

# **Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows by John Constable (1776-1837)**

**Date:** 1831

**Medium:** Oil on Canvas

**Size:** 147cm high by 189cm wide

## **Information about the painting**

John Constable was devoted to the idea of painting landscapes as they appear to the artist in nature. He was skilled in the technique of chiaroscuro – using paint to balance light and shade within a painting. Constable created some very large oil paintings, often referred to as his ‘six-footers’, for public exhibition and ‘Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows’ is a late example of one of them.

Constable painted places of personal significance to him. Following the death of his wife Maria in 1828, he was supported in his grief by friend and confidant Archdeacon John Fisher, nephew of the Bishop of Salisbury. It was during a visit to Fisher in 1829 that Constable made studies of Salisbury Cathedral, sketched outdoors in natural light from the banks of the River Nadder, overlooking nearby meadows. Based on these sketches, the ‘six-footer’ was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1831.

## **Overview description of the painting**

The painting is a wide landscape view looking across from the banks of the River Nadder towards the north-west elevation of Salisbury Cathedral and open water meadows, edged by distant buildings, tall trees and distant hills. The Cathedral is set against a cloud-filled stormy sky. Birds are silhouetted against patches of blue sky. A rainbow arches down from the sky around the west end of the Cathedral to the top of the buildings that edge the meadows. A single bolt of lightning drops from the stormy clouds onto the roof of the Cathedral’s quire near the east end.

In the foreground a large cart is pulled by three horses, one behind the other, emerging from a shallow stream into the River Nadder. A woman and boatman go about their business nearby. A dog watches the scene from a bank of the stream.

## **Detailed description of the painting**

A little more than half the top section of the painting depicts sky. In the landscape below, covering one-fifth of the painting, stretching from left to right in the foreground, is the bank of a stream. To the far left of the bank, on a bed of brown soil and small rocks, lies a tangle of long grasses and brambles. Towards the centre a path leads to the stream. Standing at the end of the path, facing towards the water, is a sheepdog, its tail and muzzle tipped with white and a bright pink tongue protruding from its mouth. To

