



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME ONE

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,
Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley,
Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
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Details:

TITLE PAGE: John Constable, *Yarmouth Jetty* (cat. 73)

OPPOSITE COPYRIGHT PAGE: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Bathers of the Borromean Isles* (cat. 89)

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PRECEDING PAGE 2: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Snake Charmer* (cat. 154)

ently has two glue/paste linings of the same weight linen and a five-member stretcher. It is possible that the middle lining is an older layer left in place during a more recent lining. In 1993, Simon Gillespie removed fills along the top and bottom to reveal the uneven original canvas edges, which suggest that the artist cut the section from a large piece of canvas. There are three long lifted vertical cracks and three shorter ones through the surface, suggesting that the original canvas had been rolled prior to use. Deposits of paint caught along the lifted creases prove that the artist used the canvas with the creases in place. There are pinholes in the corners where the artist presumably tacked the small canvas to a rigid surface while painting. The right edge is furrowed from tight framing, the impastos are flattened, and there is some abrasion in the church and various dark passages. There is a small paint loss at the lower edge. The sky over the church where Gillespie noted a patch of mold has been retouched, and small retouches have been made along the vertical cracks. There may still be some grime trapped in the paint layer, and there is some skinned varnish in the upper left treetops.

The ground layer seems to be a buff or tan color, and Gillespie suggested that it is comprised of brittle chalk. The ground at the edges looks whiter, but this may be remnants of the earlier fill. No underdrawing was detected. The painting is a very quick sketch, leaving some ground color showing. The dark browns are very thinly applied, but the remaining paint strokes are of vehicular paste consistency. A resinous bright yellow brown seen in the lower left may be the gum-based pigment gamboge.

1. The one exception is a pencil drawing whose whereabouts are, at present, unknown (R 15.38).
2. R 05.41.
3. Parris recounts a conversation with Ian Fleming-Williams in which the Constable scholar noted that the position of the setting sun indicated the time of year the scene represented. See Parris 1994, p. 32.
4. The majority of lots at this sale were proofs by David Lucas for Constable's *English Landscape*. For the division of Constable's remaining works among his children and the subsequent series of sales, see Beckett 1962–70, vol. 5, pp. 204–10. See also Fleming-Williams and Parris 1984, 81–84.

57 | Flatford Mill from the Lock c. 1810

Oil on beige laid (?) paper, mounted on canvas,
19 x 24.1 cm

Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin
and Lady Manton

2007.8.23

As with *Dedham Vale from the Road to East Bergholt, Sunset* (cat. 58), *Flatford Mill from the Lock* is one of a series of sketches that culminated in a large-scale oil; The finished version of *Flatford Mill from the Lock* (David Thomson collection) was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1812 as *A Water-mill*.¹ Although the final version of *Dedham Vale: Morning* (W. H. Proby collection)² had been exhibited the year before, the production of the sketches overlapped, and both series of sketches show Constable using the format of the small-scale oil executed in front of the motif to experiment with compositional elements. These changes to the composition form the basis for establishing the chronology of five related responses to his father's mill on the River Stour, a short distance southeast of the village of East Bergholt.

On the discovery of this sketch, Ian Fleming-Williams argued that it was the earliest in the sequence, dating it to about 1810. Fleming-Williams based his conclusion on the compositional shift that distinguishes this sketch from the other four.³ Here, Constable placed the four dominant elements—the lock, the river, the mill, and the sky—in four parallel horizontal registers, with the bright red figure of the lock-keeper visually forming a human bridge across the river. Constable radically altered this horizontal emphasis in the larger oil sketch on paper that Fleming-Williams believes was the second in the series (Royal Academy of Arts, London).⁴ With the lock-keeper and the mill farther to the left of the composition, Constable planted the pair of conifers in the center of the picture, at the vanishing point. To emphasize this perspectival flow, the River Stour forms a triangle with its apex at the trees.

The artist retained this view in the succeeding sketch, this time painted on canvas (The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino), but with a more turbulent sky and a more pronounced reflection of the paired poplars in the Stour.⁵ As Reynolds has pointed out, in the field to the right, haycocks have replaced the harvesters,



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indicating that this sketch was painted after the Royal Academy version.⁶ Constable has further minimized the human presence by placing the lock-keeper at the very left edge of the canvas, the bright red of his vest in the Clark sketch reduced to a dab of paint to indicate a kerchief.

While the poplars are just right of center in the fourth sketch (David Thomson collection), the position of the lock-keeper has shifted more radically.⁷ In this version, which Fleming-Williams times to just after the harvest season,⁸ Constable's viewpoint takes in more of the mill, which was relegated to just a sliver in the Huntington sketch. In the most recent consideration of the series, Anne Lyles places this sketch immediately after the Clark one.⁹ As part of Lyles's understanding of the process behind Constable's use of sketching toward the making of a final painting, she adopts Fleming-Williams's dating of the Clark sketch to 1810, suggesting that this sketch began as a "one-off." Then, in the following summer, he returned to the same location, but before settling on a final viewpoint, explored the site from another side. One of Constable's letters to Maria Bicknell reveals that he was sketching the lock in the summer of 1811.

In this letter to Maria, Constable pinpoints the location of his work as "whence you once made a drawing."¹⁰ Ann Bermingham has taken Constable's

report to the woman he was courting to argue that by sketching a scene Maria had herself recorded, the artist was "superimposing his present longing for Maria on the past."¹¹ There is no denying that Flatford Mill on the River Stour, which had been central to the family's livelihood for generations, had strong personal associations for him. Nevertheless, the variety of viewpoints Constable explored in these sketches and the resulting final composition show him deeply engaged in advancing an artistic project that had its basis in empirical evidence. The result would transform contemporary understanding of the painted landscape.

Following the visual evidence, Lyles, Reynolds, and Fleming-Williams agree that Constable's fifth sketch (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) is the one closest in conception to the painting exhibited in 1812.¹² They disagree, however, about whether Constable painted this sketch in the open air or in his studio. While Lyles adopts Sarah Cove's conclusion that this sketch is a "collage of discrete areas from each of the four sketches" made in the studio and resulting in a distortion of the landscape,¹³ Reynolds maintains that it, like the other four, was painted in front of the motif.¹⁴

Taken as a group, the sketches show Constable moving away from the prominence of the mill and the lock-keeper, and placing the river in a more central

position. In effect, Constable used his composition to show that farming and milling were dependent on the Stour as a power source and transportation route. Even in the Clark sketch, his first rendition of the subject, we see Constable pulled toward the bank that lies across from the mill. The river's reflection of the poplars, in this case more trunk than leaves, appears to have been the original edge of the composition. The lighter coloration of the right quarter of the paper with its thinner paint application gives the impression that the artist felt it necessary to expand the view to show more of the river and include the barge that awaits entry into the lock. An alternate explanation for this discrepancy in coloring is suggested by technical analysis that speculates the paper may have originally had a vertical orientation—one rarely used by Constable in his landscapes. With the exception of the Thomson sketch, Constable continues this expansion of the view in his succeeding sketches.

In the exhibited oil, Constable moved the boat to the mill side of the river, and, at the last minute, eliminated the lock-keeper (the pentimento of his red jacket is visible), exchanging him for a yellow-vested fisherman. To balance the figure of the fisherman, Constable added a young boy, kneeling at the wooden pilings. Without the figure of the lock-keeper, whose presence in the sketches creates a sense of urgent labor, the final painting depicts a more tranquil moment in the life of the River Stour. As with the series of sketches leading to *Dedham Vale: Morning*, at this early stage of Constable's career, immediately before he began to paint in the open air larger oils for exhibition, there is a clear distinction between the sketches Constable executed in the fields and along the riverbanks in and around East Bergholt and the paintings he showed to the public in London. EP

PROVENANCE Ella D. Constable, the artist's granddaughter, by descent; [Spink, London, sold to Grosvenor, 1983]; Gerald Grosvenor, 6th Duke of Westminster, London (1983—at least 1996); [Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, sold to Manton 20 Apr. 2002]; Sir Edwin A. G. Manton, New York (2002–d. 2005); Manton Family Art Foundation (2005–7, given to the Clark); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007.

EXHIBITIONS London 1991a, pp. 123–24, 523–24, 526, no. 50, ill.; London–Washington–San Marino 2006–7, p. 92, no. 10, ill. (exhibited in London only); Williamstown 2007a, no cat.

REFERENCES Fleming-Williams 1980, pp. 216–17, 219, ill.; Birmingham 1987, pp. 129–34, fig. 56; Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, pp. 166–67, no. 12.5, vol. 2, pl. 933.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a beige paper, possibly laid paper, as some delicate lines are visible in the surface. The paper sheet has been aqueous lined to moderate-weight linen having a thread count of 16 x 19 threads per cm. The four-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher is old and likely dates to the time of the lining. Pin marks appear in three corners where the artist held the paper support to something flat during painting. There are small buckle distortions in the paper on either side of an old diagonal crease or scratch, which runs vertically across the entire image, and two short old tears in the paper, one near the lower left corner on the bottom edge, the other in the mid-foreground area. The paint layer is in fairly good condition, with only several moated impastos and a few dimples from being lined face down. There may be a few old white repaint strokes over original paint near the bottom of the image. The painting seems to have been recently cleaned, and it has retouching along the central crease/scratch and in a few small, scattered locations.

There is no true solid ground layer, but there appears to be a wash of a warm reddish brown over the paper surface allowing paper fibers to be visible under low magnification. A partial underlayer of thick, striated white paint extends two inches in from the left edge, striking through the image from top to bottom, as if the artist had started a sky with the paper oriented the other way. No underdrawing was detected. The buildings and foreground bushes were sketched with very dark transparent paint as the image was started, with most of these areas remaining as part of the final image. There are a few deposits of a plate-like, fibrous yellow, which resembles the arsenic-based mineral pigment orpiment.

1. R 12.1. It was shown in the 1812 Royal Academy exhibition as no. 9.
2. R 11.2.
3. Fleming-Williams 1980, p. 219.
4. R 12.6.
5. R 12.7.
6. Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, p. 167.
7. R 12.8.
8. Fleming-Williams 1980, p. 219.
9. See London–Washington–San Marino 2006–7, p. 92.
10. John Constable to Maria Bicknell, 12 Nov. 1811, in Beckett 1962–70, vol. 2, p. 54.
11. Birmingham 1987, p. 133.
12. R 12.9.
13. London 1991a, p. 528; London–Washington–San Marino 2006–7, p. 93.
14. Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, p. 167.