

Review: The Making of Landscape

An all-star cast boasting some of the world's greatest Landscape artists, The Making of Landscape leaves you feeling unexpectedly cheated. [Roisin Astell](#) reviews

Monday 21 January 2013



Gainsborough's "Romantic Landscape"

Gallery: Royal Academy of Arts, London

Dates: 8th December 2012 – 17th February 2013

Rating: 3 stars

Highly anticipating this exhibition, I couldn't wait to be faced with the works of Constable, Gainsborough and Turner in one showing. Three artists which most of the British public will be aware of, they exemplify Britain's most loved landscape painters of the 18th century. This exhibition aims to explore the development of landscape painting, and how Constable, Gainsborough and Turner influenced this particular genre of painting in Britain.

A small exhibition containing only a handful of rooms, you first encounter contemporary works of art that are inspired by the work of the three protagonists. Continued from here we regress back into the 18th century, creating a somewhat ambiguous and disjointed chronology to the exhibition. Displaying around 150 works of art, mostly of engravings, it seems to take a while for the show to 'pick up': eventually presenting works by Constable, Gainsborough and Turner in Room 3. Perhaps this prolonged concealment of the main works allows the viewer to engage with the works of art by previous, less known artists, and to understand the progression of Landscape painting during this time. However, I felt let down and slightly turned off with this curtation.

The idea of curating with a 'trio' in mind may seem contrived and unoriginal, having been previously curated this summer at the Tate Liverpool with 'Turner, Monet and Twombly' and with Turner and Claude Gellée at the National Gallery in 'Turner Inspired: In the Light of Claude' back in March 2012. However, it highlights the understanding that ultimately artists are inspired by other's work around them, past and present artists alike. Perhaps the world of art can never be 'original', as just with 18th century Landscape painting and contemporary art today, artists are constantly copying, manipulating and recycling old ideas.

The lack of any major artworks from Constable, Gainsborough and Turner is however made up for with unique objects that related to the individual artist's lives. Material belongings, such as a marble grinding slab and glass mullet alongside a palette with colours still on, from Constable, intensifies the reality of these men going out into the Landscape and painting the natural scenes before them. Belonging to Turner is the inclusion of a set of used watercolours and a watercolour test page showing all the colours used within his paintings. Another item owned by Turner was a fishing rod that he would use during times of leisure and entertainment. The placement of this object seems somewhat random, under a series of works that did not relate to him personally. One additional item that I found intriguing was a series of letters written in Gainsborough's hand to a fellow artist, Joshua Reynolds. The inclusion of such objects brings their artistic practices to life, transforming the name written on a canvas to life. Adding realism and background context to the exhibition that was previously lacking until the final room.

This short exhibition, both frustrating and modest, alludes to the impressive collection of Constable, Gainsborough and Turner, however ultimately emphasises the inclusion of only a few paintings by the trio making the exhibition sound more impressive and extravagant than it actually was. Nevertheless, it is a show that investigates the minor and some unknown artists working at the same time, providing an insight into how Landscape art transformed and developed during the 18th-19th centuries making the viewer aware that there were other artists painting the Landscapes of Britain.



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