

British Panoramic Landscapes, January 28, 2008-October 5, 2008

*A spacious horizon is an image of liberty, where the eye has room to range abroad, to expatiate at large on the immensity of its views, and to lose itself amidst the variety of objects that offer themselves to its observation. Such wide and undetermined prospects are as pleasing to the fancy, as the speculations of eternity or infinitude are to the understanding. (Joseph Addison, in *The Spectator*, 1712.)*

With this, the English essayist Joseph Addison introduced landscape as one of the pleasures of the imagination and characterized the intent of many panoramic works on paper on view in the Museum's Porcelain Gallery. Each of these represents a particular place, yet their function was to impart aesthetic pleasure rather than record minute detail. They are expansive in scope, affording grand vistas from bird's-eye views. They are also deliberately simplified, allowing for speculative imagining. An exception is Thomas Stothard's *Hamlet on a Hillside*, which presents a more descriptive or topographical approach to the panorama.

The landscapes on view also share certain technical concerns. In four examples, the artist painted across two or more pages in his sketchbook in order to achieve a horizontal panorama. In every case, watercolor was applied over lines drawn with ink or graphite.

This type of artwork was termed "tinted drawing" by contemporaries. The predominant blues, greens, and yellows and calculated progressions between fore-, middle-, and background also indicate more concern for idealization than naturalism. In most cases, the artist sketched onsite and then colored the drawing in his studio.

The majority of drawings here were executed prior to a number of innovations in watercolor technique introduced by Thomas Girtin and Joseph M.W. Turner in the early 19th century, such as doing away with contour drawing in ink or chalk. Even after these innovations were introduced, some artists, among them Francis Towne in his view of Plymouth, retained the earlier technique. Others, such as Thomas Barker, were deliberately old-fashioned. His Scarborough recalls Renaissance pen, ink, and wash drawings, which would have been known by contemporary viewers.

This is the first in a series of exhibitions in the Porcelain Gallery featuring selections from the Museum's fine collection of British watercolors. Thanks to the remarkable generosity of an anonymous donor, the Museum's holdings in this area number nearly 900 sheets and include all the major practitioners.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

John Warwick Smith, English, 1749-1831
Keswick Lake from Castlerigg Farm, ca. 1790-1799
Pen and ink, watercolor over graphite on wove paper
Anonymous gift 1986.184.55



Thomas Stothard, British, 1755-1834
Hamlet on a Hillside, 1772
Pen and ink, watercolor over graphite on wove paper
Anonymous gift 1986.184.60



William Green, British, 1760-1823
Landscape with River (River Forth), n.d
Watercolor over graphite on wove paper
Anonymous gift 2005.142.110



Francis Towne, English, ca. 1740-1816
A Panoramic View of Plymouth, 1810
Pen and ink, watercolor over graphite on wove paper
Anonymous Gift 70.118.53



Thomas Barker, British, 1769-1847
Scarborough, n.d
Pen and brown ink, blue and grey washes over graphite on wove paper
Anonymous gift 71.153.16



RISD MUSEUM

Sir Copplestone Wawick Bampfylde, English, 1720-1791
Stourhead: The Lake, looking towards the Temple of Flora with the Church and Market Cross, ca. 1750-1770
Watercolor over graphite on wove paper
Anonymous gift 71.153.18



John White Abbott, British, 1763-1851
On Ullswater, 1791
Pen and ink, watercolor on wove paper
Anonymous gift 71.153.54



George Heriot, British, 1759-1839
Greenwich Park, Prince Edward Island, ca. 1795
Pen and ink, watercolor over graphite on laid paper
Anonymous gift 72.171.19



Francis Towne, English, ca. 1740-1816
Road on Pen Maen Mawr, 1777
Pen and ink, watercolor over graphite on laid paper
Anonymous gift 73.204.52



On the back of this drawing, Towne wrote: "No. 33, July 12 1777. The Beginning of the Road on Pen Maen manor drawn on the spot by Francis Towne. Light from the right hand." Although Towne drew "on the spot," his next sentence indicates that he wanted to remember the slant of the light when he colored the drawing in his studio.