

Release Date: August 3, 2006

English Painter John Constable's Renowned Six-Foot Landscapes are Reunited with Groundbreaking Sketches for the First Time Since Artist's Death



John Constable (1776 - 1837)

The White Horse (Full-size Sketch), c. 1818

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

Washington, DC— John Constable's (1776–1837) seminal six-foot landscapes—among the best-known and beloved images in British art—are reunited with their groundbreaking full-size sketches for the first time since the artist's death in **Constable's Great Landscapes: The Six-Foot Paintings**, at the National Gallery of Art, East Building, October 1 through December 31, 2006. Fifty-five works include oils and drawings that are related to the large landscapes, an early pencil portrait, and a

series in varied media brought together for the first time, illustrating areas along the Stour River in Suffolk known to many as "Constable Country." The exhibition and its companion catalogue examine why Constable produced the six-foot sketches.

Eight finished six-foot paintings, including *The White Horse* (1819), *Stratford Mill* (1820), *The Hay Wain* (1821), *View in the Stour near Dedham* (1822), *The Lock* (1824), *The Leaping Horse* (1825), *Hadleigh Castle* (1829), and *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* (1831) are paired with their corresponding full-size oil sketches, while *Chain Pier, Brighton* (1827) is presented with related smaller oil sketches. Two large finished versions of *The Opening of the Waterloo Bridge* (c. 1829–1832) and what is believed to be a full-size sketch from the very end of Constable's life, *Stoke-by-Nayland* (c.1835–1837), will also be on view.

"The idea of bringing together this body of work came originally from the National Gallery of Art in the late 1990s, inspired by the cleaning of our full-scale sketch for *The White Horse*," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are very grateful to our co-organizers and generous lenders and especially to General Dynamics and General Dynamics United Kingdom, Ltd., all of whom have made this exhibition possible."

Constable's Great Landscapes: The Six-Foot Paintings has been organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington; Tate Britain, London, where it is on view through August 28; and The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, California, where it will be presented February 3 through April 29, 2007.

Exhibition Support

The exhibition is made possible by General Dynamics and General Dynamics United Kingdom, Ltd.

"Through our sponsorship with our subsidiary, General Dynamics United Kingdom Limited, we celebrate the friendship and close bond between the United States and the United Kingdom," said Nicholas D. Chabraja, chairman and chief executive officer of General Dynamics. "We hope that visitors will find pleasure in viewing these magnificent works." Other National Gallery of Art exhibitions sponsored by General

Dynamics include **John James Audubon (2005)**, **Thomas Gainsborough, 1727–1788 (2003)**, and **Goya: Images of Women (2002)**.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

The White Horse

Six of the six-foot paintings with full-size sketches depict different aspects of the working life of Suffolk's prosperous Stour River valley—the world of Constable's boyhood—which was conjured up in his London studio from memory and plein air sketches. The first in this early series is the National Gallery of Art's *The White Horse* (c. 1818), made in preparation for the painting of the same title that Constable exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1819.

The resemblance between the finished painting and its sketch is clear, but there have been decades-long disagreements about their precise relationship. In 1984, Charles Rhyne, then a Samuel H. Kress Fellow in the National Gallery of Art's Center for the Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, embarked upon a study of *The White Horse* sketch. The findings of this first-time scientific examination revealed disfiguring repaint from the 19th century, as well as an abandoned composition underneath that relates to *The Valley of the Stour (Dedham from Gun Hill)* (c. 1805-1809). The repaint was removed and the work was cleaned, revealing one of the more brilliant and spirited of the six-foot sketches. The restoration dramatically illustrates Constable's working process at this critical turning point in his career.

The Six-Foot Paintings, 1818 to 1837

The six-foot landscapes painted during these years secured both Constable's reputation as a painter and his membership as an associate in the Royal Academy. To create such large-scale works, Constable found he needed an intermediate stage between his small oil studies painted outdoors and the final paintings; he thus chose to work out the diverse elements of the large compositions on a full-scale canvas.

In the late 1820s, Constable began to paint large landscapes of scenery beyond the

Stour River valley. His work was profoundly affected by his wife's terminal illness and later death. His grief can be seen in the desolate and turbulent full-size sketch for *Hadleigh Castle* (c. 1828–1829). In addition to full-size sketches, these later six-foot paintings are accompanied by a variety of preliminary works ranging from very small to half-size sketches.

In his final years Constable painted *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* (1831), his most overtly religious painting, which shows a new spiritual mood. *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge* (1832) is his only large-scale view of an urban landscape and was intended to emulate Canaletto and J.M.W. Turner. It was the last work he sent to the Royal Academy for exhibition. In one of his last works, *Stoke-by-Nayland* (c. 1835–1837), Constable drew upon sketches made many years before to create this complex and personal response to his native landscape.

Catalogue and Curators

Constable's Great Landscapes: The Six-Foot Paintings is curated by Anne Lyles, Tate, Britain, together with Franklin Kelly, senior curator of American and British paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

A fully-illustrated scholarly catalogue discussing the nature and special character of these paintings, their place in modern landscape tradition, and the context of Constable's work accompanies the exhibition. Published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with Tate Publishing, the catalogue is edited by Lyles and includes contributions by Lyles, Kelly, Sarah Cove, fellow of the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works; John Gage, fellow of the British Academy; and Charles Rhyne, professor emeritus, Reed College, Portland, Oregon. The catalogue is available in late September for \$55 in hardcover and \$40 in softcover. The hardcover edition of the catalogue is published by Tate/Abrams. To order call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov (224 pp., 100 color and 10 black-and-white).

The National Gallery of Art is planning a full program of related lectures, tours, and concerts.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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