

Lady Lever Art Gallery

Cloudorama: Influential paintings in the Lady Lever Art Gallery by Paul Cousins

You don't have to be an artist to be aware of the unpredictable weather patterns that affect our daily lives and pepper our conversations even when talking to strangers. I have always been interested in painting the landscape which is inextricably bound up in the weather conditions; from a sunny day with bright light and dark shadows to a hazy misty morning or cloud patterns over hills and valleys.



Cottage at East Bergholt, John Constable
Room 30

As a young student I was fascinated by Constable's sketchbooks that were crammed with studies of clouds and weather systems - complete with supporting notes of the time of day and even the wind direction. This "late" work is associated with the artist's increasing interest with the effect over topography giving it a very modern feel. The picture is dominated by the billowing rainclouds producing an almost triple rainbow. The rest of the picture is filled with familiar Constable subject matter: cottage, cornfield, river

and figures. Constable also had concerns about the way he saw his environment changing as his natural world became increasingly absorbed into the industrial revolution.

The Falls of the Clyde, JMW Turner **Room 30**

In complete contrast to Constable this is a scene bathed in quiet mist and golden light; a painting that relies heavily on invention and experimentation to transform a picturesque scene into a symphony of light and colour. It was the paintings of Turner that inspired me to look into mist and fog to try and seek out the subtle tones and colours that lie within the apparent "nothingness".



May Morning on Magdalen Tower, William Holman Hunt
Main Hall

The Pre-Raphaelite movement was influential to me through the artists' use of colour, light and attention to detail. It led me to see how skies could be used to assist the storytelling content of a painting. As dawn breaks on the first of May, the sky is filled with pink and orange light, textured cloud against an azure sky of intense cobalt which fades to ice blue on the horizon. This light can only be that found at the start to the day and its intensity is emphasised by the low horizontal shadow that falls across the bottom portion of this huge dramatic

picture. Hunt would have ascended the tower on numerous occasions at around 4 am to study the rising sun and sky and I have attempted many a similar early morning call to study the atmospheric effects of colour and light as night gives way to day. Notice the roof tops of Oxford below glimpsed through the balustrade to suggest the height of the tower.

The shortening winter's day is near a close

J Farquharson

Main Hall

In complete contrast to *May Morning* there is a splendid sunset glow hidden behind trees in this picture. On first sight I mistakenly considered this painting to be a little too sentimental. I would always look beyond the sheep in the field to the woods and to the dark red glow of the fading winter evening sky. With time I have come to view the whole scene and appreciate the complex relationship of all the various components even down to the soft, subtle blue-pink shadows from the trees on the snowy ground - something easy to overlook at first glance.



***Boulter's Lock*, Edward John Gregory**

Main Hall

Reflections in water, particularly of skies, have always been an influence in my work. The sky in this painting comes closest to *Clouddorama* in terms of shape, colour and texture of cloud. The water reflects the sky with chaotic movement in the elliptical shapes on the watery surface describing the events taking place on this narrow stretch of river and the billowing sail and the smoke from the steam boat in the middle distance.

***The Friesian Bull*, Alfred Munnings**

***In June*, JA Arnsby-Brown**

East Balcony

I have chosen these two paintings which I see as very similar in style and subject matter therefore deserving the same amount of attention and respect. Both have big skies, both capture the full force and energy of a cloud-filled day, and both echo the strength of the animals that make up the subject of both paintings.

In conclusion, clouds are what make up a daytime sky and they are constantly changing in size, shape, colour and texture - rich in mystery and symbolism. Constable once wrote, when referring to his beloved landscape: "*No two days are alike...nor even two hours...*" How right he was!



Please join Paul Cousins for an Artist's talk on 20 July at 3pm

Full details at the Information Desk