



Constable: The Making of a Master

Supported by the Friends of the V&A

20 September 2014 - 11 January 2015

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"We see nothing till we truly understand it." Constable, 1821

The V&A's major autumn exhibition will re-examine the work of John Constable (1776-1837), Britain's best-loved artist. It will explore his sources, techniques and legacy and reveal the hidden stories behind the creation of some of his most well-known paintings.

Constable: The Making of a Master will juxtapose Constable's work for the first time with the art of 17th-century masters of classical landscape such as Ruisdael, Rubens and Claude, whose compositional ideas and formal values Constable revered. On display will be such celebrated works as *The Hay Wain* (1821), *The Cornfield* (1826) and *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* (1831), together with oil sketches Constable painted outdoors directly from nature, which are unequalled at capturing transient effects of light and atmosphere. The exhibition will bring together over 150 works of art including oil sketches, drawings, watercolours and engravings.

Martin Roth, V&A Director, said: *"The V&A has been one of the leading centres for Constable research since the 19th century, following a significant gift of paintings, oil sketches and drawings from Constable's daughter Isabel in 1888. This exhibition refreshes our understanding of his work and creative influence. It shows that Constable's art, so well-loved and familiar to many of us, still delivers surprises."*

Born in East Bergholt, Suffolk on 11 June 1776, John Constable was the second son of a gentleman farmer and mill owner. Whilst working in the family business he became intimately familiar with the countryside around the River Stour and sketched observations of nature and the scenery and motifs of the Suffolk countryside. Given permission by his father to pursue art, he travelled to London in 1799 where he studied at the Royal Academy of Arts. He was schooled in the old masters, meticulously copying their work and reflecting on their compositions in his individual style. On display will be paintings including *Moonlight Landscape* (1635-1640) by Rubens and *Landscape with a Pool* (1746-7) by Gainsborough, which inspired Constable's early practice.

Constable made a number of close copies of the old masters which he referred to as a “*facsimile...a more lasting remembrance.*” Paintings including Claude’s *Landscape with a Goatherd and Goats* (c.1636-7) and Ruisdael’s *Windmills near Haarlem* (c.1650-52), as well as etchings and drawings by Herman van Swanevelt and Alexander Cozens, will be displayed alongside Constable’s own direct copies, many of which will be brought together for the first time since they were produced almost 200 years ago. Constable also owned an extensive art collection that included 5000 etchings principally by 17th-century Dutch, Flemish and French landscape painters, which became a vital resource for his own image making.

Outdoor sketching was central to Constable’s working method. The 1810s saw the beginning of a series of expressive oil sketches and drawings in the open air, capturing the changes of weather and light in his native countryside. His naturalistic representation of the landscape and use of broad brushstrokes and impasto technique challenged conventions and brought the genre of outdoor oil sketching to a new level of refinement. Examples of his cloud studies, including sketches of Hampstead Heath and Brighton Beach will demonstrate Constable’s innovative and poetic evocations of land, sea and sky.

The exhibition will also investigate Constable’s methods for transferring the freshness of his sketches into his exhibition paintings. From 1818-19 Constable produced full-scale oil sketches to resolve the compositions, colours and light values of his ‘six-footers’ such as *The Hay Wain* (1821) and *The Leaping Horse* (1825) which are amongst the best-known images in British art.

In the last decade of his life Constable and the engraver David Lucas collaborated on a series of mezzotints after the artist’s paintings. The final section of the exhibition will present a major group of these prints together with the exemplary original oil sketches on which they were based. Through these prints Constable sought to secure his artistic legacy and ensure the continued study of his groundbreaking paintings, which remain hugely influential to the present day.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- *Constable: The Making of a Master* has been curated by Mark Evans, Senior Paintings Curator at the V&A.
- The exhibition is at the V&A from 20 September 2014 to 11 January 2015.
- The V&A is open daily 10.00 – 17.45 and until 22.00 every Friday.
- The V&A is the leading centre for the study of Constable’s work and houses a collection, which includes the three easel paintings, 92 oil sketches, 297 drawings and watercolours and three sketchbooks, given to the Museum by Constable’s last surviving child Isabel in 1888.

- The exhibition will also include a previously unrecorded oil sketch discovered in the V&A's permanent collection, concealed beneath a lining canvas on the reverse of *Branch Hill Pond: Hampstead* (c.1821-22).
- A documentary produced by Tern TV and presented by Alastair Sooke will be broadcast on BBC4 to coincide with the opening of the V&A exhibition.

Ticket Information

Tickets: £14 (concessions available)

V&A Members go free

Tickets available from www.vam.ac.uk

Exhibition Supporters

About the Friends of the V&A

The Friends of the V&A was founded in 1976 and supports the V&A with grants towards acquisitions, scholarships, exhibitions and other important work. Members enjoy a range of benefits including free entry to V&A exhibitions, previews of exhibitions and new galleries, and the annual Members' Week. For more information visit www.vam.ac.uk/membership

Exhibition Publication

An accompanying publication, *John Constable: The Making of a Master* (by Mark Evans, with Susan Owens and Stephen Calloway) will be available from V&A Publishing priced £30.00 in hardback. This will be a companion volume to an earlier publication by Mark Evans, *John Constable: Oil Sketches from the Victoria and Albert Museum* (£25.00 HB / V&A 2011).

For PRESS information on the book please contact Julie Chan on +44 (0)20 7942 2701 or email j.chan@vam.ac.uk

For further PRESS information about the V&A *Constable: The Making of a Master* exhibition please contact Alice Evans in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2508 or email a.evans@vam.ac.uk

A selection of press images are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

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