



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

**VOLUME TWO**

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,  
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Curtis R. Scott, Director of Publications  
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**337 | Oxen Plowing** 1860

Oil on canvas, 97.2 x 130 cm  
Lower left: C. TROYON. 1860.  
1955.56

Three pair of oxen, placed very close to the picture plane, are yoked with a wooden beam that is affixed to their padded heads and joined with a chain. Their bodies are seen in complicated foreshortening as they turn at the edge of the field, guided by a boy with a stick. Small figures to the right are sowing seed; the standing figure wears over his shoulder a bag familiar from paintings by Jean-François Millet (see cat. 221). The man behind the oxen may be plowing a new furrow or covering over an already seeded one with a harrow. Dark storm clouds let patches of light fall on selected parts of the oxen, figures, and landscape. Imminent bad weather lends a sense of urgency to the task at hand.

Signed and dated 1860, Troyon's *Oxen Plowing*

was painted toward the end of the artist's productive life. He remained active, exhibiting in Brussels, Rotterdam, Bordeaux, Lyon, Le Havre, Besançon, and Marseille, continuing the habit that he had begun in 1839 of sending his works to provincial and foreign venues. He showed his paintings in Paris, too, but 1859 was the last year he participated in the Salon. In 1860, his pictures could be seen at the shop of the dealer Martinet, on the boulevard des Italiens. He oversaw the brisk trade in his paintings himself, selling both through dealers and directly to collectors.

Troyon amassed a fortune by painting pictures of animals, yet some subjects were more popular than others. Hunting dogs, flocks returning from the field, peasants accompanying their animals to market, and animals reacting to a thunderstorm proved good sellers. To this list can be added yoked oxen in a field. Although large, *Oxen Plowing*, at more than one meter wide, is a scaled-down version of one of Troyon's first big successes, *Oxen Going to Work: Morning Effect* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Commissioned in 1854 for the Musée du Luxembourg and finished in 1855, *Oxen*



Fig. 337.1 Constant Troyon, *Oxen Ploughing*, c. 1860. Pastel on paper, mounted on canvas, 96.5 x 129.9 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Thomas Gold Appleton (84.24)

*Going to Work*, measuring 2.6 by 4 meters, received extravagant praise from the critics when it was exhibited in the Exposition Universelle of 1855, particularly for its convincing depiction of effulgent early morning light. William Henry Howe, a nineteenth-century American painter of cattle subjects, admired the immediacy of *Oxen Going to Work*. He wrote that “the plodding oxen, as they come toward us, casting their long shadows before them” make one feel as if “one is almost disposed to step aside and make way for them, it is all such a breathing truth.”<sup>1</sup>

One wonders how Howe would have responded to *Oxen Plowing*. The animals in the earlier picture are small in relation to the overall size of the canvas, whereas in *Oxen Plowing* they fill the entire lower half of the picture. The light color of the first pair, almost but not quite broadside to the picture plane, combined with the small size of the boy make the animals loom over the viewer. They are docile beasts, though, having been castrated to suit their purpose as draft animals. Albert Boime uses *Oxen Plowing* as a foil to Rosa Bonheur’s *Plowing in Nivernais* (1849; Musée d’Orsay). Boime points out that the oxen dominate Bonheur’s picture: “Their rugged bodies completely overshadow the peasant drivers who are lost among the animals and subordinated to the diagonal movement formed by the oxen.” In Troyon’s picture, by contrast:

*the man [whom I read as a boy] is total master of the situation. He occupies the compositional center, and his luminous white sleeves sustain his prominent position. He controls the animals with a pole whose horizontal position parallels the picture plane and the heads of the lead team of oxen. The overriding effect of this gesture is blockage and intelligent control of brute force.*<sup>2</sup>

Troyon’s painting can thus be read as a paean to successful animal husbandry.

A cluster of works in various media surrounds this canvas. A preparatory drawing in charcoal and red and black chalk was found in the artist’s studio at his death in 1865 (Kunsthalle Bremen).<sup>3</sup> It sets out the main motif of the painting, substituting a dog for the blue flowers at the lower right. An etching after the painting by Charles-Louis Courty (1846–1897) was made to illustrate it when it appeared at Galerie Georges Petit in 1883. These works on paper are easy to explain. One was made before and the other after the large oil painting on canvas. More intriguing is *Oxen Ploughing*, a pastel at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 337.1). Almost exactly the same size (96.5 x 129.9 cm) as the oil painting, the pastel shares the overall composition and individual details of the Clark painting. Unaffected by the discolored varnish that darkens the oil painting, the pastel appears fresh. Much of the tan paper is left bare, and the pastel is used sparingly except in the middle, for the white of the boy’s shirt. Pastel scrubbed onto the paper at the upper right is particularly effective in suggesting the rapidly changing clouds. Troyon was comfortable with the medium of pastel, having used it from the beginning of his career in the 1830s. If at first he used pastel to make quick notations of light effects, in the early 1840s he used it to make scenes à la François Boucher and Jean-Honoré Fragonard for ready sale.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the technique of *Oxen Ploughing* is assured and effective. It is likely that the pastel was made as a less expensive version of the oil, another instance of Troyon’s keen sense of the market and the popularity of the motif of the plowing oxen. FEW

**PROVENANCE** Probably Frédéric Boucheron, Paris (by 1883–d. 1902); probably Louis Boucheron, his son, by descent (1902–35, his sale, Galerie Jean Charpentier, Paris, 28 May 1935, no. 10, ill., as *Boeufs au labour*, sold to Knoedler);<sup>5</sup> [Knoedler, Paris, sold to Clark, probably June 1935]; Robert

Sterling Clark (1935–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Paris 1883c, no. 81, ill. (print by Courtry after the painting), as *Boeufs au labour*, lent by Boucheron; Williamstown 1955, no. 56, pl. 41; Williamstown 1958b, pl. 73.

**REFERENCES** Gensel 1906, pp. 77, 96, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 149, ill.; Boime 1981, p. 396, fig. 22; London–Williamstown 2007, p. 55, fig. 50.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a fine twill-weave fabric (19 x 25 threads/cm), which is glue-lined to a slightly coarser fabric, with the original tack margins preserved. The seven-member pine mortise-and-tenon stretcher may be original and has twisted convex warps that are causing draws in the supports. Henri Helfer may have performed the lining and cleaning in 1940. There is some flattening of the impastos due to the heat and pressure used during lining. The paint seems to be rather brittle, possibly due to a resinous original component, and has very minute aperture cracks, with deeper age cracks in the thickest impastos. During a 1977 examination and minor treatment, abrasion in the darker colors was noted, along with strokes of overpaint along the upper edge and in the landscape, with smaller retouches in the animals. There are presently two or more heavy brush coats of varnish, with some cloudiness. Less varnish appears along the left and right edges, possibly from being applied while framed. The upper varnish layer is thicker and more yellowed than the lower layer, and presents a very shiny, glassy reflectance.

The ground layer is a thin, off-white, commercially applied water-sensitive layer. No underdrawing was detected, although there may be a thin, broadly painted sketch. There is a pentimento where the line of oxen heads and horns was changed. The paint is worked wet-into-wet, from the thin dark colors up to the thick pale impastos. The boy in front of the oxen was either painted before the animals or a reserve was left for his figure in the underlayer. The sky seems to have been painted after the oxen.

1. William Henry Howe, "Constant Troyon," in Van Dyke 1896, p. 148.
2. Boime 1981, p. 396.
3. For an illustration, see Bremen 1977, no. 138, fig. 61.
4. See Miquel 1975, vol. 2, pp. 322, 325.
5. In the sale catalogue, the collection is labeled only as "appartenant à Monsieur X." The SCIPIO database identifies the seller as Boucheron, the jeweler.

## Daniel Turner

English, active 1782–1817

### 338 | A View of the Thames Looking East with the Adelphi, Somerset House, and Saint Paul's Cathedral c. 1806

Oil on panel, 17.2 x 45.2 cm  
Lower left (on wharf): D Turner  
Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton  
2007.8.99

Although not much is known about the artist Daniel Turner, the scene he depicts of the River Thames has a long history in topographical representations of London.<sup>1</sup> From Claude de Jongh's *Old London Bridge* of 1650 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) to Antonio Canaletto's *veduti* of a century later, the view east with both north and south banks visible was a logical compositional choice for artists. The Thames was not only the main artery of the capital city in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but it was also crucial to Britain's international trade, with about seventy percent of imports and fifty-six percent of exports handled by the London docks.<sup>2</sup> Turner's depiction of the Thames is a record of the continuing development of the waterway and the growth of the city itself.

On the north bank, at the extreme left of the panel, are the buildings of the Adelphi. Begun in 1768 as a grand speculative scheme by Robert Adam and his brothers, the result was a terrace of neoclassical brick houses, sitting atop wharves. The combination of commercial and residential structures that characterized the Adelphi was supplemented by a cultural organization; the Royal Society of Arts, founded in 1754, in conjunction with the Adam brothers, constructed their headquarters on what is now known as John Adam Street.<sup>3</sup>

Farther along the north side of the Thames, William Chambers's neoclassical Somerset House,<sup>4</sup> begun in 1776 and completed in 1780, is clearly identifiable. The Great Room of Somerset House was, from 1780 until 1836, the venue of the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy and, therefore, the public center of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British art world. Daniel Turner, who was listed as residing at 24 Millbank Street, exhibited views of London there between 1796 and 1801. Standing at the east end of the Strand, Somerset House is in many ways the gate-