NEW HAVEN, UNITED STATES

Yale Center for British Art: Masterpieces

Twenty works from the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven, from Queen Charlotte's zebra to Spencer Gore's mural studies.



The Yale Center for British Art in New Haven was built to house a collection of British art assembled largely through Paul Mellon's generosity, in a building designed by Louis Kahn. The collection covers several centuries of paintings, drawings and other works, and it is particularly strong in portraits and landscapes.

The twenty works chosen here have very different subjects: a royal zebra, a young marquess in an embroidered coat, a family beneath a tree, a packet-boat waiting for wind, Vesuvius in eruption, a crowded railway compartment, a college crew on the river and a comet. Their purposes differ just as much. Some were made for great houses and public display; others began as small personal studies or working sheets. Alongside J. M. W. Turner, Constable, Gainsborough, Stubbs, Hogarth, Mary Beale and Rossetti are Samuel Palmer, Blake, Spencer Gore, Hannah Emma Palmer and William Turner of Oxford, who is represented by several landscapes. He was a different artist from J. M. W. Turner.

Artline selected these works from documented museum holdings, independently of the museum. Dates and attributions keep the qualifications given in the linked records.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/yale-center-british-art

The selection · 20

1. Dort, or Dordrecht: The Dort Packet-Boat from Rotterdam Becalmed
   J. M. W. Turner · 1818
2. Hadleigh Castle
   John Constable · 1829
3. A Zebra
   George Stubbs · 1763
4. The Gravenor Family
   Thomas Gainsborough · c.1752 - 1754
5. William Cavendish, Marquess of Hartington
   William Hogarth · 1741
6. Mount Vesuvius in Eruption
   J. M. W. Turner · 1817
7. Donati's Comet
   William Turner of Oxford · 1858–1859
8. Elizabeth Siddal
   Dante Gabriel Rossetti · 1854–1855
9. Bartholomew Beale
   Mary Beale · 1663–1664
10. First Class: The Meeting
    Abraham Solomon · 1855
11. Study for The Shearers
    Samuel Palmer · 1833–1834
12. Christmas
    Samuel Palmer · 1850
13. Interior of the New Bedford
    Spencer Gore · 1908–1909
14. Study for a Deer-Hunting Mural
    Spencer Gore · 1912
15. Study for a Mural: Old Man in a Landscape
    Spencer Gore · 1912
16. The Entrance Front of Hayley's House at Eartham
    William Blake · 1801
17. The Exeter College Eight on the Isis
    William Turner of Oxford · 1824
18. Bridge at Corpo di Cava
    Hannah Emma Palmer · 1838
19. Tysoe Windmill and Church, Warwickshire
    William Turner of Oxford · 1849
20. Scene near Shipton on Cherwell
    William Turner of Oxford · 1835

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Dort, or Dordrecht: The Dort Packet-Boat from Rotterdam Becalmed

J. M. W. Turner

1818 · Oil on canvas · Yale Center for British Art



Dort, the Dort Packet Boat from Rotterdam Bacalmed. WikiArt; J. M. W. Turner. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

The key word in the title is the last one: the packet-boat from Rotterdam is becalmed. Its large sail looms over still, reflective water, and there is too little wind to carry it on. Around it, smaller vessels and people keep the harbour busy, so the stillness belongs to the air and water rather than to the crowd. Behind them the town lies low under a luminous sky, which leaves the cluster of boats plenty of room.

Object source · Open artwork

02 / 20

Hadleigh Castle

John Constable

1829 · Oil on canvas · Yale Center for British Art



John Constable. Hadleigh Castle. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/john-constable/hadleigh-castle-1829 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Broken towers stand above the estuary, their rough outlines set against an unsettled sky. The ruin anchors the composition, yet Constable does not let it look stable or whole. On the near slope, a path and small figures show that the ground beside the damaged masonry is still in use.

Object source · Open artwork

03 / 20

A Zebra

George Stubbs

1763 · Yale Center for British Art



George Stubbs. A Zebra. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/george-stubbs/a-zebra-1763 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

This was Queen Charlotte's zebra, brought to Britain as a gift in 1762 and put on public show. Stubbs treats the royal curiosity as a sitter. He paints it in profile, with the close attention he would give an individual portrait, so the striped body is seen at full length, and its lit stripes stand out sharply against dark trees. A wood is not the zebra's natural habitat. Whatever else these trees are doing, they make a very effective foil for the stripes.

Object source · Open artwork

04 / 20

The Gravenor Family

Thomas Gainsborough

c.1752 - 1754 · Oil on canvas · Yale Center for British Art



Thomas Gainsborough. Mr. and Mrs. John Gravenor and their Daughters, Elizabeth and Ann. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/thomas-gainsborough/mr-and-mrs-john-gravenor-and-their-daughters-elizabeth-and-ann-1754 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

A man, a woman and two girls form a compact group beneath a tree. Nobody is doing anything in particular, and no domestic incident is acted out. Gainsborough shows how they are related through where he places each figure and how their differently coloured clothes meet. The landscape gives the family a shared piece of ground, and the way they occupy it sets out their positions within the family as well as their social standing.

Object source · Open artwork

05 / 20

William Cavendish, Marquess of Hartington

William Hogarth

1741 · Yale Center for British Art



William Hogarth. William Cavendish, Marquess of Hartington, Later 4th Duke of Devonshire. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Rank, in this portrait, is largely a matter of embroidery. It spreads across the young marquess's coat, and Hogarth turns the body so that the elaborate garment falls into shifting planes instead of being displayed flat. The pale face and white neckcloth stand out against the dark background, and for all the detail of the coat, the face stays in command.

Object source · Open artwork

06 / 20

Mount Vesuvius in Eruption

J. M. W. Turner

1817 · Watercolour on paper · Yale Center for British Art



Mount Vesuvius in Eruption. WikiArt; J. M. W. Turner. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

In the Dort picture Turner shows a boat waiting for a wind that does not come. Here, in watercolour rather than oil, he paints a force of nature at full strength. Fire and lit smoke rise above dark slopes and are reflected in the water below, and the small boats and figures in the foreground give a human scale to an eruption that dwarfs them. Turner's light spreads from the volcano into its surroundings, so the mountain is hard to see as a separate object.

Object source · Open artwork

07 / 20

Donati's Comet

William Turner of Oxford

1858–1859 · Yale Center for British Art



William Turner. Donati's Comet. Image credit: William Turner; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

This is almost entirely a picture of sky. Trees and low ground are kept to the bottom edge. Above them are blue sky and the pale track of the comet, and the still horizon beneath gives a measure of the comet's scale and the direction of its path. Next to the other Turner's Vesuvius, this comet is an understated presence, a pale track rather than a blaze.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1975.4.1767

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Elizabeth Siddal

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

1854–1855 · Yale Center for British Art



Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Miss Elizabeth Siddal. Image credit: Dante Gabriel Rossetti; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

Siddal leans against a chair, her hands gathered over a full skirt. Rossetti sets the pose down broadly and concentrates darker hatching around her head and upper body, the only area he describes in any detail.

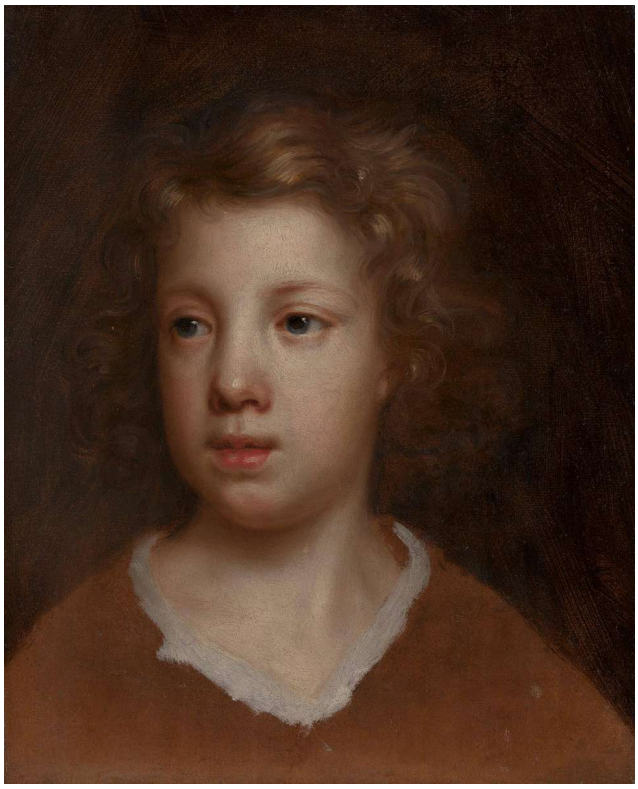
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1975.4.681

09 / 20

Bartholomew Beale

Mary Beale

1663–1664 · Yale Center for British Art



Mary Beale. Bartholomew Beale. Image credit: Mary Beale; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

After Hogarth's embroidered marquess, Mary Beale's portrait of a child offers almost nothing but the head. There is no setting and there are no possessions, only a pale collar at the lower edge. The face turns slightly beneath loose hair, one cheek catching more light than the other, and small differences of tone make the head look solid. That slight turn keeps this close likeness from becoming stiffly frontal.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B2016.24

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First Class: The Meeting

Abraham Solomon

1855 · Yale Center for British Art



Abraham Solomon. First Class - The Meeting. "And at first meeting loved.". Image credit: Abraham Solomon (1824 - 1862) – Artist (British) Details on Google Art Project; Source credit: QgFGq1XLeArz7Q at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Two men talk across a railway compartment while a young woman sits near the window. Bags and clothes crowd the foreground, narrowing the space between the passengers. Solomon uses that confinement to stage a social encounter, and the title gives its setting: a first-class carriage, where the travellers have to share the compartment even though their attention is divided.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1987.26.3

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Study for The Shearers

Samuel Palmer

1833–1834 · Yale Center for British Art



Samuel Palmer. Study for "The Shearers". Image credit: Samuel Palmer; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

Palmer's sheet holds only curved tools and a small group of other objects on otherwise spare paper. The larger scene named in the title is nowhere to be seen. Instead, the edges and overlaps of these things can be studied on their own. The blank paper around them is working space, not emptiness.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B2014.5.74

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Christmas

Samuel Palmer

1850 · Yale Center for British Art



Samuel Palmer. Christmas. Image credit: Samuel Palmer; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

This Palmer could hardly be further from the tool study. Dense lines gather a cottage, bare trees and dark foliage into the same winter darkness, broken by a small lit area at the cottage. A cloaked figure passes nearby, with a path through the scene. The title supplies the occasion, but the image stays general. It shows a winter journey past a lit house, not a particular story.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1977.14.10907

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Interior of the New Bedford

Spencer Gore

1908–1909 · Yale Center for British Art



Spencer Gore. Interior of the New Bedford. Image credit: Spencer Gore; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

The title puts the building first, and so does Gore. Tall arches and decorative divisions rise above a small crowd. He sets out the structure of the interior in darker passages and catches the audience below in quicker marks, and he does not give every figure or ornament the same detail. The people show how tall the building is, and the hall gathers them into one public space.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1980.15

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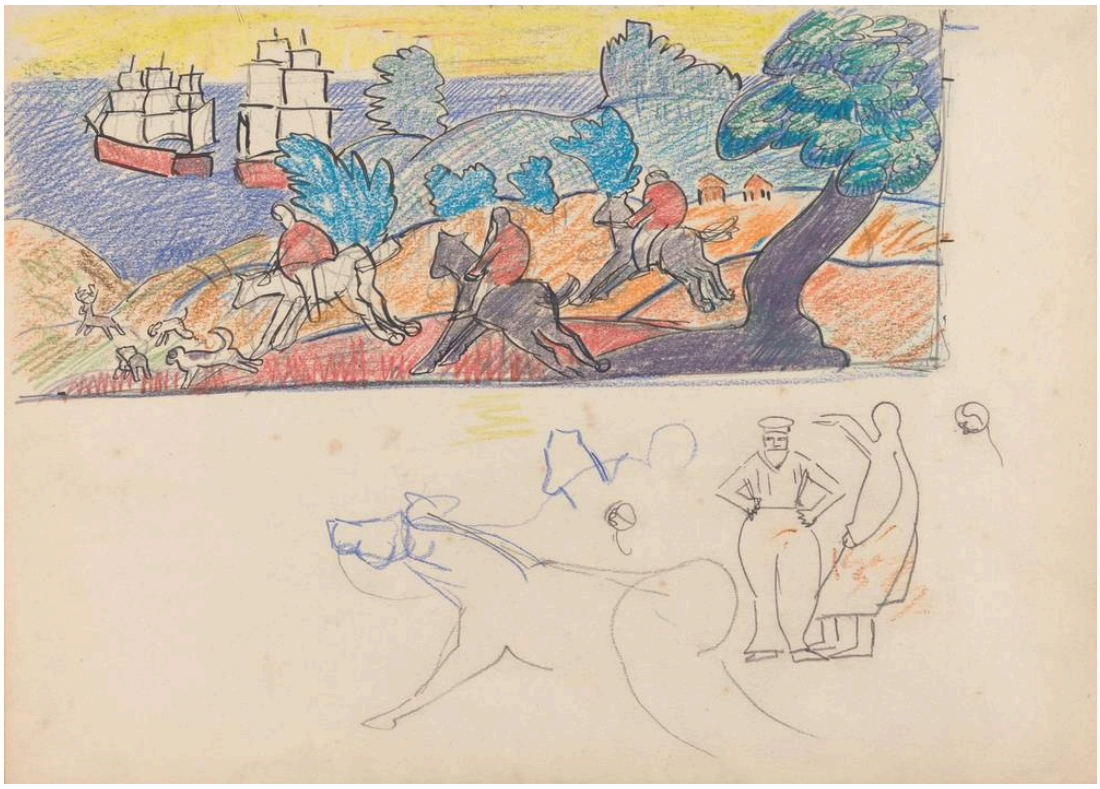
Study for a Deer-Hunting Mural

Spencer Gore

1912 · Yale Center for British Art



Spencer Gore. Cave of the Golden Calf: Study for Deer Hunting Mural. Image credit: Spencer Gore; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

The coloured design at the top of this sheet and the sparer sketches beneath are doing different jobs. In the developed scene of figures and animals, trees, water and ground are laid in as broad areas that would have to hold together as decoration. The smaller studies deal with particular decisions separately. Working out one pose is a different problem from fitting many poses into a continuous design, and the sheet shows Gore working on both.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1985.25.2

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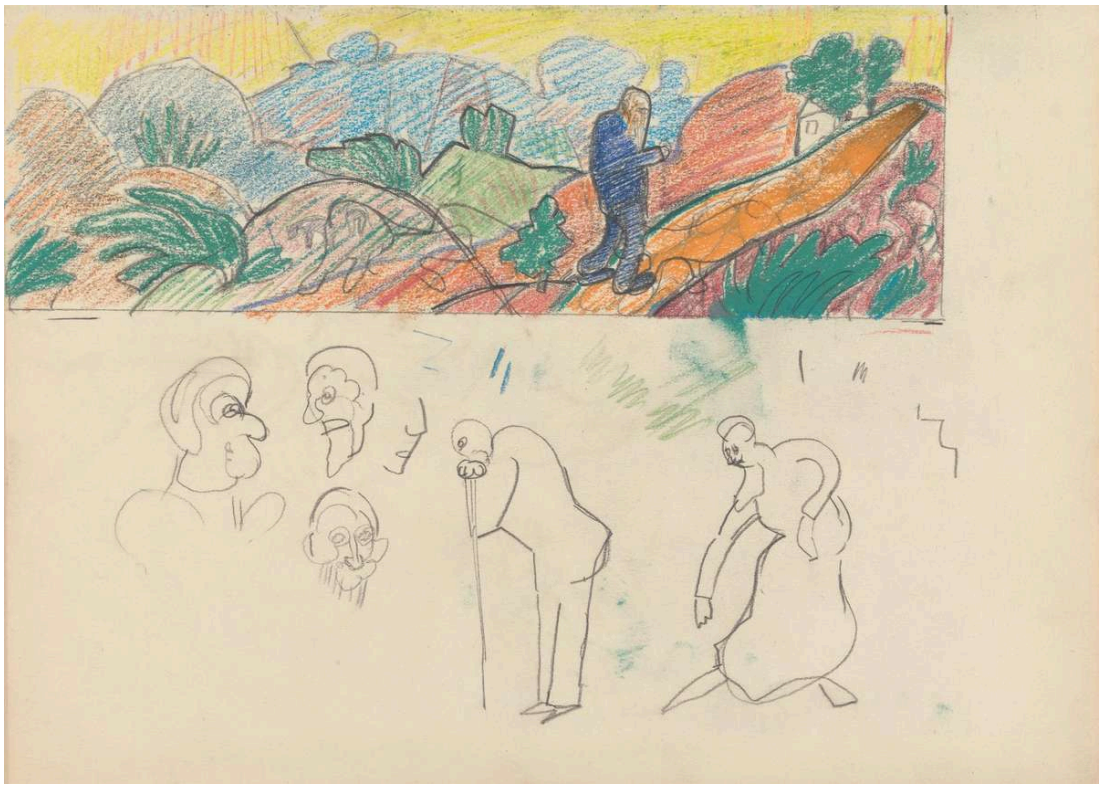
Study for a Mural: Old Man in a Landscape

Spencer Gore

1912 · Yale Center for British Art



Spencer Gore. Cave of the Golden Calf: Study for a Mural Decoration, Old Man in Landscape. Image credit: Spencer Gore; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

The layout is the same as in the deer-hunting study, but here the main design holds a single standing figure in a narrow, brightly coloured landscape. Below it, separated by blank paper, outline sketches try alternative poses. Whatever wall decoration might have followed, at this stage it exists only as separate decisions on the same sheet.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1985.25.1

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The Entrance Front of Hayley's House at Eartham

William Blake

1801 · Yale Center for British Art



William Blake. The Entrance Front of Hayley's House at Eartham. Image credit: William Blake; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

The title is precise: not simply Hayley's house but its entrance front. Blake outlines the building lightly among trees, adds small touches of colour and leaves broad areas almost bare. He draws the trees more firmly than the faint architecture, and they do much of the work of locating it. He records enough to make this particular building recognisable without filling the sheet.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1981.25.2396

17 / 20

The Exeter College Eight on the Isis

William Turner of Oxford

1824 · Yale Center for British Art



William Turner. The Exeter College Eight on the Isis, Oxford. Image credit: William Turner; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

The Exeter College crew get the title but not much of the picture. The long rowing boat follows the horizontal lines of the banks and the calm water, trees and low buildings stretch beyond, and reflections take up much of the foreground. William Turner of Oxford places the eight within a wide view of the river and does not bring them close. They form a narrow band of movement in a largely still scene.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B2001.2.1293

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Bridge at Corpo di Cava

Hannah Emma Palmer

1838 · Yale Center for British Art



Hannah Emma Palmer. Bridge at Corpo di Cava. Image credit: Hannah Emma Palmer; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

A small stone bridge crosses a rough cleft among thin branches and rock, painted in subdued washes of colour. Hannah Emma Palmer keeps its built shape clear while fitting it into the uneven ground it spans. Layers of vegetation complicate the view, but what the bridge is for, linking the two slopes, stays plain.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1982.20

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Tysoe Windmill and Church, Warwickshire

William Turner of Oxford

1849 · Yale Center for British Art



William Turner. Tysoe Windmill and Church, Warwickshire. Image credit: William Turner; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

A windmill rises above a low horizon. The title names the church as well, but the ground is only lightly marked and other details are kept faint, so it is the upright mill that stands out, with proportions that are easy to take in. Much of the open paper is left to stand for light and distance.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1975.3.994

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Scene near Shipton on Cherwell

William Turner of Oxford

1835 · Yale Center for British Art



William Turner. Scene near Shipton on Cherwell, Oxfordshire. Image credit: William Turner; Source credit: Yale Center for British Art. Wikimedia Commons. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · CC0

Water lilies spread across the near part of the river, and the banks close in towards an opening further off. Close to, the leaves are separate shapes. Further back they merge into a pattern over a continuous stretch of water. William Turner of Oxford uses that change to connect the detail on the surface with the river's course into the distance.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: B1981.24

Paper left bare

The comet and the eruption are dramatic subjects, but several of the works on paper are quieter and more provisional, and their bare paper does different jobs. Around the Tysoe windmill it stands for light and distance. On Palmer's study for The Shearers and Gore's mural designs it gives room to work and keeps separate problems apart. Rossetti and Blake are selective about where they put their effort, on Siddal's head and upper body and on the trees around Hayley's house, and they state the rest lightly.

Further reading

The Elements of Drawing

John Ruskin · Read free · English

Ruskin's exercises train close attention to leaves, buildings, light and edges. These are much the same concerns as in the landscapes here, from the lily leaves near Shipton to Blake's faint house among firmer trees at Eartham.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12
