



**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,
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
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58 | Dedham Vale from the Road to East Bergholt, Sunset 1810

Oil on canvas, 15.4 x 26 cm

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

2007.8.21

With the inclusion of the motifs of the times of day and the four seasons, Constable alludes to a tradition of elevating landscape from the quotidian to the grand philosophical themes of the passage of time and the workings of the universe. This oil sketch of *Dedham Vale from the Road to East Bergholt, Sunset* is one of a group of five that Constable worked on in preparation for his first major oil of Suffolk to be exhibited at the Royal Academy: *Dedham Vale: Morning* (W. H. Proby collection),¹ a process Michael Rosenthal has described as transforming “the sketch into a ‘Claude’.”² The other sketches are: *A Lane near East Bergholt, with a Man Resting* (private collection); *Dedham Vale* (private collection); *Dedham Vale* (private collection on loan to Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery), and *Dedham Vale* (private collection, Ohio).³ That the Clark sketch represents the end of the day rather than its commencement as depicted in the final oil, makes it a key work to understanding the conceptual evolution of one of Constable’s most important early paintings.

As with any series of sketches that culminate in a fully developed exhibition oil, establishing the order in which they were executed has been the dominant con-

cern of previous cataloguers. There is consensus that the only dated sketch is the earliest; inscribed “Octr 13. 1809. E. B.,” *A Lane near East Bergholt* is the same lane as at the right of the final painting. The viewpoint is different, as are the occupations of the figures and the time of day. Whereas the sketch depicts a weary traveler, his walking stick and hat lying at his side, the woman and man of the final version are erect and beginning their day. Charles Rhyne suggested that the Clark sketch is the second in the sequence, executed on location;⁴ Reynolds concurs.⁵ On the occasion of the 1991 Tate exhibition, the Clark sketch was placed as the first of the sketches Constable made when he returned to the subject in 1810; Ian Fleming-Williams and Leslie Parris add a cautionary note that “this does not necessarily mean that it was painted first.”⁶

Elements of the final painting appear in all four of the later panoramic sketches. All four depict the milestone that Constable finally inscribed “Dedham.” All four also include the trees on the right, which in the final painting become the more articulated trees shading the lane. Each also contributes a unique compositional element to the exhibited painting. Only the *Dedham Vale* now in an Ohio private collection includes the large tree on the left, leading to Rhyne’s proposal that Constable painted this sketch last and in his studio. In this first conception of the dominant tree, it blocks the view of Dedham church; the church is once again visible in the final painting. The black horse, seen in profile to the left of the cattle in the exhibited painting, appears in only one of the other sketches of *Dedham Vale*, where it is seen from behind at the far right.⁷

In addition to its evening setting, the Clark sketch also includes elements that do not appear in the other sketches. The cattle and herdsmen, though depicted with the bare minimum of strokes verging on abstraction, are clearly retained in the final painting. The figure to the right, hunched and leaning on his walking stick, is not. Thus, for his first major exhibition picture, Constable turned back time with his crystalline view of the Dedham valley. Rather than the somber mood evoked by the end of a long, hard day, Constable decided to light his exhibition piece with the more uplifting morning sun, by which the men, woman, and animals begin their traversal of the Suffolk countryside. EP

PROVENANCE Private collection, sold to Lloyd and Day; [Lloyd and Day, Effingham, Surrey, sold to Manton, 22 June 1983]; Sir Edwin A. G. Manton (1983–d. 2005); Manton Family Art Foundation (2005–7, given to the Clark); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007.

EXHIBITIONS New York 1988, pp. 36, 198, pl. 9; London 1991a, pp. 70–73, 75, no. 10, ill., as *Dedham Vale*; London 1991b, pp. 14–15, pl. 4, as *Dedham Vale*.

REFERENCES Rosenthal 1983, pp. 52–53, fig. 54; Parris 1994, pp. 28–30, no. 6, ill.; Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, p. 155, no. 11.3, vol. 2, pl. 887, as *Dedham Vale from the Lane to Flatford: Sunset*.

TECHNICAL REPORT The original support layer is a moderate-weight canvas with a thread count of 16 threads per cm. The support has been described as paper, but the canvas threads are clearly visible at the edges and in all the losses, and the canvas pattern is quite prominent on the surface in reflected light. The small scrap of primed fabric is irregularly cut, probably from a larger canvas, leaving the lower edge somewhat tapered. The picture had been mounted to a gray laminate cardboard 0.3 cm thick and then glued to a double layer of mahogany or walnut 1.3 cm thick. In 2009, the wood and cardboard supports were removed and a new linen lining was applied using Beva 371 sheet film. The yellowed varnish layers were removed, and old unfilled losses of paint and ground, as well as abrasions, were filled and inpainted. A layer of synthetic resin varnish was also applied.

The ground layers are comprised of a gray layer beneath the visible salmon-colored upper layer. One or both layers may have been commercially applied, as both were on the surface at the time the small piece of canvas was cut for this painting. Examination in normal and infrared light revealed a series of six vertical graphite lines, some running from the bottom edge up into the sky. These are too unevenly spaced to be a grid formation and do not appear to be related to the final image. The paint-layer brushstrokes are applied in

a rather loose manner using paint of paste-like consistency. Some brushwork visibly skips across the tops of the canvas threads. Several large yellow-brown areas in the foreground display the characteristics of the gum-based pigment gamboge, more commonly seen in watercolors, but occasionally evident in oil paintings.

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1. R 11.2.
 2. Rosenthal 1983, p. 52
 3. R 09.40, 11.4–6.
 4. New York 1988, p. 15.
 5. Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, p. 156.
 6. London 1991a, p. 71.
 7. R 11.4.

59 | Study of a Burdock c. 1810–14 or c. 1828

Oil on canvas, mounted on panel, 18.4 x 27.8 cm
(panel size)

Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton
2007.8.45

Numerous anecdotes in Charles Robert Leslie's *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable* and passages in Constable's correspondence reinforce the visual evidence of Constable's entire oeuvre: the pursuit of the accurate depiction of his landscape surroundings. In other words, Constable's role as an early advocate of visual naturalism, a concept closely tied to the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century, has been the prevailing interpretation of his career from soon after his death. Although paintings such as *The Wheat Field* (cat. 64) are replete with details of the rural life of East Anglia, Constable only rarely isolated small details in his studies.

The Clark *Study of a Burdock* is a rare exception in Constable's practice and has been grouped by Reynolds with a number of other small-scale studies of foliage and flowers. Dating of this group hinges on the inscription of *Study of Docks and Grasses*, which reads: "Brighton July 24th 1828."¹ A second *Study of Dock Leaves* is inscribed: "July 25, 1828."² Both these studies are executed in oil on paper. Three other studies of trolius blossoms are oil on card.³ A *Study of Ivy Geranium* is, like the Clark work, executed on a canvas with slightly smaller dimensions.⁴