



**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

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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)

PAGE VIII: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Woman Crocheting* (cat. 267)

PAGE X: Claude Monet, *Seascape, Storm* (cat. 222)

PAGE XII: Jacques-Louis David, *Comte Henri-Amédée-Mercure de Turenne-d'Aynac* (cat. 103)

PAGE XVI: William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Nymphs and Satyr* (cat. 33)

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



55

55 | Bow Fell, Cumberland 1807

Oil on canvas, 20.4 x 25.4 cm

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

2007.8.16

The close association of Constable with his native Suffolk, his adopted Hampstead Heath and Salisbury on his visits to the Archdeacon John Fisher, has resulted in a lack of attention to localities he visited less frequently. Thus, the two months he spent in the Lake District in September and October 1806, are characterized in the Constable literature as anomalous in the artist's lifetime. Constable, in contrast to Turner, is depicted as an artist who rarely ventured far from home. Within his oeuvre, the rocky peaks of the desolate landscape have been considered foreign to his interest in the rivers, vales, woods, and fields of southeastern England. But the oil *Bow Fell, Cumberland* and the watercolor of the same location, also in the Clark's collection (fig. 55.1),¹ are valuable evidence of Constable's powers of recording landscapes viewed for the first time. Further, the circumstance of his early autumn tour, which was funded by David Pike Watts (1754–1816), his moth-

er's eldest brother, points to the involvement of his extended family in aiding Constable's artistic career. As divergent as a painting career was from the expected occupation of a miller's son, the need for patronage was recognized early by Constable's mother, who was able to arrange an introduction in 1795 to Sir George Howland Beaumont (1753–1827), a collector and amateur draftsman who frequently visited his mother at her home in Dedham, close to the Constable family home in East Bergholt, Suffolk.

By 1806, Constable had been exhibiting at the Royal Academy for four years and his well-to-do uncle proposed and underwrote a two-month tour of the Lake District. In 1800, Watts had inherited the bulk of the fortune of Ben Kenton, a wine merchant, for whom he had worked. Using the inheritance to retire and devote himself to "boundless" charity,² Watts had recently been living at Storrs Hall on Lake Windermere. It was here, with the new tenant, Mr. Worgan, that Constable first stayed.

In his biography, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, Charles Robert Leslie acknowledged the quantity of work Constable accomplished at this time: "He spent about two months among the English lakes and mountains, where he made a great number of sketches, of a large size, on tinted paper, sometimes



Fig. 55.1. John Constable, *Bow Fell and Langdale Pikes*, 1806. Watercolor over graphite on beige wove paper, 18.4 x 23.8 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton (2007.8.15)

in black and white, but more often coloured. They abound in grand and solemn effects of light, shade, and colour, but from these studies he never painted any considerable picture, for his mind was formed for the enjoyment of a different class of landscape.”³

Although Leslie did not know Constable in 1806, he concluded his account of the results of the tour with a reminiscence that “I have heard him say the solitude of mountains oppressed his spirits.”⁴ In so writing, Leslie not only emphasized his privileged relationship to the artist but also initiated the view that the paintings and drawings of the Lake District should be regarded as separate from, and less successful than, Constable’s characteristic studies of more familiar locations.

In fact, Leslie was incorrect in his statement that Constable never painted “any considerable picture” from his sketches: in 1807, he exhibited three paintings at the Royal Academy of Lake District subjects, and the following year he exhibited three more. Although not one of these paintings has been definitively identified today, Graham Reynolds has proposed that the Clark oil is the work catalogued at the Royal Academy in 1807 as *Bow Fell, Cumberland*.⁵ In cataloguing the Lake District works, Reynolds dated the pencil drawings and watercolor sketches to 1806 with the implication that they were made on the spot, while the oils are dated to 1807, and thus thought to have been painted in the studio.⁶ This view is supported by Ian Fleming-Williams, who maintained that from the summer of 1805 through the autumn of 1806, Constable rejected working in oils in favor of watercolors and pencil.⁷ Referring specifi-

cally to the Clark oil, Fleming-Williams wrote, “This oil painting does not give the impression of having been painted from nature.”⁸

Consonant with the view that the oil was executed in the studio is the prevailing interpretation of the work as evidence of the influence of Constable’s East Anglian artistic predecessor, Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788). During the summer of 1783, Gainsborough, too, had sketched in the Lake District.⁹ The organizers of the 1971 Tate exhibition stated their opinion boldly, calling the oil “a pastiche of Gainsborough.”¹⁰ Again in 1976, the catalogue described the oil as “an exercise in the manner of Gainsborough.”¹¹ In reviewing that exhibition, Michael Kitson identified Sir George Beaumont—in particular, works by Gainsborough in his collection that Constable no doubt knew—as Constable’s greatest influence, as references to his mentor on the back of some of the Lake District works attest.¹² Most emphatic, however, is Gainsborough scholar John Hayes, who described the Clark oil as “so close in style and tone to Gainsborough’s small, late mountain scenes that it seems possible it was based on a lost original.”¹³

There is only one other known oil of the Lake District. Entitled *Keswick Lake* (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne), it is a more panoramic view on a wider canvas (25 x 43.1 cm.) of the Derwentwater situated to the north of Bow Fell without a known watercolor study against which to measure it.¹⁴ The close relationship between the present oil and the related watercolor, however, provides an excellent opportunity to examine Constable’s use of the two different media. Most obviously, the pinkish brown and mossy green coloration of the watercolor lends the scene a more desolate air. The greater range of color in the oil is matched by a more concerted use of the medium to suggest the texture of the rocks and grasses; in the watercolor, by contrast, Constable has used pencil to sketch in the contours of the rock formation. The location of both the oil and the watercolor is clearly identical, though its precise identification as Bow Fell has been called into question.¹⁵

The most striking difference is the substitution of the goat in the oil for the Gainsborough-like donkey of the watercolor. Further, the rock on which the animal stands is given greater volume in the oil and a steeper grade, which is emphasized by the more dramatic diagonal of the goat’s back. Interestingly, these are the most developed depictions of animal life in the artist’s Lake District works.¹⁶ Another noticeable

difference is that in the oil the clouds are swirls of pigment that lend additional drama to the turbulent sky, whereas in the watercolor, the thin, pale wash of the sky does not draw attention away from the rocky surfaces. Constable, then, capitalizes on the unique qualities of his media, using the depth of oil pigment to variegate the components of sky, rocks, water, and foliage. EP

PROVENANCE The artist (d. 1837); Lieutenant-Colonel John Hugh Constable, his great-grandson, by descent (d. 1974);¹⁷ Eileen Constable, his widow, by descent (1974–77); [Spink, London, sold to Manton, 22 Sept. 1977]; Sir Edwin A. G. Manton, New York (1977–d. 2005); Manton Family Art Foundation (2005–7, given to the Clark, as *Lake District Scene Near Langdale Pikes*); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007.

EXHIBITIONS Possibly London 1807, no. 150; Colchester 1950–51, no. 8; Ipswich–London–Sunderland 1954–55, no. 7, as *Mountain Landscape*; Colchester 1958, no. 32; London 1971a, no. 58, as *Bowfell and Langdale Pikes*; Auckland–Melbourne–Sydney 1973–74, no. 2, as *Bowfell at Langdale Pikes*; London 1976, no. 80, as *Lake District Scene*; New York 1988, pp. 33, 198, pl. 6; New York 2000, ill., as *Lake District Scene Near Langdale Pikes*.

REFERENCES Constable 1975, p. 37, ill.; Kitson 1976, p. 251; Hoozee 1979, p. 91, no. 35, ill.; Fleming-Williams 1981, p. 61; Hayes 1982, vol. 1, pp. 292–93, ill.; Parris 1994, pp. 21–24, no. 4, ill.; Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, p. 115, no. 07.4, vol. 2, pl. 676.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a moderate-weight canvas with a flat-faced weave, having a thread count of 16 threads/cm. The picture is glue-lined to a heavier weight, bleached fabric with an uneven weave of 13 x 16 threads/cm. The back of the lining is grimy. The four-member, lightweight pine strainer is nailed together through the corner joins. The painting was cleaned by John Bull of London in 1990, and in general looks quite good. A small dent appears in the center left sky, and a slight bulge in the lower right corner due to the non-expandable strainer. An overall network of fine age cracks occurs in the paint, and a few old losses at crack intersections are visible under low magnification. A new layer of clear varnish and inpainting has been done along the edges of the lining canvas and near the goat. The varnish saturation is good and the reflectance is even.

The ground is a pinkish beige color comprised of one or two layers, probably commercially applied. The ground has a distinctive square and even crackle network following the canvas weave. Although no underdrawing was detected with infrared reflectography, the brown tone below the hills may have served a similar purpose. The paint is quite thin, with the pinkish ground and the lower brown tone revealed in various portions of the image. Some of the brushwork is

blended wet-into-wet, which is visible where the landscape elements overlap, such as where the sky and landscape meet. There are also many dry brush details, with many individual, unblended strokes. Use of small hog’s-bristle brushes is obvious in the sky impastos as well as in the green and white foreground colors.

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1. R 06.250.
 2. His charitable causes are outlined in Smith 1833, p. 297.
 3. Leslie 1845, p. 18.
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. London 1807, no. 150; Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, p. 115.
 6. In an earlier catalogue Reynolds proposes that the Clark oil sketch was “probably painted in the open-air.” See Auckland–Melbourne–Sydney 1973–74, p. 16.
 7. Fleming-Williams 1981, p. 58.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
 9. Hayes 1970, vol. 1, p. 45.
 10. London 1971a, p. 25.
 11. London 1976, p. 68.
 12. Kitson 1976, p. 251.
 13. Hayes 1982, vol. 1, p. 293.
 14. R 07.5.
 15. Leslie Parris notes that Dow Bank and Loughrigg Fell have been proposed as alternative locations. See Parris 1994, p. 23.
 16. Only two pencil drawings include animals: two ducks in *A Man Launching a Boat on a Lake* (Mr. and Mrs. Henry Tang; R 06.268) and a cow in *Langdale Pikes* (private collection; R 06.270). Nor are there many more human figures in the works from this tour.
 17. This painting was offered for sale at Sotheby’s, London, 15 June 1960, no. 88, as *A Mountain Landscape*, but was bought in.

56 | Dedham Church from Flatford c. 1810

Oil on canvas, 10.6 x 19.4 cm
 Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton
 2007.8.22

Although Dedham Church is a frequent landmark in Constable’s work, it is almost never studied from close up, unlike the churches of East Bergholt or Stoke-by-Nayland.¹ Here the church is seen from across the Stour at Flatford Mill. Constable’s father, Golding, had inherited the tenancy of the flourmill from his uncle Abram in 1764 and had lived in the mill since