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

VOLUME ONE

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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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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)

81

81 | **Tree in a Meadow** c. 1850

Oil on wood-pulp board, mounted on canvas, 24.3 x 30.3 cm (board size), 25 x 31.3 cm (stretcher size)
Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton
2007.8.63

Like *Tree in a Landscape* (cat. 82), *Tree in a Meadow* was attributed to John Constable when Manton acquired it in 1966. As a result of Ian Fleming-Williams and Leslie Parris's research in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the sketch was later given to Constable's youngest son, Lionel. Although the authors do not give any stylistic reasons for their attribution, the calligraphic strokes of the tree branches, the solid shadow cast by the tree, and the unresolved grasses of the foreground are characteristic of Lionel's hand. Fleming-Williams and Parris cite *Tree in a Meadow* as an example of how the confusion of Lionel's work with his father's has often led to misleading titles.[1] They observe that there is no visual evidence in this sketch to suggest that Lionel was working in the Suffolk locale that was so often the subject of his father's brush. In fact, the Constable scholars point out that, in the case of settings, Lionel's practice differed from his father's. They contrast John Constable's characteristic concentration on locations with which he was intensely familiar with the more varied sites depicted by Lionel, and rightly observe that the son's landscapes overlap his father's only in the case of Hampstead.

The subsumption of Lionel's productions into the oeuvre of his father can be explained by the son's study of his father's work, combined with the following generation's misremembering the authorship of certain works. At his father's death in 1837, Lionel was just nine years old. Letters written by his older brother Alfred indicate that Lionel had already begun to try his hand at drawing by the early 1840s, and that he studied in a more formal setting at Sass's Academy between 1847 and 1848. From what we know of his work, however, it is clear that Lionel modeled his painting on his father's studies of the landscape. A clue to his father's influence can be gleaned from those works he chose in 1848 when the artist's children divided what remained in his studio among themselves.[2] Lionel selected works such as *View at Epsom* (1809; Tate Britain, London), *The Mill Stream* (1814; Tate Britain, London), and *A View at Salisbury from Archdeacon Fisher's House* (1829; Victoria and Albert Museum, London), works in which trees and

their shadows play a prominent role.[3] This interest in the effect of light on trees is often seen in the work of Lionel.

A measure of Lionel's success in learning from his father's views of the English countryside is that within a generation even his family members could not distinguish between his paintings and those of his father. In 1899, the firm of Leggatt's Gallery staged an exhibition of nearly one hundred oil paintings and one hundred drawings by John Constable bought primarily from the Royal Academician's grandson Hugh, Lionel's nephew. The exhibition was a testament to the growing appreciation of the artist's work. Among these paintings were works now known to be by Lionel. A Leggatt label on the stretcher of the Clark sketch indicates that this work was catalogued as number 75 under the title *Dedham Water Meadows*. However, there exists another, smaller sketch of the same subject purported to have a Leggatt label, contributing to the confusion surrounding clear identification of the exhibition history of works now given to Lionel.[4] As we have seen in the case of Lionel Constable's *Cottage* (cat. 79), the 1899 exhibition was not only a milestone in the public perception and understanding of John Constable, but also the source of misidentifications and confusions that remain to this day. EP

PROVENANCE Hugh Golding Constable, the artist's nephew, by descent; [Leggatt's, London, 1899, possibly sold to Young and Agnew's, 1899]; [Alexander Young and Agnew's, London, sold to Wallis, 6 May 1909];[5] [Wallis & Son (The French Gallery), London, from 1909]; John Edward Taylor; Lt. Col. A. G. Penchen;[6] sale, Parke-Bernet, New York, 7 April 1966, no. 59, as *Dedham Water Meadows*, by John Constable, sold to Manton; Sir Edwin A. G. Manton, New York (1966–d. 2005); Manton Family Art Foundation (2005–7, given to the Clark, as *Meadow Scene "Dedham Water Meadows"*); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007.

EXHIBITIONS Possibly London 1899b, no. 75, as *Dedham Water Meadows*, by John Constable.

REFERENCES Fleming-Williams and Parris 1984, pp. 228–29, pl. 138, as *"Dedham Water Meadows"*; Parris 1994, pp. 107, 109, no. 36, ill., as *Meadow Scene ("Dedham Water Meadows")*.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a thin (0.1 cm) woodpulp board, glue-mounted to moderate-weight linen with a weave of 19 threads/cm. The mounting is slightly off-square and the stretcher is a five-member mortise-and-tenon design. There are a small straight-line lump or blister in the lower left corner, a small lump in the center right sky between the two supports, and scattered debris both above and below the paint film. Old lumpy repairs can be seen in the far left shrubbery and the trunk of the large tree. Frame rebate pressure marks show along the upper edge, and there is a furrowed scratch in the upper left sky which occurred when the paint was still wet. The painting was cosmetically treated in 1990 by John Bull of London. There are no old varnish residues, and the new surface coating has a moderately matte reflectance. Three fairly large retouches are visible in ultraviolet light along the right edge.

The ground layer is white, with a pebbly texture possibly induced by the large pigment particles. One pin mark in the upper right suggests that the support was pinned to a board for painting purposes. The presence of a beige or brownish wash or imprimatura layer suggests that the artist may have prepared or adjusted the ground layer himself. The toned ground is visible in the sketchy lower left foreground. There was no detectable underdrawing. The sky seems to have been painted and set first, and much of the tree foliage was produced by using wet-into-wet brushwork. Bristle brushes up to 1.3 cm wide were used in the sky, and small sables were used for much of the landscape, with scattered brush hairs embedded in the paint.

1. Fleming-Williams and Parris first published the attribution of this sketch in Fleming-Williams and Paris 1984, p. 228.
2. An account of this division is related in Fleming-Williams and Paris 1984, p. 61.
3. R 09.8, 14.47, and 29.40.
4. See Sotheby's 1987, p. 123, no. 90. Leslie Parris writes that the work in the Sotheby's catalogue "is said to carry a Leggatt label on the back." See Parris 1994, p. 109.
5. Young and Agnew's owned the work in half shares.
6. The ownership of the work by Taylor and Penchen is mentioned in Parke-Bernet 1966, no. 59.

82 | Tree in a Landscape c. 1850

Oil on cream wove paper, mounted on panel, 33.5 x 26.1 cm (sheet size), 34.3 x 27.2 cm (panel size)
Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton
2007.8.62

A relatively early acquisition by Sir Edwin Manton, who purchased the sketch in 1971 as by John Constable, *Tree in a Landscape* is now considered to be by his youngest son, Lionel Bicknell Constable. Charles