

NEWS RELEASE

**THE
CLARK
ART
INSTITUTE**

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[Digital images available upon request]

LANDSCAPE DRAWINGS BY THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH ON VIEW IN NEW INSTALLATION AT THE CLARK ART INSTITUTE

Rarely seen works featured in special presentation

Williamstown, Massachusetts—Although Thomas Gainsborough (English, 1727–1788) is widely recognized as one of the most fashionable portrait painters of the eighteenth century, a new installation at the Clark Art Institute provides an opportunity to study the artist’s landscape drawings, working methods and imaginative approach to representing nature.

Thomas Gainsborough: Drawings at the Clark, on view from December 1, 2018 – March 17, 2019, marks the first time that the Clark’s entire collection of rarely exhibited Gainsborough drawings will be shown together. The installation includes a suite of fourteen sheets from the Manton Collection of British Art, along with two works acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark. Gainsborough’s scenes of the English countryside are presented in conjunction with *Turner and Constable: The Inhabited Landscape*, opening on December 15, 2018. That exhibition explores the wide-ranging landscapes and seascapes of John Mallord William Turner (English, 1775–1851) and John Constable (English, 1776–1837), who built upon the landscape tradition that began to gain recognition through Gainsborough’s work.

The Manton Collection of British Art is considered one of the greatest collections of British art assembled in the last fifty years. In 2007, the Manton Foundation donated more than 250 works to the Clark, constituting the most significant addition to its collection in the Institute’s history.

“This special installation, along with our Turner and Constable exhibition, is a wonderful opportunity to highlight some of the many treasures of our Manton Collection of British Art,” said Olivier Meslay, Hardymon Director of the Clark. “The Gainsborough installation reveals the breadth of the artist’s approach to nature and celebrates his fascination with mixed media and innovative techniques. These are truly remarkable drawings, and it is a true pleasure to be able to share the full collection with our visitors for the first time.”

Abounding with foliage, cottages, and pastoral figures—shepherds driving flocks of sheep and cows drinking from pools or streams along meandering paths—Gainsborough's landscapes present an idealized view of country life. Rather than depicting specific locales, his drawings evoke the gentle woodland and heath of his native Suffolk in the east, and, later, the mountainous Lake District of Cumbria in the northwest.

Early in his career, Gainsborough sometimes consulted detailed drawings of flora, such as *Study of Mallows* (mid- to late 1750s), when completing the foreground foliage of his paintings. Gainsborough added depth to the clump of mallow by blending his soft graphite strokes with a stump, a tool made of tightly rolled paper or felt. This drawing likely came from one of the artist's sketchbooks, which were dismantled for sale after his death.

In *Landscape with a Clump of Trees on a Hillock* (early 1760s) Gainsborough renders the characteristics of trees with a looser handling than in *Study of Mallows*. The withered trees in the foreground are drawn with calligraphic strokes of watercolor. Scalloped graphite lines define the leafy contours of the group of trees at center, strengthening the sketchy mass of light and shadow formed by layered sweeps of wash.

In the early 1770s, Gainsborough introduced materials traditionally associated with oil painting into his drawings. After establishing this composition with watercolor and thickly applied opaque pigments, he stabilized the sheet with a coating of water mixed with gum arabic, a hardened sap derived from the acacia tree. Once dry, he coated the drawing with three layers of mastic gum dissolved in turpentine, a common solvent for oil paints and varnishes.

Wooded Landscape with Herdsman and Cow (early 1780s) epitomizes the artist's inventive mixed media technique. A sense of rapid handling pervades the composition—a few lines and smudges of chalk define the figures while short, multidirectional strokes describe surrounding foliage. However, the layered use of wash, chalks, and fixative reveals a methodical approach. Gainsborough applied gray ink washes to form a tonal foundation for shadows, which he drew in black ink and chalk; the latter medium was then dragged and smoothed to the desired effect. Throughout the composition, he scattered broken lines of white chalk that serve as highlights in combination with areas of untouched paper, further indications of the artist's forethought.

During the summer of 1783 Gainsborough visited the Lake District of northwest England. The shimmering lakes, valleys, and high peaks of the region attracted artists and tourists in pursuit of its scenic views. *Rocky Wooded Landscape with Herdsman Driving Cattle along a Valley and Distant Mountains* (c. 1783), composed entirely of freely brushed, transparent layers of ink wash, is reminiscent of the picturesque vistas he encountered there. During this period, artists favored wash when carefully recording features of a recognizable landscape. Gainsborough, however, used the medium for painterly expression to represent an unidentifiable mountain that was likely made from memory.

Thomas Gainsborough: Drawings at the Clark is on view in the Clark's Manton Research Center.

ABOUT THE MANTON COLLECTION OF BRITISH ART

Business leader and arts patron Sir Edwin A. G. Manton (1909–2005) and his wife Florence, Lady Manton (1911–2003), began collecting in the 1940s. Born in Essex County, just twenty miles from “Constable Country” in the east of England, Sir Edwin arrived in New York in 1933 to help develop the American International Group. Although he spent the remainder of his life in the United States, Sir Edwin’s love of British art was testimony to his continued devotion to his homeland.

The Mantons built an exceptional collection of paintings and works on paper by British artists, including Constable’s contemplative views of the English countryside and strikingly naturalistic oil studies; Turner’s turbulent, quasi-abstract seascapes; Gainsborough’s rigorous chalk drawings; and Thomas Rowlandson’s humorous watercolors caricaturing British life. The Manton Foundation’s initial gift to the Clark of 250 works has grown through additional acquisitions and now includes more than 300 watercolors, drawings, and prints by such artists as Thomas Girtin, Richard Parkes Bonington, Samuel Palmer, John Martin, and William Blake.

Sir Edwin was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1994 for his generous contributions to the Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain) in London. Throughout his life, his appetite for art collecting never diminished. “I am a compulsive buyer,” he once observed. “It’s better than spending your money on bottles of Scotch.”

ABOUT THE CLARK

The Clark Art Institute, located in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts, is one of a small number of institutions globally that is both an art museum and a center for

research, critical discussion, and higher education in the visual arts. Opened in 1955, the Clark houses exceptional European and American paintings and sculpture, extensive collections of master prints and drawings, English silver, and early photography. Acting as convener through its Research and Academic Program, the Clark gathers an international community of scholars to participate in a lively program of conferences, colloquia, and workshops on topics of vital importance to the visual arts. The Clark library, consisting of more than 270,000 volumes, is one of the nation's premier art history libraries. The Clark also houses and co-sponsors the Williams College Graduate Program in the History of Art.

The Clark, which has a three-star rating in the Michelin Green Guide, is located at 225 South Street in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Galleries are open daily in July and August and Tuesday through Sunday, from September through June. Hours: 10 am to 5 pm. Admission is \$20; free year-round for Clark members, children 18 and younger, and students with valid ID. Free admission is available through several programs, including First Sundays Free; a local library pass program; EBT Card to Culture; Bank of America Museums on Us; and Blue Star Museums. For more information on these programs and more, visit clarkart.edu or call 413 458 2303.

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