

Turner and Constable



01 Turner, *Self Portrait* c1799

Joseph Mallord William Turner RA (1775 – 1851) was an English Romantic painter, printmaker and watercolourist, known for his expressive colourisation, imaginative landscapes and turbulent, often violent marine paintings. Born in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London, to a modest lower middle-class family, he lived in London all his life, retaining his Cockney accent and assiduously avoiding the trappings of success and fame. A child prodigy, Turner studied at the Royal Academy of Arts from 1789, enrolling when he was 14, and exhibited his first work there at 21. During this period, he also served as an architectural draftsman. He earned a steady income from commissions and sales, which due to his troubled, contrary nature, were often begrudgingly accepted. He opened his own gallery in 1804 and became professor of perspective at the Academy in 1807, where he lectured until 1828, although he was viewed as profoundly inarticulate. He traveled to Europe from 1802, typically returning with voluminous sketchbooks.

Intensely private, eccentric and reclusive, Turner was a controversial figure throughout his career. He did not marry, but fathered two daughters, Eveline (1801–1874) and Georgiana (1811–1843), by his housekeeper Sarah Danby. He became more pessimistic and morose as he got older, especially after the death of his father, after which his outlook deteriorated, and his gallery fell into disrepair and neglect, and his art intensified. He lived in near poverty circumstances and in poor health from 1845, and died in London in 1851 aged seventy-six. Turner is buried in Saint Paul's Cathedral, London.

He left behind over 2,000 paintings and 19,000 drawings and sketches. He had been championed by the leading English art critic **John Ruskin** from 1840, and is today regarded as having elevated landscape painting to an eminence rivaling history painting.

His father was a barber and wig maker. His mother, Mary Marshall, came from a family of butchers.

Around 1786, Turner was sent to Margate on the north-east Kent coast. There he produced a series of drawings of the town and surrounding area that foreshadowed his later work. By this time, Turner's drawings were being exhibited in his father's shop window and sold for a few shillings. His father boasted to the artist **Thomas Stothard** that: "My son, sir, is going to be a painter". In 1789, Turner again stayed with his uncle.

Turner entered the Royal Academy of Art in 1789, aged 14, and was accepted into the academy a year later by **Sir Joshua Reynolds**.

His first watercolour, ***A View of the Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth*** was accepted for the Royal Academy summer exhibition of 1790 when he was 15. He exhibited watercolours each year at the academy while painting in the winter and travelling in the summer widely throughout Britain, particularly to Wales, where he produced a wide range of sketches for working up into studies and watercolours.



02 Turner, *Fishermen at Sea* 1796

In 1796, Turner exhibited *Fishermen at Sea*, his first oil painting for the academy. It depicts a moonlit view of fishermen on rough seas near the Needles, off the Isle of Wight. It juxtaposes the fragility of human life, represented by the small boat with its flickering lamp, and the sublime power of nature, represented by the dark clouded sky, the wide sea, and the threatening rocks in the background. The cold light of the moon at night contrasts with the warmer glow of the fishermen's lantern.

The image was praised by contemporary critics and founded Turner's reputation, as both an oil painter and a painter of maritime scenes. Art historian Andrew Wilton has commented that the image: "Is a summary of all that had been said about the sea by the artists of the 18th century."



03 Van der Velde the younger, *Three Ships in a Gale* 1673

For his painting Turner drew inspiration from the art of Willem van de Velde the Younger.



04 Turner, *Dutch Boats in a Gale* 1801

The Sublime, the Beautiful and the Picturesque: how to study and record nature

Interest in landscape painting was accompanied by theories on how to look at nature. In *The Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), writer and politician **Edmund Burke** defined the Sublime as an aesthetic response to overwhelming phenomena filtered through art or literature, rather than experienced at first hand. Artists who evoked thundering waterfalls, erupting volcanoes, tempestuous seas and violent storms were responding to the Sublime. Many of Turner's storms at sea fall into this category.

Burke defined the Beautiful as the opposite of the Sublime, characterised by small scale, smooth surfaces and gentle luminosity. Theories of the picturesque, were current from about 1770 to 1820 (Turner was born in 1775). Central to the development of these ideas was the **Reverend William Gilpin**, who, in his accounts of a series of *Picturesque tours of Britain*, encouraged travellers to look out for views that were as pretty as a picture (that is, that resembled the paintings of **Claude** or **Poussin**). The definition of the picturesque included roughness and unevenness. Ruins and cottages were desirable along with sandy paths peopled by gypsies or peasants. Many of **Thomas**

Gainsborough's landscapes could be defined as picturesque.



05 Turner, *The Wreck of a Transport Ship* c1810



06 Turner, *Walton Reach* 1805

07 Constable, *View at Epsom* 1809

It was probably during the summer of 1807 that Turner made the oil sketches of Thames scenery, evidently direct from nature, from a boat. Some of these are painted on thin mahogany, the reddish wood often showing through the rapidly applied brushstrokes. The immediate rendering of the relation of treetops and buildings to skies taught Turner a new understanding of landscape and shows surprising similarities to the almost contemporary sketches by Constable, such as the View of Epsom, and also to the somewhat later outdoor work of Corot. His friend and executor, Reverend, Henry Scott Trimmer, records that Turner used to paint large canvases direct from nature from his boat: 'In my judgement these are among his very finest productions: no retouching, everything firmly in its place...This is the perfection of his art...'



08 Turner, *Snow Storm; Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* 1812



09 David, *Napoleon at the Saint Bernard Pass* 1801

The painting contains the first appearance in Turner's work of a swirling oval vortex of wind, rain and cloud, a dynamic composition of contrasting light and dark that will recur in later works. It depicts the struggle of Hannibal's soldiers to cross the Maritime Alps in 218BC, opposed by the forces of nature and local tribes. A curving black storm cloud dominates the sky, poised to descend on the soldiers in the valley below, with an orange-yellow sun attempting to break through the clouds. A white avalanche cascades down the mountain to the right. Hannibal himself is not clearly depicted, but may be riding the elephant just visible in the distance. The large animal is dwarfed by the storm and the landscape, with the sunlit plains of Italy opening up beyond. The painting is Turner's response to **Jacques-Louis David's** portrait of ***Napoleon Crossing the Alps***, of Napoleon leading his army over the Great St Bernard Pass in May 1800, which Turner had seen during a visit to Paris in 1802. Turner set his painting in the Val d'Aosta, one of the possible routes that Hannibal may have used to cross the Alps, which Turner had also visited in 1802.



10 Turner, *Dido Building Carthage* 1815

The painting is one of Turner's most important works, greatly influenced by the luminous classical landscapes of Claude Lorraine. Turner described it as his chef d'oeuvre.

The subject is a classical landscape taken from Virgil's *Aeneid*. The figure in blue and white on the left is Dido, directing the builders of the new city of Carthage. The figure in front of her, wearing armour and facing away from the viewer, may be her Trojan lover Aeneas. Some children are playing with a flimsy toy boat in the water, symbolising the growing but fragile naval power of Carthage, while the tomb of her dead husband Sychaeus, on the right side of the painting, on the other bank of the estuary, foreshadows the eventual doom of Carthage.

In the first draft of his first will in 1829, Turner stipulated that he should be buried in the canvas of *Dido building Carthage*, but changed his mind to make a donation of the painting and ***The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire*** to the National Gallery, on condition that his two paintings should always be hung either side of **Claude's *Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba***, a painting that Turner first saw when it was part of the Angerstein collection which later became the nucleus for the National Gallery. His revised will of 1831 changed the bequest, so *Dido building Carthage* would be accompanied by ***Sun rising through Vapour***, and the two works would be exhibited alongside *Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* and *Landscape with the Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca*.



10a Claude, *The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* 1648



10b Claude, *Landscape with the Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca* 1648



10c Turner, *The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire* 1817



10d Turner, *Sun Rising through Vapour, Fishermen Cleaning and Selling Fish* 1807



11 Turner, *Venice, The Rialto* 1821-23

Turner visited Venice three times during his lifetime - in 1819, in 1833 and in 1840

During the Napoleonic wars, between 1793 and 1815, travel was no longer possible between Britain and the continent, the British began to pay more attention to their own landscape, providing work for a flourishing school of topographical artists (painters who accurately describe the appearance of towns and country). They recorded cities, focussing on their historic buildings, as well as painting sites of historic interest or natural beauty. They also recorded people's occupations; fishermen at sea, farmers and what now seem like quaint occupations such as water-carrying.



12 Turner, *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* 1829

It depicts a scene from Homer's *Odyssey*, showing Odysseus (Ulysses) standing on his ship deriding Polyphemus, one of the cyclopes he encounters and has recently blinded, who is disguised behind one of the mountains on the left side. Additional details include the Trojan Horse, a scene from Virgil's *Aeneid*, on one of the flags and the horses of Apollo rising above the horizon.

The later the date the more atmospheric Turner's paintings become. As early as 1816, the essayist **William Hazlitt** had talked of his "representations not so properly of the objects of nature as of the medium through which they are seen...someone said of his landscapes that they were pictures of nothing, and very like." Constable said, In a letter of 1836 to his brother George, "Turner has outdone himself; he seems to paint with tinted steam, so evanescent, and so airy."



13 Turner, *Marley* c1829-30

Watercolour sketch

Henry Moore: "Turner - whether on canvas or paper - can create almost measurable distances of space and air - air that you can draw, in which you can work out what the section through it would be. The space he creates is not emptiness; it is filled with 'solid' atmosphere."



14 Turner, *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons* 1834-5

Along with thousands of other spectators, Turner himself witnessed the Burning of Parliament from the south bank of the River Thames, opposite Westminster. He made sketches using both pencil and watercolour in two sketchbooks from different vantage points, including from a rented boat, although it is unclear that the sketches were made instantly, en plein air.

The paintings were made in late 1834 or early 1835. Turner spent many hours reworking both paintings on the varnishing day immediately before the exhibition opened to the public.

The first painting, exhibited at the British Institution in February 1835, shows the Houses of Parliament from the upstream side of Westminster Bridge. The buildings on the other side of the river are wreathed in golden flames. The fire is consuming the chamber of the House of Commons in St Stephen's Hall, and illuminating the towers of Westminster Abbey. The fire reflects dull red in the water, with a crowd of spectators in the foreground. To the right of the painting, Westminster Bridge looms like an iceberg, larger than life, but the perspective of the part of the bridge closest to the far bank is strongly distorted where it is lit up by the flames.



15 Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire* tugged to her last berth to be broken up 1839

The 98-gun ship HMS Temeraire was one of the ships of the line to have played a distinguished role in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The painting depicts HMS Temeraire being towed by a paddle-wheel steam tug towards its final berth in Rotherhithe in south-east London in 1838 to be broken up for scrap.

When Turner came to paint this picture he was at the height of his career, having exhibited at the Royal Academy, London, for 40 years. He was renowned for his highly atmospheric paintings in which he explored the subjects of the weather, the sea and the effects of light. He spent much of his life near the River Thames and did many paintings of ships and waterside scenes, both in watercolour and in oils. Turner frequently made small sketches and then worked them into finished paintings in the studio.

The composition of this painting is unusual in that the most significant object, the old warship, is positioned well to the left of the painting, where it rises in stately splendour and almost ghostlike colours against a triangle of blue sky and rising mist that throws it into relief. The beauty of the old ship is in stark contrast to the dirty blackened tugboat with its tall smokestack, which scurries across the still surface of the river.

Turner has used the triangle of blue to frame a second triangle of masted ships, which progressively decrease in size as they become more distant. Temeraire and tugboat have passed a small river craft with its gaff rigged sail barely catching a breeze. Beyond this a square-rigger drifts, with every bit of sail extended. Another small craft shows as a patch of white farther down the river. In the far distance, beyond the second tugboat which makes its way towards them, a three-masted ship rides at anchor. The becalmed sailing vessels show the obsolescence of sail.

On the opposite side of the painting to *Temeraire*, and exactly the same distance from the frame as the ship's main mast, the sun sets above the estuary, its rays extending into the clouds above it, and across the surface of the water. The flaming red of the clouds is reflected in the river. It exactly repeats the colour of the smoke which pours from the funnel of the tugboat. The sun setting symbolises the end of an epoch in the history of the British Royal Navy.

Behind *Temeraire*, a gleaming sliver of the waxing moon casts a silvery beam across the river, symbolising the commencement of the new, industrial era. The demise of heroic strength is the subject of the painting, and it has been suggested that the ship stands for the artist himself, with an accomplished and glorious past but now contemplating his mortality. Turner called the work his "darling", which may have been due to its beauty, or his identification with the subject.



16 Turner, *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhoon coming on* 1840

In this classic example of a Romantic maritime painting, Turner depicts a ship, visible in the background, sailing through a tumultuous sea of churning water and leaving scattered human forms floating in its wake.

Turner was inspired to paint *The Slave Ship* in 1840 after reading *The History and Abolition of the Slave Trade* by **Thomas Clarkson**. In 1781, the captain of the slave ship *Zong* had ordered 133 slaves to be thrown overboard so that insurance payments could be collected. This event probably inspired Turner to create his landscape and to choose to coincide its exhibition with a meeting of the British Anti-Slavery Society. Although slavery had been outlawed in the British Empire since 1833, Turner and many other abolitionists believed that slavery should be outlawed around the world. Turner thus exhibited his painting during the anti-slavery conference, intending for Prince Albert, who was speaking at the event, to see it and be moved to increase British anti-slavery efforts.

The first impression that the painting creates is of an enormous deep-red sunset over a stormy sea, an indication of an approaching typhoon. Upon closer inspection one can discern a ship sailing off into the distance. The masts of the ship are red, matching the blood-red colour of the sky and the sickly copper colour of the water, which serves to blur the lines between various objects in the painting. The ship's sails are also not unfurled, revealing that the ship is preparing for the typhoon. In the foreground can be seen a number of bodies floating in the water; their dark skin and chained hands and feet indicate that they are slaves, thrown overboard from the ship. Looking even more carefully, one can see fish and sea monsters swimming in the water, possibly preparing to eat the slaves, and sea gulls circling overhead above the chaos.



17 Turner, *Snow Storm; Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* 1842

An inscription on the painting relates that The Author was in this Storm on the Night the "Ariel" left Harwich. Turner later recounted a story about the background of the painting:

“ I did not paint it to be understood, but I wished to show what such a scene was like; I got the sailors to lash me to the mast to observe it; I was lashed for four hours, and I did not expect to escape, but I felt bound to record it if I did. ”

He was 67 years old at the time.

Turner had investigated the interactions between nature and the new technology of steamboats in at least five paintings in the previous decade. Throughout his career, Turner engaged with issues of urbanism, industry, railroads and steam power.

Early critical response to the painting was largely negative, with one critic calling it "soapsuds and whitewash". **John Ruskin**, the leading English art critic of the Victorian era, though, wrote in 1843 in his book *Modern Painters* that the painting was "one of the very grandest statements of sea-motion, mist and light, that has ever been put on canvas." Reportedly Turner was hurt by the criticism, repeating "soapsuds and whitewash" over and over again, and saying, "What would they have? I wonder what they think the sea's like? I wish they'd been in it". Ruskin commented, "It is thus, too often, that ignorance sits in judgment on the works of genius". More recently, art historian Alexandra Wettlaufer wrote that the painting is one of Turner's "most famous, and most obscure, sublime depictions".



18 Turner, *Interior of Petworth House* c1837



19 Turner, *Petworth Park*

As Turner's originality revealed itself it alienated the aristocratic men of taste, and it was, in consequence, difficult for him to sell his pictures into the principal collections. There was, however, one among the great amateurs of the art world who extended to Turner first his patronage and later his friendship. This was **George Wyndham**, third Earl of Egremont. As early as 1802 he bought ***Ships bearing up for Anchorage***, and other works year by year.

We do not know when Turner first visited Petworth, Lord Egremont's house in Sussex. In 1809 he was commissioned to paint views of the house and park, but it was not until 20 years later that he was received as a member of the family and given his own painting room with a specially constructed window. The enchantment of the place and the genial exhilaration of Lord Egremont's friendship combined to give an almost miraculous quality to the many paintings and watercolours he made there.



20 Constable, *Dedham Vale* 1802

John Constable, RA (1776 – 1837) was an English landscape painter in the naturalistic tradition. Born in Suffolk, he is known principally for his landscape paintings of Dedham Vale, the area

surrounding his home — now known as "Constable Country" — which he invested with an intensity of affection. "I should paint my own places best", he wrote to his friend **John Fisher** in 1821, "painting is but another word for feeling".

He was born in East Bergholt, a village on the River Stour in Suffolk. His father was a wealthy corn merchant, owner of Flatford Mill in East Bergholt and, later, Dedham Mill in Essex.

In 1799, Constable persuaded his father to let him pursue a career in art. Entering the Royal Academy Schools as a probationer, he attended life classes and anatomical dissections, and studied and copied old masters. Among works that particularly inspired him during this period were paintings by **Thomas Gainsborough**, **Claude Lorrain**, **Peter Paul Rubens**, **Annibale Carracci** and **Jacob van Ruisdael**. He also read widely among poetry and sermons, and later proved a notably articulate artist.

Kenneth Clark in *The Romantic Rebellion* says: "Without any doubt the great works of Constable were done at the point when his desire to be a 'natural' painter and his need to express his restless, passionate character overlap. Through his violence of feeling, concealed under a conventional exterior, he was able to revolutionise our own feelings about our surroundings. The conviction that open spaces and areas of rural scenery must be saved for the refreshment of our spirits owes more to Constable than to any other artist. While Turner, with greater gifts, was transforming the 'beauty spots' of Europe, Constable was teaching us all to realise that our own countryside could be taken exactly as it is, and and yet become more precious to us."

Constable: "Painting is a science and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature. Why, then, may not a landscape be considered as a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but experiments?"

"Speaking to a lawyer about pictures is something like talking to a butcher about humanity."

His most famous paintings include **Wivenhoe Park** of 1816, Dedham Vale of 1802 and **The Hay Wain** of 1821. Although his paintings are now among the most popular and valuable in British art, Constable was never financially successful. He did not become a member of the establishment until he was elected to the Royal Academy at the age of 52. His work was embraced in France, where he sold more works than in his native England and inspired the Barbizon school.



21 Constable, *The Bridges Family* 1804

To make ends meet, Constable took up portraiture, which he found dull, though he executed many fine portraits.



22 Constable, *Portrait of Maria Bicknell* 1816

Maria Elizabeth Bicknell (1788-1828)

From 1809, his childhood friendship with Maria Elizabeth Bicknell developed into a deep, mutual love. Their marriage in 1816 when Constable was 40 was opposed by Maria's grandfather, Dr Rhudde, rector of East Bergholt. He considered the Constables his social inferiors and threatened Maria with disinheritance. Maria's father, Charles Bicknell, solicitor to King George IV and the Admiralty, was reluctant to see Maria throw away her inheritance. Maria pointed out to John that a penniless marriage would detract from any chances he had of making a career in painting. Golding and Ann Constable, while approving the match, held out no prospect of supporting the marriage until Constable was financially secure.



23 Constable, *Boat Building near Flatford Mill* 1815

In his youth, Constable embarked on amateur sketching trips in the surrounding Suffolk and Essex countryside, which was to become the subject of a large proportion of his art. These scenes, in his own words, "made me a painter, and I am grateful"; "the sound of water escaping from mill dams etc., willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork, I love such things."

In 1806 Constable undertook a two-month tour of the Lake District. He told his friend and biographer, **Charles Leslie**, that the solitude of the mountains oppressed his spirits, and Leslie wrote:

"His nature was peculiarly social and could not feel satisfied with scenery, however grand in itself, that did not abound in human associations. He required villages, churches, farmhouses and cottages."

Constable quietly rebelled against the artistic culture that taught artists to use their imagination to compose their pictures rather than nature itself. He told Leslie, "When I sit down to make a sketch from nature, the first thing I try to do is to forget that I have ever seen a picture".

Although Constable produced paintings throughout his life for the "finished" picture market of patrons and R.A. exhibitions, constant refreshment in the form of on-the-spot studies was essential to his working method. He was never satisfied with following a formula. "The world is wide", he wrote, "no two days are alike, nor even two hours; neither were there ever two leaves of a tree alike since the creation of all the world; and the genuine productions of art, like those of nature, are all distinct from each other."



24 Constable, *Wivenhoe Park* 1816



25 Constable, *The White Horse* 1819

Constable did not send a major work to the Academy in 1818, his mind no doubt turned to marriage and fatherhood. He was also still struggling to make the large-scale canvases he wanted to show at the Academy, which turned him down as an Associate in November 1818. From this point on he began to make six-foot sketches in his studio, a unique practice in the history of Western art and one which has marked him out as distinctly 'modern' in his approach. His great paintings in the early 1820s are of incidents in the working life of the River Stour, usually at noon: ***The White Horse*** 1819, for example, shows a horse being ferried across the river. It was a critical success and Constable was voted an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1819.

Encouraged by this breakthrough, Constable sought to exhibit a six-foot canvas each year, slowly refining his compositional impact and deepening the drama of time and place. *The Hay Wain* 1821, with its focus on the hay cart under dense clusters of clouds, evokes a specific midday moment as the vehicle turns towards the distant fields.



26 Constable, *The Hay Wain* 1821

The Hay Wain depicts a rural scene on the River Stour between the English counties of Suffolk and Essex

It is one of a series of paintings by Constable called the "six-footers", large-scale canvasses which he painted for the annual summer exhibitions at the Royal Academy. As with all of the paintings in this series Constable produced a full-scale oil sketch for the work

Although *The Hay Wain* is revered today as one of the greatest British paintings, when it was originally exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1821 (under the title *Landscape: Noon*), it failed to find a buyer.

It was considerably better received in France where it was praised by **Théodore Géricault**. The painting caused a sensation when it was exhibited with other works by Constable at the 1824 Paris Salon (it has been suggested that the inclusion of Constable's paintings in the exhibition was a tribute to Géricault, who died early that year). In that exhibition *The Hay Wain* was singled out for a gold medal awarded by Charles X of France, a cast of which is incorporated into the picture's frame. The works by Constable in the exhibition inspired a new generation of French painters, including **Eugène Delacroix**.

Eugène Delacroix: "Constable, an admirable man, is one of England's glories. I have already told you about him and about the impression he had made on me when I was making ***The massacre at Chios***. He and Turner were real reformers. They broke out of the rut of traditional landscape painting. Our School [French Romanticism], which today abounds in men of talent in this field, profited greatly by their example. **Géricault** [the first leader of French Romanticism, followed by

Delacroix after his early death] came back in a daze from seeing one of the great landscapes Constable sent us."



27 Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds* 1823



28 Constable, *Seascape Study with Rain Cloud* c.1824

Constable completed numerous observational studies of landscapes and clouds, determined to become more scientific in his recording of atmospheric conditions. The power of his physical effects was sometimes apparent even in the full-scale paintings which he exhibited in London; ***The Chain Pier***, 1827, for example, prompted a critic to write: "the atmosphere possesses a characteristic humidity about it, that almost imparts the wish for an umbrella".

The sketches themselves were the first ever done in oils directly from the subject in the open air. To convey the effects of light and movement, Constable used broken brushstrokes, often in small touches, which he scumbled over lighter passages, creating an impression of sparkling light enveloping the entire landscape. One of the most expressionistic and powerful of all his studies is ***Seascape Study with Rain Cloud***, painted about 1824 at Brighton, which captures with slashing dark brushstrokes the immediacy of an exploding cumulus shower at sea. Constable also became interested in painting rainbow effects, for example in ***Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows***, 1831, and in ***Cottage at East Bergholt***, 1833.

To the sky studies he added notes, often on the back of the sketches, of the prevailing weather conditions, direction of light, and time of day, believing that the sky was "the key note, the standard of scale, and the chief organ of sentiment" in a landscape painting. In this habit he is known to have been influenced by the pioneering work of the meteorologist **Luke Howard** on the classification of clouds; Constable's annotations of his own copy of *Researches About Atmospheric Phaenomena* by **Thomas Forster** show him to have been fully abreast of meteorological terminology. "I have done a good deal of skying", Constable wrote to Fisher on 23 October 1821; "I am determined to conquer all difficulties, and that most arduous one among the rest".

Constable once wrote in a letter to Leslie, "My limited and abstracted art is to be found under every hedge, and in every lane, and therefore nobody thinks it worth picking up".



29 Constable, *The Leaping Horse* 1825 Preliminary sketch (left) and exhibited picture.

Constable painted many full-scale preliminary sketches of his landscapes to test the composition in advance of finished pictures. These large sketches, with their free and vigorous brushwork, were revolutionary at the time, and they continue to interest artists, scholars and the general public. The oil sketches of *The Leaping Horse* and *The Hay Wain*, for example, convey a vigour and expressiveness missing from Constable's finished paintings of the same subjects. Possibly more

than any other aspect of Constable's work, the oil sketches reveal him in retrospect to have been an avant-garde painter, one who demonstrated that landscape painting could be taken in a totally new direction.



30 Constable, *The Cornfield* 1826



31 Constable, *Hadleigh Castle* 1829

After the birth of their seventh child in January 1828, Maria fell ill and died of tuberculosis on 23 November at the age of 41. Intensely saddened, Constable wrote to his brother Golding, "hourly do I feel the loss of my departed Angel—God only knows how my children will be brought up...the face of the World is totally changed to me".

Thereafter, he dressed in black and was, according to Leslie, "a prey to melancholy and anxious thoughts". He cared for his seven children alone for the rest of his life.

He was elected to the Royal Academy in February 1829, at the age of 52.



32 Constable, *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge seen from Whitehall Stairs, 18 June 1817*, c1832

Anyone who was anyone in London society in the 1830s was expected to attend the Royal Academy exhibition. The playwrights and actors of the Drury Lane theatres, the Fleet Street art critics, the moneyed nabobs returned from India with grand town houses to fill with art from the masters of the day.

For the artists who exhibited in the Academy's high-ceilinged rooms, the exhibition was the culmination of a year's work. It had the power to make an artist's name — or ruin him.

Each year, more than 1,000 pictures were exhibited in the crowded galleries, hung frame-to-frame from skirting board to ceiling. The power of the Academy's Hanging Committee was immense.

A spot opposite the doors could mean an artist spent the next year being courted by aristocratic clients with commissions to paint their country estate, their beautiful wife or their adored King Charles spaniel. A painting unfavourably hung up by the cornice meant another year starving in a garret.

In this competitive field, painters resorted to all manner of dirty tricks to gain advantage.

The days before the opening of the exhibition, when artists were allowed to apply a final coat to their paintings in situ, were particularly fraught.

In 1833, two of the giants of British painting J.M.W. Turner and John Constable found that their paintings had been hung side-by-side in one of the main galleries.



33 Exhibition of *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge* alongside Turner's *City of Utrecht, 64, Going to Sea* Showing how they were exhibited side by side.



34 Turner, *City of Utrecht, 64, Going to Sea*, 1832

Turner, who was touching up another picture in the next room, came several times to cast an eye between his '*Helvoetsluys*' — a Dutch seascape — and Constable's '*The Opening of Waterloo Bridge*'. This must have infuriated Constable, who was carefully applying flecks of vermilion paint to the flags decorating the barges of his own painting.

After several trips back and forth, Turner finally returned with his palette and, leaning close to the canvas, applied a daub of red, no bigger than a shilling, over his grey sea. He left without saying a word, the paint still wet and glistening.



35 Exhibition of *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge* alongside Turner's *City of Utrecht, 64, Going to Sea*. Showing how they looked after Turner's addition.

It was another day-and-a-half before Turner returned, and then, in the last moments allowed for alterations, he glazed the scarlet shilling and turned it into a buoy bobbing in the harbour. Constable told a fellow Academy member: 'He has been here and fired a gun.' What he meant, of course, was that this last-minute dash of elan — of sheer, breathtaking colour — was tantamount to an act of sabotage against his own painting hanging alongside.

The exhibition was a disaster for Constable. Even his friend the painter **Thomas Stothard** pronounced *Waterloo Bridge*: 'Very unfinished, sir.'

The *Morning Herald* critic wrote: 'What a piece of plaster it is!' Then, adding insult to injury: 'Mr Constable appears to think he is a Turner.'

If Constable did not already loathe Turner, there is no doubt he did from that moment on. Turner seems to have detested Constable with equal force.



36 Constable, *Stonehenge* 1835

Constable's watercolours were also remarkably free for their time: the almost mystical *Stonehenge*, 1835, with its double rainbow, is often considered to be one of the greatest watercolours ever painted. When he exhibited it in 1836, Constable appended a text to the title: "The mysterious monument of Stonehenge, standing remote on a bare and boundless heath, as much unconnected with the events of past ages as it is with the uses of the present, carries you back beyond all historical records into the obscurity of a totally unknown period."



37 Constable, *Arundel Mill and Castle* c1836–37



38 Turner, *Venice, the Bridge of Sighs* 1840



39 Turner, *Riva degli Schiavoni, Venice* 1843



40 Turner, *A Paddle-steamer in a Storm*, watercolour c1841



41 Turner, *Sunrise with Sea Monsters* c1845



42 Turner, *Colour Beginning* c1839



43 Turner, *Venice with the Salute* 1840-45?