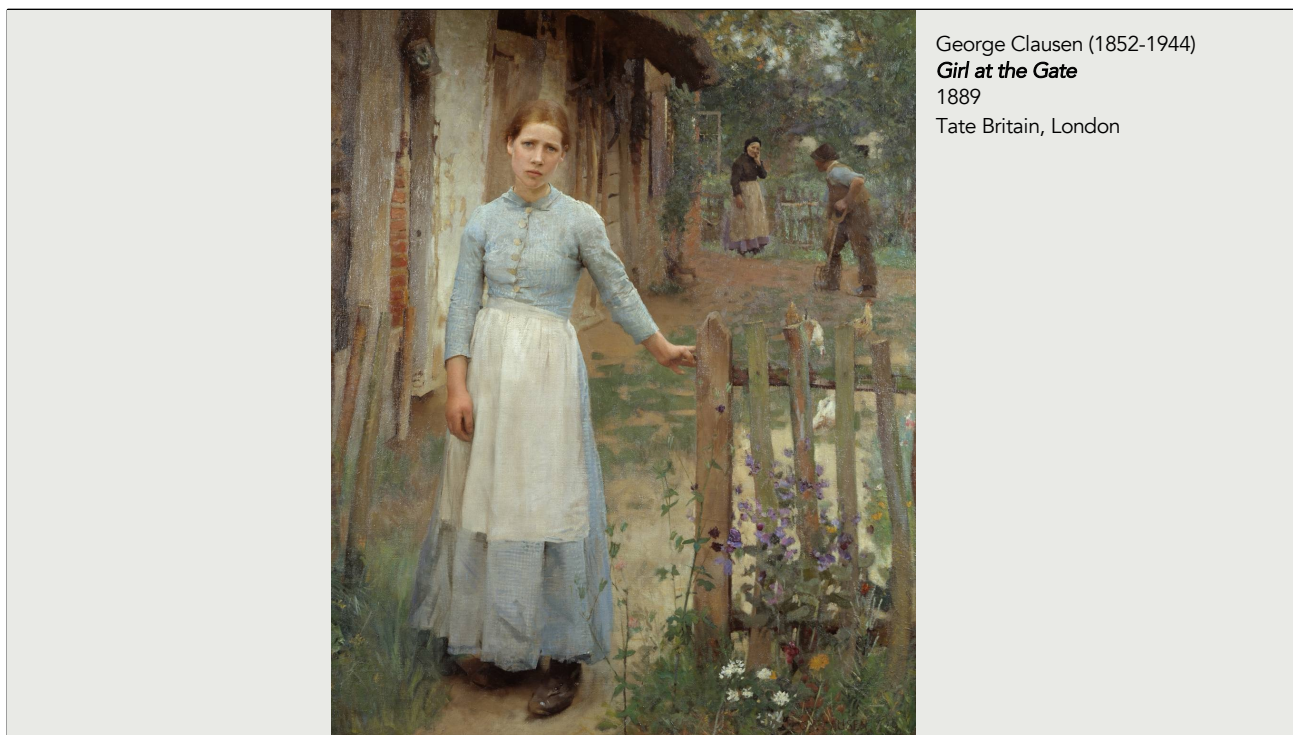
John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), *En route pour la pêche (Setting Out to Fish)*, 1878, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Sisley's Thames paintings show how French Impressionism could find an unlikely home in the English countryside — and **John Singer Sargent** is another transatlantic figure who complicates any simple national story. Born in Florence to American parents, Sargent trained in Paris under Carolus-Duran before settling in London, and he never quite belonged to any single tradition. He is best remembered as the supreme society portraitist of the **Edwardian** era, but that reputation came to weigh on him, and in his later decades he retreated increasingly to **plein air** landscape work, which he described as pure pleasure by contrast. His early painting **The Oyster Gatherers of Cancale**, completed in **1878** when he was just twenty-two, shows what he was before portraiture claimed him. Based on sketches made at **Cancale** in Brittany, it was submitted to the **Paris Salon** and received an honourable mention — a significant verdict for so young a painter. The work is executed **alla prima**, wet paint laid directly onto wet paint in a single sitting, a technique he absorbed from studying **Velázquez**. Julian Alden Weir, meeting Sargent around this time, recorded that he was "one of the most talented fellows I have ever come across; his drawings are like the old masters, and his colour is equally fine." Yet for all his brilliance, Sargent stood apart from what English Impressionism would become.

## Notes

Another artist associated with England was John Singer Sargent. His parents were American but he trained in Paris before moving to London. His early enthusiasm was for landscape but he became a renowned international portrait painter working in the grand manner. In later life he became ambivalent about formal portrait work and devoted more of his time to working en plein air.

The Oyster Gathers of Cancale was painted when he was 21 and living in Paris. It was based on sketches he made at Cancale, a fishing village in Brittany. He made two versions, *En route pour la pêche* (Setting out to Fish) and *The Oyster Gathers at Cancale* which he submitted to an American exhibition and to the Paris Salon (*En route pour la pêche*, now in the Corcoran Gallery, Washington DC) and they both received warm reviews (it received an 'Honourable Mention' in Paris). His ability to paint the reflections in the pools, the light sparkling on the figures and the clouds dazzled viewers. Sargent was taught to paint *alla prima* (Italian, meaning 'at first attempt', layers of wet paint are applied directly onto wet paint) directly on the canvas with a loaded brush in the style of Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). This gives the painting the spontaneity of a sketch. The artist Julian Alden Weir (1852-1919, an American impressionist painter) met Sargent in 1874 and noted that Sargent was "one of the most talented fellows I have ever come across; his drawings are like the old masters, and his color is equally fine." However, both these artists were closely associated with French Impressionism and true English impressionism took a different direction.



George Clausen (1852-1944), *Girl at the Gate*, 1889, Tate Britain, London

The figure who follows Sargent most naturally into English plein air naturalism is **Henry Herbert La Thangue**. Where Sargent remained a cosmopolitan outsider, La Thangue committed himself entirely to English rural life, settling at **Cookham Dean** in Berkshire and painting the working landscape around him with methodical dedication. His approach belongs to what we might call the rural naturalist strain of late Victorian painting — an unflinching record of ordinary country existence, rendered in clear outdoor light without sentimentality. His painting of a girl at a farm gate draws directly on the village itself: the model was **Mary Baldwin**, a local woman who worked as the family's nanny. That rootedness in actual people and places is the point. La Thangue was deeply shaped by **Jules Bastien-Lepage**, the French painter whose insistence on working outdoors from real peasant subjects became a touchstone for an entire generation of British and Scottish painters. La Thangue was a founding force behind the **New English Art Club**, established in **1886** as an explicit challenge to the Royal Academy's conservatism. Through that organisation he helped champion the **Glasgow Boys** — painters like **James Guthrie** and **E. A. Walton** — who were bringing the same Bastien-Lepage influence to bear on Scottish rural subjects with remarkable intensity.

### Notes

Painted at Cookham Dean, Berkshire where he lived. Mary Baldwin modelled for the girl at the gate, she lived in the village and worked as their nanny. Was a 'rural

naturalists' who painted realistic scenes of everyday country life, late nineteenth century, influenced by Jules Bastien-Lepage (founder New English Art Club, and the Glasgow Boys).



Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942)  
**The Bridge**  
 1887-8  
 Tate Britain, London

Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942), *The Bridge*, 1887-8, Tate Britain, London

The **New English Art Club** that La Thangue helped found in 1886 also gave early platform to one of the most underappreciated figures in late Victorian painting: **Philip Wilson Steer**. Rejected by the Royal Academy Schools, Steer trained in Paris before returning to London, where he became, alongside **Walter Sickert**, a leading voice in British Impressionism. His painting **The Bridge**, now identified as a view at **Walberswick** in Suffolk, was shown in 1887 and met with immediate hostility. One critic dismissed it as "either a deliberate daub or so much mere midsummer madness." Steer was shaken enough to consider abandoning painting altogether. Looking at it now, that critical violence is instructive. The picture's creamy, fluid brushwork, its atmospheric diffusion of light, and its deliberate withholding of crisp detail made it genuinely disorienting to London eyes. What subject exactly is shown? The uncertainty is part of the point. In this it sits very close to **Whistler**, whose **Nocturnes** had already scandalised audiences by dissolving landscape into atmosphere rather than description. Yet Steer's roots run deeper into English painting — **Gainsborough**, **Constable**, **Turner** all feed into his sensibility. He is, in the fullest sense, a painter standing between two traditions.

### Notes

Key point: an influential Post-Impressionist English artist who is little known today is Philip Wilson Steer

Philip Wilson Steer

Steer was rejected by the Royal Academy school and so trained in Paris before returning to London. He exhibited at the Royal Academy on his return and became a founder of the New English Art Club. This painting, *The Bridge*, is now considered to have been painted in Walberswick, Suffolk. With Walter Sickert he became a leading British Impressionist who were influenced by Whistler, Gainsborough, Constable and Turner.

This picture was strongly attacked by the critics when it was first exhibited in 1887, and dismissed by one as 'either a deliberate daub or so much mere midsummer madness'. Steer considered giving up painting in the wake of this disapproval. With its exploitation of the creamy fluency of oil paint, its atmospheric lighting and subdued colouring, *The Bridge* is like Whistler's landscapes he called 'Nocturnes'. It was unusual in London at the time for its lack of detail, and for the uncertainty about its subject.





## 23-14 VICTORIAN LANDSCAPE PAINTING PART 2

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

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George Clausen  
*Girl at the Gate*  
1889  
Tate Britain

This talk has traced Victorian landscape painting from its deepest philosophical roots to its dissolution into pure sensation. We began with Burke's sublime, moved through Turner, Palmer, and Constable, followed the Pre-Raphaelites into obsessive truth to nature, and ended with Whistler and Steer draining landscape of narrative entirely. What connects every painter we examined is the same question: what does depicting the natural world actually mean when the world itself is being transformed beyond recognition?



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