

## V&A experts discover new John Constable oil sketch



V&A experts have discovered a previously unrecorded oil sketch by John Constable in the Museum's permanent collection, concealed beneath a lining canvas on the reverse of *Branch Hill Pond: Hampstead*. The newly discovered work will now go on public display in the Paintings Galleries.

The recent discovery was made by V&A conservators Clare Richardson and Nicola Costaras whilst preparing works for the Museum's major autumn 2014 exhibition *Constable: The Making of a Master*. X-radiography had formerly revealed evidence of another composition on *Branch Hill Pond: Hampstead* but it had been assumed that these were traces of an over-painted scene on the front. As the lining had become loose, the conservators removed it and discovered the previously hidden oil sketch on the reverse of the painting.

In 1888 Constable's last surviving child Isabel, gave the remains of her father's studio contents: three easel paintings; 92 oil sketches; 297 drawings and watercolours and three sketchbooks to the V&A. Constable is known to have been thrifty with his artist's materials and sometimes painted sketches on both sides of a support, which were typically of homemade paper laminate, panel, millboard or sometimes scraps of reused canvas. Six of the oil sketches bequeathed to the V&A were previously known to be double-sided. The Museum register for 1888 indicates that some of these artworks arrived without mounts and several double-sided works were recorded on receipt, while others arrived framed and glazed with the result that scenes on the reverse were not noticed until later.

The new oil sketch depicts a narrow clearing fringed by trees set against an unsettled sky, a wedge-shaped expanse of dark clouds at lower left parts to reveal a stretch of blue sky with white clouds. In the foreground a brown cylindrical structure with a waft of smoke is visible, most probably representing a kiln. The sketch is painted on a piece of canvas measuring 24.5 x 39.4cm. Its tacking margins have been folded out, flattened and painted over, suggesting that the scene on the front was painted with the canvas pinned to a solid support, probably the lid of the artist's paint box which he used for sketching in oils outdoors. The newly discovered scene was probably made in the late summer of 1821 or 1822 when Constable painted a number of sketches featuring similar cloud studies and motifs, as seen in another of the double-sided oil sketches in the V&A's collection, *Branch Hill Pond: Evening*, which also probably dates from those years.

The new discovery will be featured in the V&A's autumn 2014 exhibition *Constable: The Making of a Master* opening on 20 September 2014. This major exhibition will reveal how Constable created some of his most loved and well-known paintings. It will present the English painter for the first time alongside the old masters of classical landscape, in particular Jacob van Ruisdael and Claude Lorrain whose compositional ideas and formal values he revered and studied in great depth. On display will be such famous works as *The Haywain* together with the oil sketches he painted outdoors direct from nature which show unequalled skill in capturing transient effects of light and atmosphere. The exhibition will also examine Constable's collection of over 5000 etchings by masters including Rembrandt and Dürer, which was a vital resource for his own image making, as well as the mezzotints of his paintings which he made in the last decade of his life with the engraver David Lucas to secure his lasting legacy.

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#### **Notes to Editors**

- The newly discovered oil sketch will be on display in the V&A's Edwin and Susan Davies Galleries (Room 88) from 27 November 2013. Free admission.
- *Constable: The Making of a Master* will open on 20 September 2014 – 11 January 2015, tickets will be available on the V&A website from March 2014, visit [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)
- A detailed essay about the discovery by Mark Evans, Clare Richardson and Nicola Costaras, is published in the December issue of the Burlington Magazine [www.burlington.org.uk](http://www.burlington.org.uk)

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