

## John Constable (1776-1837): Nature in its element

Leading English landscape painter. Interested above all in landscape, Constable is renowned for his direct observation of nature, in which he was greatly influenced by the poetry and theories of Wordsworth. Such works as *View on the Stour* (1819) and *The Hay Wain* (1821) greatly influenced the general course of 19<sup>th</sup> century French landscape painting. Constable once said that nature has to be deciphered like Egyptian hieroglyphics. His connection with place was so deep that he often went back to a place after years to paint it again.

*A Cart on the Lane from East Bergholt to Flatford*, 1811  
*Cloud Study*, 1822

In 1806 Constable spent two months in the Lake District. This period was an important source of inspiration for some of his paintings. While in Windermere, the artist met Wordsworth and gradually fell under the influence of his poems. However, the romanticism of Constable's paintings, whose landscapes evoke some of Wordsworth's best-known poems, is always tempered by an **empirical, scientific element**.

The meticulous **observation of atmospheric conditions** and the changing of light according to the time of the day formed a crucial part of Constable's conception of his paintings. Very often he would write down on small pieces of paper notes about the colour and light of the sky, and in particular its **cloud formations**. *'No two days are alike, nor even two hours; neither were there ever two leaves of a tree alike since the creation of the world'*.

He then 'translated' these notes into quick sketches which would later become the finished paintings. Constable was so serious about his meteorological observations that he even planned to give a conference on the subject of sky and clouds, but unfortunately died before he could do so.

*Study of Clouds* is just one of the fifty or so studies that Constable made of the English sky. Although the clouds seem much more real than those of many other painters, this study is quite remarkable for its **abstract quality** and for its isolation of the sky from a terrestrial context, which evokes the first line of Wordsworth's most famous verses *'I wandered lonely as a cloud'*.



Answer the following questions:

1. Describe the landscape represented in *A Cart on the Lane from East Bergholt to Flatford*.
2. What are the dominant colours in the painting? What emotions do they convey?
3. How would you describe Constable's sky? Choose from the following: sad emotionless abstract tenebrous bright mysterious ominous realistic menacing violent calm impressionistic
4. Constable has often been associated with Wordsworth. What connections do you think they have?
5. Read the poem 'Daffodils' – do you find Constable's clouds 'lonely'? Why? Why not?
6. Do you like landscape painting? Why? Why not?
7. *'No two days are alike, nor even two hours; neither were there ever two leaves of a tree alike since the creation of the world'*. Do you agree with Constable's statement? Why? Why not? Do you think Constable would say this if he were alive today? Give reasons for your answer.

## Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851): Landscapes

One of the finest English landscape artists, Turner began exhibiting his work while still a teenager and unlike many artists of his era was successful throughout his career. Turner travelled widely throughout Europe, which provided the inspiration for some of his finest work. Like Constable, he was a keen meteorologist, studying the effects of various kinds of weather on **the sea and the sky**. Although trained as a topographic draftsman, he later refined his painting technique according to romantic principles, translating ordinary scenes into quasi-abstract light-fields which expresses his emotional and physical perception of the landscape.

*Snow Storm*, 1842

*Rain, Steam and Speed*, 1844

'The author was in this storm on the night the Ariel left Harwich' – recites the accompanying note that Turner wrote for his *Snow Storm*, one of his best renderings of the raging elements. 'I got the sailors to lash me to the mast to observe it; I was lashed for four hours, and I did not expect to escape, but I felt bound to record it if I did', he added. The effect of **irresistible motion** the painting provokes is achieved through the wild movements of the waves as well as the powerful vortex of storm clouds revealing a glimpse of blue sky.

*Rain, Steam and Speed* provides us with the first important representation of a train. However, as often happens in Turner's paintings, the real protagonist is not the train itself but the **effect of the train speed** on the rain-filtered light. This painting is again the vivid translation of a personal experience. One time when he was leaning out the window of a train, Turner found himself fascinated by the action of both atmospherical and technological forces, the excitement of driving rain, the speed and movement combined with a myriad of sparks from the engine. In this painting the flying strokes of the brush majestically convey this complexity of sensations.



### Answer the following questions:

1. How would you describe nature in these two paintings? Choose from the following: peaceful quiet vague tempestuous wild serene emotional abstract
2. How is the sea represented in *The Sea Storm*? What are the dominant colours?
3. What is the real protagonist of *Rain, Steam and Speed*?
4. Both paintings convey an idea of movement. How does Turner manage to express this?
5. What connections do you find between Turner's paintings and the Industrial Revolution?
6. What elements of Romanticism do you find in Turner's paintings?
7. Do you prefer the landscapes of Turner or Constable? Why?

<b>John Constable (1776-1837): Nature in its element</b>	<i>A Cart on the Lane from East Bergholt to Flatford, 1811 - Cloud Study, 1822</i>	<b>Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851): Landscapes</b>	<i>Snow Storm, 1842 Rain, Steam and Speed, 1844</i>
<p>Leading English landscape painter. Interested above all in landscape, Constable is renowned for his direct observation of nature, in which he was greatly influenced by the poetry and theories of Wordsworth. Such works as <i>View on the Stour</i> (1819) and <i>The Hay Wain</i> (1821) greatly <u>influenced the general course of 19<sup>th</sup> century French landscape painting</u>. Constable one said that nature has to be deciphered like Egyptian hieroglyphics. His connection with place was so deep that he often went back to a place after years to paint it again.</p> <p>In 1806 Constable spent two months in the <u>Lake District</u>. This period was an important source of inspiration for some of his paintings. While in Windermere, the artist <u>met Wordsworth</u> and gradually <u>fell under the influence of his poems</u>. However, the romanticism of Constable's paintings, whose landscapes evoke some of Wordsworth's best-known poems, is always tempered by an <b>empirical, scientific element</b>.</p> <p>The meticulous <b>observation of atmospheric conditions</b> and the changing of light according to the time of the day formed a crucial part of Constable's conception of his paintings. Very often he would write down on small pieces of paper notes about the colour and light of the sky, and in particular its <b>cloud formations</b>. 'No two days are alike, nor even two hours; neither were there ever two leaves of a tree alike since the creation of the world'.</p> <p>He then 'translated' these notes into quick sketches which would later become the finished paintings. Constable was so serious about his meteorological observations that he even planned to give a conference on the subject of sky and clouds, but unfortunately died before he could do so.</p> <p><i>Study of Clouds</i> is just one of the <u>fifty or so studies</u> that Constable made <u>of the English sky</u>. Although the clouds seem much more real than those of many other painters, this study is quite remarkable for its <b>abstract quality</b> and for its isolation of the sky from a terrestrial context, which <u>evokes the first line of Wordsworth's most famous verses 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'</u>.</p> <p><u>Answer the following questions:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the landscape represented in <i>A Cart on the Lane from East Bergholt to Flatford</i>.</li> <li>What are the dominant colours in the painting? What emotions do they convey?</li> <li>How would you describe Constable's sky? Choose from the following: sad emotionless abstract tenebrous bright mysterious ominous realistic menacing violent calm impressionistic</li> <li>Constable has often been associated with Wordsworth. What connections do you think they have?</li> <li>Read the poem 'Daffodils' – do you find Constable's clouds 'lonely'? Why? Why not?</li> <li>Do you like landscape painting? Why? Why not?</li> <li>'No two days are alike, nor even two hours; neither were there ever two leaves of a tree alike since the creation of the world'. Do you agree with Constable's statement? Why? Why not? Do you think Constable would say this if he were alive today? Give reasons for your answer.</li> </ol>		<p>One of the finest English landscape artists, Turner began exhibiting his work while still a teenager and unlike many artists of his era was <u>successful throughout his career</u>. Turner travelled widely throughout Europe, which provided the inspiration for some of his finest work. Like Constable, he was a keen meteorologist, studying the effects of various kinds of weather on <b>the sea and the sky</b>. Although trained as a topographic draftsman, he later refined his painting technique according to romantic principles, translating ordinary scenes into quasi-abstract <u>light-fields</u> which expresses his <u>emotional and physical perception of the landscape</u>.</p> <p>'The author was in this storm on the night the Ariel left Harwich' – recites the accompanying note that Turner wrote for his <i>Snow Storm</i>, one of his best renderings of the raging elements. 'I got the sailors to lash me to the mast to observe it; I was lashed for four hours, and I did not expect to escape, but I felt bound to record it if I did', he added. The effect of <b>irresistible motion</b> the painting provokes is achieved through the wild movements of the waves as well as the powerful vortex of storm clouds revealing a glimpse of blue sky.</p> <p><i>Rain, Steam and Speed</i> provides us with the first important representation of a train. However, as often happens in Turner's paintings, the real protagonist is not the train itself but the <b>effect of the train speed</b> on the rain-filtered light. This painting is again the <u>vivid translation of a personal experience</u>. One time when he was leaning out the window of a train, Turner found himself fascinated by the action of both atmospheric and technological forces, the excitement of driving rain, the speed and movement combined with a myriad of sparks from the engine. 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