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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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LANDSCAPE DRAWINGS IN THE FRICK COLLECTION

June 9 through September 13, 2015



Antoine Vollon (1833–1900), *View of Dieppe Harbor*, 1873, watercolor and graphite on laid paper, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

The recent acquisition of Antoine Vollon's 1873 watercolor *View of Dieppe Harbor*, the gift of Dr. Carol Forman Tabler in memory of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Alexander A.

Forman III, has inspired a presentation of landscape drawings and oil studies from the Frick's permanent collection. Ranging in date from the 1500s to the late nineteenth century, the selection includes rarely exhibited works by Rembrandt, Claude, Corot, Whistler, and others.

For all of these artists, working on paper was a fundamental practice. Whether depicting observed or imagined views,

working outdoors or in the studio, they shared a drive to investigate the technical possibilities for representing on paper the textures and intangible atmospheric effects of the three-dimensional world. *Landscape Drawings in The Frick Collection* is organized by Joanna Sheers Seidenstein, Research Assistant at The Frick Collection, and will be on view in the Frick's Cabinet gallery.

FOUR CENTURIES OF LANDSCAPE TRADITIONS, FROM VENICE TO DIEPPE

Landscape emerged as a distinct artistic category in the sixteenth century. In various parts of Europe, artists began to treat elements of land, sea, and sky as subjects in their own right. This development coincided with renewed interest in ancient pastoral literature. Such texts, most notably Virgil's *Eclogues*, describe an idyllic world populated by shepherds, nymphs, and satyrs. The earliest work in the exhibition, by a Venetian artist of the sixteenth century—possibly Titian—evokes this Arcadian



Attributed to Titian (ca. 1488–1576), *Landscape with a Satyr*, 16th century, pen and brown ink on paper, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

realm. The imaginary landscape, resembling not Venice’s distinctive lagoons but the sundrenched hills of the surrounding area, is the site of an enigmatic encounter between a goat and a satyr, the latter an often lustful and drunken presence in pastoral poetry. The sheet also reveals, both in the spare lines of the landscape and the more vigorous hatching of the satyr’s hirsute body, a masterful balance of ink and the untouched paper to create a sense of brilliant light.



Claude Lorrain (1600–1682), *Heroic Landscape*, 1655–58, pen, iron-gall ink, brown and gray wash, and white heightening on laid paper, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

With the rapid development and expansion of landscape in the seventeenth century, artists began to specialize in the genre. One of the most celebrated practitioners in the history of Western art was Claude Lorrain. Spending nearly his entire career in Rome, the French native achieved renown throughout Europe for his classical landscapes. He produced magnificent, idealized views often featuring episodes from ancient and biblical texts. The “heroic landscape,” as it became known, is exemplified by one of the Frick drawings, a splendid work of the mid-1650s. It contains the initial idea for an oil painting, now in the National Gallery, London, which depicts the Old

Testament hero David in an episode understood in the seventeenth century as a moral exempla of stoicism. This narrative content is absent from the drawing, but the strong light and the swirling lines of the clouds nonetheless convey a sense of movement and impending drama. The two figures, who in the final painting witness the main action, here serve as stand-ins for the viewer, taking in the awe-inspiring landscape unfolding before them.

Among Claude’s nineteenth-century admirers was the British artist John Constable, whose images of the local English countryside are characterized by close—even scientific—observation of nature and a strong emotional tenor. To achieve the latter, the artist considered the sky his primary means—in his own words “the key note” and “chief organ of sentiment” of any landscape. Constable’s work is represented in this exhibition by two studies of cloud formations painted in oil on paper and only later mounted to board. These belong to an enormous



John Constable (1776–1837), *Cloud Study*, ca. 1822, oil on paper, laid down on board, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb



John Constable (1776–1837), *Cloud Study*, ca. 1822, oil on paper, laid down on board, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

group of studies of the sky that he produced at different times of day and under different meteorological conditions between 1821 and 1822. On the back of one of the Frick sketches he inscribed the date, the weather, and the direction he was facing: “28th July 12 o’clock noon, very fine day, showery and warm No [North] West under the sun.”

Sketching in oil out of doors became a common practice in the nineteenth century, and Constable devised a method that maximized the immediacy with which he could capture fleeting atmospheric effects. Preparing his paper in advance with a ground layer of paint, usually pink in tone, he would venture out with a special case that held his materials and that served, when propped on his knees with the lid open, as a kind of easel-like support. One of the two Frick works has tiny holes where the artist tacked the paper onto this lid.

Constable's work was a sensation in France, particularly among artists of the Barbizon School, who similarly dedicated themselves to their local landscape. In the hands of these figures and, later, the Impressionists, landscape underwent radical transformation in France during this period. Antoine Vollon shared with these artists—his immediate predecessors and contemporaries—a commitment to unpretentious subject matter and a desire to capture the ephemeral qualities of nature. In the *View of Dieppe Harbor* (page 1)—one of his earliest representations of the Northern French city, to which he made intermittent visits between 1873 and 1876—his swift application of watercolor in the sky creates a sense of rapidly passing clouds, through which the sun filters, bathing the entire scene in the subdued light characteristic of the region. The drawing presents a panoramic vista from the inner harbor looking north, with the church of St. Jacques at center. This vantage point affords a view not of Dieppe's scenic beaches or of grand ships entering and leaving the English Channel in the distance, but of rough-hewn buildings, small fishing boats, and locals working along the shore. Although Vollon depicted the same view in a small oil painting (now lost), this large watercolor is an independent, finished sheet of the kind contemporary collectors eagerly sought. It bears a dedication to Madame Dumas, the wife of Alexandre Dumas *fils*, the celebrated French playwright and author of the 1848 novel *La Dame aux Camélias*. The couple welcomed Vollon at their home in Puy, near Dieppe, and would acquire no fewer than eighteen works by the artist. Vollon most likely gave the *View of Dieppe Harbor* to Madame Dumas to thank her for her hospitality and patronage during his first stay in the region.

HENRY CLAY FRICK AS A COLLECTOR OF WORKS ON PAPER

In October 1912 *The New York Times* reported the \$1 million sale of some 600 drawings owned by the British painter and collector John Postle Heseltine (1843–1929) to the firms M. Knoedler & Co. and P. & D. Colnaghi. A year later, six of these drawings, including the sheets by Rembrandt and Gainsborough presented in this exhibition, were in the possession of Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919). These were the first Old Master drawings Frick acquired. In his early years as a

collector he had purchased a number of nineteenth-century drawings that he would leave to his family; now, with his Fifth Avenue

mansion under construction, he began to consider the place that works on paper would have in his future museum. He



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *Landscape with Cattle Crossing a Bridge*, ca. 1785, oil over black chalk with white chalk highlights on laid paper, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

continued to purchase drawings, along with several prints, and would bequeath to the museum a total of ten drawings (including as well the Whistler pastel in this show) and approximately forty prints. In the decades since Frick's death, through important gifts, bequests, and purchases, these holdings have grown to include more than 120 works (some forty drawings and eighty prints), resulting in a superb, highly selective ensemble of European works on paper.

INTERACT

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BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

Building project: www.frickfuture.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

App: frick.org/app

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

Museum Hours: open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

Admission: \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; "pay what you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Visits: Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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For further press information, please contact Alexis Light, Senior Manager of Media Relations & Marketing

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