

# Artists Landscapes

---

## Information for educators

The following booklet has been formulated to provide you with ways of working with groups in the Gallery. The information is based on the varying representations of Landscape within Manchester Art Gallery and supplies practical and theoretical approaches to using artworks. You could use the artworks and suggested activities as a starting point to further study or for a new class project, developing the ideas to suit your yearly or termly planning. Ideas can be photocopied directly from the pack or adapted into worksheets for your students to explore independently, in pairs or as part of a group discussion.

The theme has been chosen to give educators and their pupils or students an introduction to some of the Landscapes within the collection, that range from the 1600-1900. Four paintings have been selected to demonstrate the range of artistic representation of Landscapes. The selected pieces will target specific areas within the Gallery, whilst also allowing time to explore the building generally and grasp the various destination Galleries and breadth of study that can be conducted using the collection.

Manchester Art Gallery is a fantastic resource for engaging with many subjects across the curriculum. Art and Design, History, Drama and Citizenship, can be easily addressed within one visit and provide a framework for further visits. The education team use many artworks in a cross-curricular approach, which can be adapted to suit individual student, teacher and school/college needs. Some of these techniques will be explored through the information that follows to create a focal point to your visit and to provide inspiration for related classroom or studio activities and future practise.

## Gallery 2

Artwork:

*Thomson's  
Aeolian Harp*

Artist: Joseph  
Mallord William  
Turner

Date Made: 1809

Oil on canvas



© Manchester City Galleries

A depiction of the landscape overlooking the River Thames from Richmond Hill, London is transformed by the artist into a scene from classical antiquity whilst still being recognisable as a naturalistic landscape in the south of England. Turner uses the clothes and attitudes of the people to evoke a scene in Italy and the work has dreamlike mood of a gentle pastoral scene. A group of figures are in the foreground to the right, some dancing around a golden harp mounted on a pedestal, which is a special instrument played by the wind, not by human hands, others sitting around a stone plinth amongst classical ruins.

---

## Gallery 6

Artwork: *A Spate in the  
Highlands*

Artist: Peter R.A Graham

Date Made: 1866

Oil Paint on canvas



© Manchester City Galleries

A dramatic Highlands landscape, depicting a river rushing towards the viewer, turned brown and swollen by the surge rainwater. The river runs through a valley between misty mountains, which are dark with the storm clouds, on either side. An arched bridge over the river has been half swept away in the torrent, a man who had attempted to cross can just be seen driving his cattle back to the riverbank.

The landscape in contrast to Turners, *Thomson's Aeolian Harp* looks more traditional and seems to reflect the English countryside in a realistic manner, especially the rainy, cold atmosphere that has been achieved through the application of paint and the dramatic subject matter and nature.

## Gallery 12

**Artwork:** *A Storm Off the Dutch Coast*

**Artists:** Jacob Van Ruisdael

**Date made:** 1660-1670

**Oil on canvas**



© Manchester City Galleries

Jacob Van Ruisdael is considered one of the greatest Dutch landscape painters. In this work the artist depicts a storm off the coast. Nature here is not merely presented in a decorative way but is full of forceful personality and intent. There appears to be a sombre mood, the sky overcast.

A jetty is seen in the middle of the distance, and vessels can be seen caught by the strong winds. The sky almost fills two thirds of the painting, which makes human beings relatively small, this could suggest the infinite power of Nature.

---

## Gallery 14

**Artwork:** *Echelles*

**Artist:** Yves Tanguy

**Date Made:** 1935

**Oil on canvas**



© ARS, NY and DACS, London 2005

This landscape is half marine and half lunar. Imaginary objects look as though they came from a dream space. Yves Tanguy was born in Paris in 1900, becoming a member of the Surrealist group in 1925 and despite not having any formal training; he soon developed a mature style. This landscape could be seen as a metaphorical vision of the artist's inner self.

The painter was attached to the Surrealist movement and worked in a style in which different elements in the painting are released from the unconscious, which is called automatism. Chance is also an important element to this work and by sorting the objects Tanguy makes them look real i.e. three-dimensional.

## Ways In

---

- Compare the depictions of the two English landscapes seen within Turners, *Thomson's Aeolian Harp* and Graham's, *A Spate in the Highlands*. Allow your students to express their own viewpoint on the works; to explore how every individual will have different views and ways of interpreting the images.
- Jacob Van Ruisdael depicts a stormy vision of the seascape, it is very strong, powerful and expressive. What kind of ideas do you think the artist is trying to convey? Humanity's insignificance amid the splendour of nature?  
Could the rough seas suggest the struggle of life and death?
- The expressionism of Ruisdael's work had a deep influence in the Romantic movement (early 19th Century). His seascapes were a direct influence on Turner and can be seen in paintings such as *Passengers going on board* (1827) displayed in Gallery 4.
- Students could complete sketches of the Ruisdael and Turner paintings to explore the similarities and influences. They could concentrate on composition, subject matter and application of paint. The artists' methods could be suggested using oil pastel and pencil crayon within the Gallery space to create expressive marks to capture the instant feeling from each painting. The images produced could be compared through a group discussion conducted in front of both images.
- Van Ruisdael was the nephew of Salomon Van Ruysdael, also a well-known artist, who was famous for bringing a sense of the picturesque to his landscapes. The work by both of these artists is shown hanging together in Gallery 12. Explore the comparisons between their artistic visions of nature.
- One of Surrealism tendencies is automatism (to release ideas from the subconscious). Compare the different ways in which Surrealist artist did that by looking at the different paintings displayed in Gallery 14. For example Paul Nash used stones and fossils as a starting point for his paintings, whilst Yves Tanguy would sketch from the subconscious and then refine them with further detail and thought.
- Ceri Richards' montage in Gallery 14, presents a costerwoman made out of different objects. The viewer can see different images depending on how the objects are associated, for example the woman could be holding a slice of melon, but maybe it is a fan. This is an example of Surrealist process, the free association of images. Ask the students what can they see?

## Follow Up

---

Ask the students to complete a sketch of a landscape scene at home, whether rural or urban. Extend the drawing activity in the classroom by revisiting a landscape seen on the Gallery visit. This could be a great opportunity to combine the sketches completed on Ruisdael and Turner. Acrylic paints could be introduced to mirror oil paint and exploration could be conducted using different tools such as plastic knives, cloth and fingers to recreate the mood and texture of the works.

Critical studies could be further explored through a discussion on how artists' representations can be altered to accommodate taste and expectation. Young British Artists such as Tracey Emin could be introduced to examine how artists' are challenging what is actually considered art?

In the 17th Century, merchants that had gained their wealth from overseas trading became interested in art. Artists such as Ruisdael painted subjects popular with these wealthy merchants; amongst these seascapes were one of the favourites.

Investigate arts patronage within this period.

The Surrealist group's ideology is summarised in Andre Breton *Surrealist Manifesto*. The book gives a great insight of their ideas and also on the position of the artist in the 20th Century, who conscious of his position in society writes manifestos to complement and expand his artwork.

## Further Research

---

A Picture of Britain, David Dimbleby, Tate Publishing (2005)

Dutch Landscape Painting of the Seventeenth Century, W. Stechow (1968)

Turner: The Late Seascapes. Catalogue for Turner exhibition, showing Dutch seascape and Turner's seascape displayed alongside.

<http://www.manchestergalleries.org>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/apictureofbritain/>

Through this website you can help build a digital picture of Britain.

<http://www.tate.org.uk>

<http://www.nationalgallery.co.uk>