



**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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Curtis R. Scott, Director of Publications
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Designed by Susan Marsh
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Proofread by June Cuffner
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Details:

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

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

wide visible brush marks running in several directions, and the dark pink color is visible throughout the image. The front surface has very visible, wide graphite underdrawing lines. A dark horizon line starting at the top of the left trees roughly divides the surface in half, and lines in the left tree area seem to be drawn for a different image. When viewed upside down under infrared reflectography, they make some sense as a smaller scale landscape with an arched bridge and buildings. Also visible under infrared is a dark painted roof shape in the sky, to the left of the present roof, which suggests that the house was initially begun higher up and to the left of the final placement. There may be a brown wash underlying some of the foreground colors. The paint is applied in thin vehicular strokes in a sketchy manner with few details. Very little detail appears anywhere in the image, and the lower left is particularly sketchy.

There are widely spaced cupped horizontal cracks possibly caused by an early rolling and diagonal stress cracks in the two lower corners from uneven stretcher tension. There are old overlapped and abraded paint disturbances from previous flaking and consolidation. New flaking paint along the edges, in the house, and in the right sky was consolidated locally from the front with warm gelatin and a tacking iron in 2009. Old debris attached to the surface appears to have been there prior to the painting. Some overlapped edges and lifted crack sites are abraded by cleaning. Small circular marks occur in the paint, possibly either from rain or some diluent such as turpentine hitting the surface during the painting process. During the 1992 treatment, several large areas of the sky were retouched, with scratch marks to imitate the artist's brush marks and graphite lines to resemble cracks. The edges and corners are heavily retouched. The upper right corner looks like it was bent over and creased at an earlier time.

1. R 14.2 and R 35.1.
2. Leslie 1845, p. 45.
3. On 2 Aug. 1824, Abram related to John that his belief that the property was overvalued was proven correct when the farm failed to meet its reserve of £2,000 at the 17 July auction. See Beckett 1962–70, vol. 1, p. 216.
4. For a brief account of what is known about Lott, see Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, p. 162.
5. R 02.13.
6. R 14.46. There is an oil sketch for this painting at Tate Britain, London (R 14.47).
7. The three sketches are R 11.36–38.
8. R 13.20.
9. Parris 1994, pp. 33–36.
10. See Technical Report.
11. John Constable to John Dunthorne, 22 Feb. 1814, in Beckett 1962–70, vol. 1, p. 101.

61 | Flailing Turnip-heads, East Bergholt

c. 1812–15

Oil on canvas, 35.6 x 44.5 cm

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

2007.8.25

The rural life of Suffolk into which Constable was born and which he knew firsthand was that of the farmer, the miller, and the lock-keeper, as well as the boatmen and carters who were involved in transporting the milled grain along the rivers. Although Constable's paintings, such as *Dedham Vale: Morning* (1811; W. H. Proby collection), *The Hay Wain* (1821; National Gallery, London), and *The Leaping Horse* (1825; Royal Academy of Arts, London), have been held up as iconic images of an idyllic East Anglian landscape, labor is, nevertheless, at the heart of these works.¹ The sketch *Flailing Turnip-heads, East Bergholt* foregrounds manual labor both in its subject matter and in the artist's working of the oil paint. Through the integration of the figures performing the labor into the surrounding landscape, Constable used technical and compositional tools to explore the relationship between identity and location, establishing a parallel between the laborers who worked the land and the artist who worked pigment. In his pursuit of the "natural painture," sketching in the fields and along the rivers in preparation for larger-scale paintings executed in his London studio, Constable replicated the seasonal rhythms of rural life, where the farmer followed a well-established schedule of planting, growing, and harvesting.

During the years 1812–15, after having spent the first half of the year in London, Constable would return to Suffolk in the summer to draw and paint extensively around his childhood home. This sketch has been dated to these years and connected to *View at East Bergholt* (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven).² While the Yale painting shows the same slate-roofed building, it extends to include more of the Ryber valley, showing a minimum of human activity.³ In the Clark sketch, Constable depicts the threshing of turnip-heads in a field owned by his father, Golding. A member of the mustard or cabbage family, the turnip-head, also called rape, was cultivated for its seed, which was used to feed cattle and sheep. To ensure the collection of these seeds, the threshing



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took place on a cloth, as is depicted in Constable's sketch. The presence of a fire in front of the thresher is explained by Arthur Young's 1804 account of the agricultural practices of Suffolk. According to Young, the remaining straw was burned after the seeds were beaten out of the turnip-heads, a practice he considered wasteful.⁴

Although Constable has applied the paint in thick, confident strokes, his typical reddish brown priming is still visible in places such as the sky on the right of the composition and where the treetops meet the sky.⁵ The individuated strokes with which Constable defined the registers of earth, trees, and sky are applied with equal ease to the six figures. With a minimum of fluid, exact lines, Constable painted each figure in a different pose. The largest and most centrally located figure, his broad back turned toward the viewer, raises his staff. To leverage his strength, he leans forward as he prepares to bring down his thresher. In the same way that Constable was later to capture fleeting moments of meteorological activity, the artist suspends the action of beating turnip-heads to the split second between the laborer's full extension to raise his staff and his adjustment of his body to reverse the action and bring back down this staff.

The tripartite, horizontal structure of the canvas

is matched by three vertical groupings: the thresher and the figure standing behind the fire are bracketed by two sets of two younger workers. Behind him and to his left, one laborer kneels while another bends forward, forming one rectangle of white above one of blue. Further to the right of the canvas, two figures crouch close to another fire. One kneels with his head erect; the other figure's head is bent, following his bright white sleeve in a downward motion. This lead white echoes the sleeves of the kneeling figure on the left, just as the dash of the latter's red kerchief is repeated in the flames of the fires and the vest of the laborer in the group at the right.

Enhancing the effect that the individual parts are related to the whole, Constable rhymed the elements of the landscape with the position of the laborers. Each figural grouping is set against trees that reinforce the postures and positions of these workers. The tall conifers, one slightly higher than the other, rise up behind the flat backs of the bending workers. The threshing pole of the central laborer links him to the branches of the deciduous tree, its leaves crowning the branches as the brown felt hat caps the thresher. A distant pair of conifers lines up directly above the two figures at the right.

Although this sketch did not become the basis for

a larger exhibited painting, it is useful to compare it to J. M. W. Turner's *Ploughing Up Turnips, near Slough ("Windsor")* (1809; Tate Britain, London).⁶ While the title under which the painting was exhibited in Turner's gallery in 1809 highlights the labor involved in the cultivation of turnips, no such activity is actually taking place. Instead, the numerous figures that populate the foreground are far less interested in the turnips than is the black cow that noses at the pile of vegetables. Constable's sketch, in contrast, more effectively shows the force of the action of the thresher and the virtuosity of the artist's first approach to his subject.

The sketch was unknown to scholars until 1986, when it appeared on the art market. It had been in the collection of a Northumberland family for two generations.⁷ Prior to that, the early history of the sketch has been linked to James Carpenter or his son William on the basis of an inscription on the back that reads "Mr. Carpenters Collection." James Carpenter was a bookseller and publisher, whose purchase of *Landscape: Boys Fishing* (present whereabouts unknown) when it was exhibited at the British Institution in 1814 introduced him to Constable and provided a needed boost to the artist's confidence.⁸ Carpenter made further purchases, and after the artist's death published C. R. Leslie's *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, Esq., R.A.* in 1843. EP

PROVENANCE Mr. Carpenter;⁹ private collection; sale, Sotheby's, London, 12 Mar. 1986, no. 96, sold to Leger Galleries; [Leger Galleries, London, sold to Manton, 9 June 1986]; Sir Edwin A. G. Manton, New York (1986–d. 2005); Manton Family Art Foundation (2005–7, given to the Clark); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007.

EXHIBITIONS New York 1988, pp. 17–18, 35, pl. 8 (in reverse); London 1991a, p. 15, 106, no. 38, ill.; London 1991b, p. 21, pl. 14; New York 2000; Paris 2002–3, p. 116, no. 53, ill.; Williamstown 2007a, no cat.

REFERENCES Parris 1991, p. 92, fig. 6; Leger Galleries 1992, pp. 148–49, ill.; Parris 1994, pp. 37–38, no. 9, ill.; Miller 1995, p. 576; Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, p. 187, no. 13.26, vol. 2, pl. 1086.¹⁰

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a moderate-weight canvas with a weave count of 13 threads per cm. The painting has a very old and blackened glue lining with a weave of 16 threads per cm. The five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher is equally aged and probably dates to the time of the lining. Although the tacks are rusting, the lining seems stable. The paint layer has scattered wandering age cracks and one old disturbed site in a cypress tree at the right. There

seems to be some exposure of the pink and black ground layers from cleaning abrasion. The picture looks recently cleaned. There is some residual grime and varnish, and small retouches have been made throughout the sky and along the edges. In general, the surface looks fine, with a few minor rubs in the varnish from previous glazing placed too close to the picture.

The ground layering structure is complex. There is clearly a pink layer extending over the lower half of the picture. The ground below the sky, however, is quite visible and seems to be two-toned, with a black upper layer abraded in places down to the pink color. It is likely that an off-white layer exists across the entire surface, below the other colors. This suggests that the artist was adding and possibly subtracting portions of the ground for particular effects. Although there does not appear to be any underdrawing, there is a pentimento of a large leafless tree rising into the sky beginning to the left of the rightmost figures. The scale of the tree suggests it was the beginning of an abandoned sketch, and perhaps its attempted eradication by the artist is responsible for the ground abrasion in the right half of the sky. There seems to be a brown wash visible in some areas of the foreground. The paint is a vehicular consistency and painted wet-into-wet. Under low magnification, large hand-ground paint particles are visible, along with scattered white brush bristles.

1. R 11.2, 21.1, and 25.1.

2. R 13.23.

3. New York 1988, p. 17.

4. Young 1804, p. 94.

5. For Constable's priming practices, see London 1991a, pp. 496–98.

6. For a discussion of the possible political subtext of Turner's painting, see Miller 1995, pp. 573–83.

7. This information comes from a letter written by R. M. Festing of Sotheby's in June 1989 to Leslie Parris; he stated that the seller did not want her identity to be revealed.

8. Reynolds 13.1. R. B. Beckett noted how important this purchase was to Constable, who was able to write to his uncle David Pike Watts about the sale. See Beckett 1962–70, vol. 4, p. 135.

9. An inscription on the back of the stretcher reads "Mr. Carpenters Collection." It is unclear whether this refers to James Carpenter or his son William Hookham Carpenter. Both Carpenters were friends of Constable and collected his work.

10. Under his provenance section, Reynolds incorrectly gives Leggatt's as the dealer from whom Manton purchased the sketch.