ARTS

"Blue has no dimensions, it is beyond dimensions."
YVES KLEIN

REVIEW

Landscape painter's creative process shines at YCBA exhibit

BY ELLIE KOO
STAFF CRITIC

"Visitors arriving on the second floor of the Yale Center for British Art are met with a simple yet finely executed oil painting of an expansive sky filled with soft, pale clouds. The small-scale painting by British painter John Constable offers a stark contrast to his more renowned grander landscape paintings, an early indicator of the remarkable breadth of his work showcased in the center's new exhibition.

"John Constable: The Landscape Reimagined," which opened on Sept. 3, brings together a variety of the British painter's works, including sketches, cloud studies, mezzotints and landscapes. Dedicated to the 250th anniversary of Constable's birth, the exhibition offers a robust and holistic view of his practice, inviting viewers to see the natural world through Constable's eyes.

The first work visitors encounter is one of the many cloud study paintings featured throughout the exhibition. The decision to foreground one of these modest studies — preparatory works for later pieces — immediately sets the showcase apart from other surveys of Constable's work. Rather than simply displaying finished masterpieces, emphasizing the artist's creative process from the outset allows for a more intimate and dynamic understanding of his work.

That sense of intimacy is reinforced by the glass cases filled with many of the cloud studies, inviting viewers to circle the paintings and read Constable's handwritten inscriptions on the backs of each canvas. These brief notes record the details Constable observed while painting the sky, as well as the observations' time and place. It is a thoughtful curatorial touch that offers a rare glimpse into the artist's inner mind, creating a quiet, emotional connection between viewer and painter.

Despite their rudimentary nature and small scale, these studies are remarkably detailed and well accomplished in color and form. Some are especially striking — "Study of a Cloud Sky," painted in 1825, is a particular highlight. The luminous, pure white of the cloud rendered in the center of the canvas, surrounded by visible, animated brushstrokes, demonstrates Constable's extraordinary eye and his ability to faithfully transfer the subtle hues of the natural world into paint.

Following the first cloud study, the exhibition unfolds in a largely chronological sequence, beginning with Constable's earliest pastoral and rural landscapes. Though small in scale, these paintings are lush in detail, with an earthy palette that feels both vibrant and gently idyllic. The landscapes are followed by a section devoted to mezzotints — black and white prints made from engravings. These works provide a welcome visual change in color and form from the rest of the exhibition.

As the exhibition progresses, charting Constable's growth as an artist and his geographical journey across England, it becomes increasingly clear how profoundly his personal life shaped his art. The cloud studies he produced between 1825 and 1828, amid his wife's declining health, take on a noticeably darker and more foreboding mood. The clouds feel heavier and more emotionally charged than his earlier, lighter renderings.

Constable shines in the sensorial quality of his paintings. "Hadleigh Castle," a formidable large-scale masterpiece displayed at the very end of the exhibition and painted after his wife's death, is no exception.



ELLIE KOO / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

"John Constable: The Landscape Reimagined" brings the British landscape painter's works to the Yale Center for British Art for the 250th anniversary of his birth, allowing viewers a glimpse into his mind and practice through July 2027.

Constable manages to imbue the once grand castle with a decrepit, crumbling quality, while the expanse of the sea looms on the right side of the composition, evoking an uneasy calm and a moody tranquility. Seen in the context of his earlier pastoral works and numerous studies, "Hadleigh Castle" reveals an artist profoundly transformed by loss.

Peppered throughout the exhibition are works by other British artists from Constable's period, some of which provide useful points of contrast. British painter John Seguier's "Excavating the Regent's Canal, with a View of Marylebone Chapel," for instance, immediately cues viewers towards Constable's creative innovation and his departure from other artists of the time. Seguier depicts a rural landscape with compositional elements similar to Constable's, yet his painting's minute, precise details give it a sharper, more restrained quality and a somewhat more impressive mood.

Other works by Constable's contemporaries intend to demonstrate Constable's direct influence on them. While many are compelling in their own right, their inclusion occasionally feels repetitive and unnecessary, offering little additional insight into Constable's relationship with these painters or of the impact of their work.

Taking up the entire second floor of the YCBA, the exhibition benefits from the natural light and openness of the layout, reinforcing its airy, transformative quality. Thoughtfully curated and beautifully installed, the show possesses a dynamism and fluidity that traditional retrospectives sometimes lack. By attending not only to Constable's finished works but also to his creative process across various mediums, it offers a stirring exploration of the artist's life and mind. In doing so, the exhibition situates Constable within the broader history of British landscape painting while leaving visitors with an intimate understanding of the person behind the paintings.

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'Ninth House' author talks release of final book in Yale-based trilogy

BY BRETT PENK
STAFF REPORTER

"When did you become interested in going to hell?"

That was the first question asked to Leigh Bardugo '97 at a Tuesday evening conversation held at the Trinity Church on the Green about the release of her new book, "Dead Beat."

The 479-page novel, released on Tuesday, is the final part of Bardugo's "Ninth House" urban fantasy trilogy, which is set at Yale and inspired by the author's time on campus.

"I've been planning the end of this trilogy for a while," Bardugo said in a phone interview. "Now that it's actually done, I think there's a little bit of melancholy attached to it."

According to Leigh Bardugo's website, the series follows Alex Stern, a 20-year-old high school dropout, mysteriously offered a full-ride scholarship to attend Yale after surviving a gruesome homicide. When she arrives on campus, she is assigned to monitor Yale's secret societies, which hold some magical, mysterious and sinister secrets.

"I set this challenge for myself, where I wanted anything to be rooted in real places, real architecture, and real people," Bardugo said.

Bardugo has also written other bestselling books, including the fantasy "Six of Crows" and her debut novel, "Shadow and Bone."



KIVA BANK / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Pictured last March, Leigh Bardugo, at a sold-out Tuesday evening talk in the Trinity Church on the Green, discussed "Dead Beat," the final book of her "Ninth House" fantasy trilogy that was released earlier that day.

She said there were points at Yale where "she didn't know the language of this place."

"It's human monsters, and also kinda the obnoxious things we do to each other," Bardugo said when asked what the scariest thing she saw while at Yale. "I wish I could tell you it was a goblin I met in the dining hall, but it is, in fact, I think, grappling with growing up in this particular institution. "

Tuesday's conversation was moderated by Holly Black, a New York Times bestselling author of young adult fantasy novels, and Kelly Link, a MacArthur Fellowship-winning short story writer.

Audience members said they enjoyed the conversation and the opportunity to hear Bardugo speak, especially since Bardugo has struggled with health complications.

According to a 2015 Instagram post by Bardugo, she has suffered since her 20s from osteonecrosis, which has made it painful for her to walk.

"I was excited to see her because she has a chronic illness and the chances to see her are not as frequent as maybe some other authors," audience member Sarah Asken said.

The event was sold out weeks in advance and filled the Trinity Church.

"This was a really exciting event for us to work on. We love that the book is set here in New Haven, and so we were excited to bring Leigh here for the final book of the series," said Julie Gordon, an event manager for RJ Julia Booksellers, which hosted the event. "There was a lot of laughter and a lot of engagement with the audience."

Bardugo is an associate fellow of Pauli Murray College.

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