



Constable

Jonathan Clarkson

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This lavishly illustrated monograph of the great British landscapist John Constable (1776-1837) presents a definitive survey of the painter's life and works. Jonathan Clarkson offers a comprehensive assessment of Constable's oeuvre, from his earliest line drawings to his last masterpieces, including pencil drawings, quick outdoor oil sketches, painstakingly worked studio canvases, and less well-known portraits.

Born the son of a miller, merchant, and gentleman farmer in the small village of East Bergholt, Suffolk, it was not immediately obvious that John Constable would pursue a career in the art world. However, the young Constable became a keen amateur landscape painter, inspired by the rural surroundings of his beloved Bergholt home. With the encouragement of local wealthy connoisseur Sir George Beaumont, whose collection introduced the artist to such masters of landscape as Claude Lorrain, and an allowance from his father, Constable was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools, London, in 1799. There he studied the work of such masters as Lorrain, Gainsborough, and Ruisdael and developed his own style of meticulous observation of natural detail combined with contemporary artistic theory. Upon leaving the Academy, Constable rejected a financially rewarding position as a drawing master in favor of sketching and painting in the English countryside for nearly ten years. He spent his time in pursuit of an honest yet coherent and dignified 'natural' style, and pioneered the revolutionary practice of making finished paintings outdoors, direct from nature. Commercial success came with Constable's decision to exhibit large works at the British Institution. These 'six-footers,' which secured his position among the greatest British painters of his age, included such enduringly famous canvases as *The Hay Wain*.

In this new monograph Clarkson looks at these grand paintings with a fresh view, investigating what we can actually see in them. Set against the rapidly changing way of life in nineteenth-century Britain, Constable's paintings are both portraits of a disappearing world and reflections of his belief that 'painting is a science, and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature.' Since his death, Constable has been condemned for presenting a willfully inauthentic vision of the early nineteenth-century English countryside, which was ravaged by unemployment, crime, and intense poverty in the years following the Napoleonic wars. However, his importance for Realism and for painting as a practice in itself cannot be underestimated. Clarkson draws attention to Constable's direct influence on landscape painters as well as figurative artists from his own time to the present, citing examples such as Lucien Freud and Frank Auerbach.

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