

COURTAULD

A View of One's Own:

Landscapes by British Women Artists 1760 – 1860

28 Jan – 20 May 2026

Gilbert & Ildiko Butler Drawings Gallery

When the Royal Academy was founded in 1768, its members included two women, yet there would not be another female academician until Dame Laura Knight was elected in 1936. Despite this institutional exclusion, women artists in Britain continued to train, practice, and exhibit during this period, particularly in the field of landscape watercolours and drawings. These artists included both highly accomplished amateurs and those ambitious for more formal recognition. Some of them managed, despite the odds, to show their work at the Royal Academy, which was then based here at Somerset House. Their drawings ranged from private topographical sketchbooks to impressive exhibition pieces. Some enjoyed the support of their families; others struggled against the obstacles imposed by fathers and husbands.

During this period, travel, both within Britain and in Europe after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, became more accessible, while watercolour burgeoned in popularity. The increasing availability of drawing manuals and the growing number of drawing masters inspired many women to pursue landscape drawing. This exhibition showcases ten artists whose work is ripe for rediscovery, from Harriet Lister, one of the first artists to explore the Lake District, to Elizabeth Batty, whose drawings were reproduced in print to critical acclaim and commercial success. Together, they highlight our evolving understanding of an important period in British art.

This exhibition is dedicated to Michael H. Broughton (1944-2026), connoisseur of English watercolours and great friend of the Courtauld Gallery.

The programme of displays in the Drawings Gallery is generously supported by the International Music and Art Foundation, with additional support from James Bartos.

A View of One's Own: Landscapes by British Women Artists 1760-1860 is also supported by the Richard McDougall Fund, administered by the University of London.

Harriet Lister (1751-1821)

Forge Valley near Scarborough

1782

Pen and black ink, ink wash and watercolour over traces of graphite on laid paper

Using shades of grey and sparing touches of colour, Harriet Lister captures the pearly quality of cloud-shadowed sunlight falling on the slopes of the Forge Valley in her native North Yorkshire. The flow of the river Derwent between the wooded hills contributes to the somewhat unsettled atmosphere.

Lister exhibited this drawing at the Royal Academy, which was then based in Somerset House, in 1784. The only daughter of a wealthy York family, little is known of Lister's training, but she was clearly an accomplished artist.

Private collection. Promised gift of the Courtauld Gallery (Samuel Courtauld Trust)



Harriet Lister (1751-1821)

Bassenthwaite Lake from Armathwaite

1790

Watercolour and opaque watercolour over graphite on wove paper

Nearly two-thirds of this view of Bassenthwaite Lake is occupied by sky, giving the scene a sense of unbounded space. Lister was a frequent visitor to the Lake District in a period when its popularity with artists was increasing rapidly. The extensive notes she made on the watercolour and its mount reveal her working method. She drew the initial sketch on the spot in August 1788, completing the final composition more than 18 months later. This explains why a work dated March 1790 shows what is clearly a summer scene.

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Harriet Lister (1751-1821)

View of the River Ure at Newby

1794

Watercolour and opaque watercolour over graphite on wove paper

A delicate glow suffuses this serene river landscape. Lister skilfully used colour to create a sense of depth through the contrast between the dark ranks of trees in the foreground and the misty blue of the woods in the middle ground and distance.

Although Lister is not known to have exhibited after 1784, she regularly shared her work with friends and family. The inscription on the mount records her gift of this watercolour to the friend on whose estate, Newby Hall, she painted it.

Private collection. Promised gift of the Courtauld Gallery (Samuel Courtauld Trust)



Eliza Mary Gore (1754-1802)

Landscape with figures and a distant view of Rome

1776

Watercolour and opaque watercolour on laid paper

The warm palette and liberal use of opaque watercolour in this idyllic scene of peasants at work along the banks of the river Tiber outside Rome reflect Eliza Gore's largely European training. The daughter of the artist Charles Gore, she was born in London but spent most of her life in Italy and Germany. Her teacher, the German landscape painter Jacob Philipp Hackert, regarded her as his most gifted pupil. Most of Gore's work entered German museums after her death, making this watercolour one of her few works in a British collection.

Courtauld Gallery: Spooner Trust gift, 2021



Amelia Long, Lady Farnborough (1772-1837)

Bromley Hill, Kent

1814

Black chalk and touches of white opaque watercolour on blue laid paper

From the vantage point of Bromley Hill, this sweeping view looks south to the distant North Downs of Kent. Amelia Long used blue paper for many of her most ambitious landscapes, taking the paper's tone as a midtone for the finely rendered clouds. The seated female figure at lower right may be a subtle self-portrait.

An aristocrat, Long was a prolific honorary exhibitor at the Royal Academy between 1807 and 1822. She exhibited views from Bromley Hill, the home she shared with her politician husband, in 1816 and 1817; this drawing may have been one of them.

Private collection. Promised gift of the Courtauld Gallery (Samuel Courtauld Trust)



Amelia Long, Lady Farnborough (1772-1837)

A view across parkland, Combe Bank, Kent

Before 1826

Black chalk and wash heightened with white on blue paper

Framed by two groups of trees and two sculpted urns, the North Downs are observed from the opposite direction as in Long's view from her home in Bromley. A grazing flock of sheep subtly animates the foreground. The parkland depicted here belonged to a country house near Sevenoaks in Kent. Although Long travelled in search of some of her subjects, her lifelong familiarity with the landscapes of northwest Kent placed them at the heart of her work.

Courtauld Gallery: Spooner Trust gift, 2024



Amelia Long, Lady Farnborough (1772-1837)

View of Paris, with St Sulpice and part of the Luxembourg Palace

After 1826

Black chalk, grey wash and blue watercolour, white opaque watercolour on light grey wove paper

Amelia Long was one of the first British artists to travel to France following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. She probably made this delicate watercolour on a later trip, as indicated by the initials AF in the lower right corner (she became Lady Farnborough when her husband was raised to the peerage in 1826). Long rendered the scene in broad watercolour washes, establishing a striking contrast between the stern verticality of the church, palace and garden statuary and their wavering reflections in the surface of the pond.

Courtauld Gallery: Witt bequest, 1952



Lady Elizabeth Susan Percy (1782-1847)

View of the Villa Pescatore from Villa Muti, Piombino

1833

Graphite, white chalk and watercolour on grey wove paper

This panoramic view of the Tuscan countryside is one of Lady Elizabeth Susan Percy's most impressive works. Using the pale grey of the paper as a midtone, she skilfully used white chalk and sparse touches of watercolour to conjure the still, hazy atmosphere of a day in late spring.

Like Eliza Gore, Percy spent much of her life in Europe. The daughter of the Earl of Beverley, she pursued her art as a member of the British expatriate community in Rome, where she also supported other artists, including Edward Lear.

Courtauld Gallery: Spooner Trust gift, 2022



Fanny Blake (1804-1879)

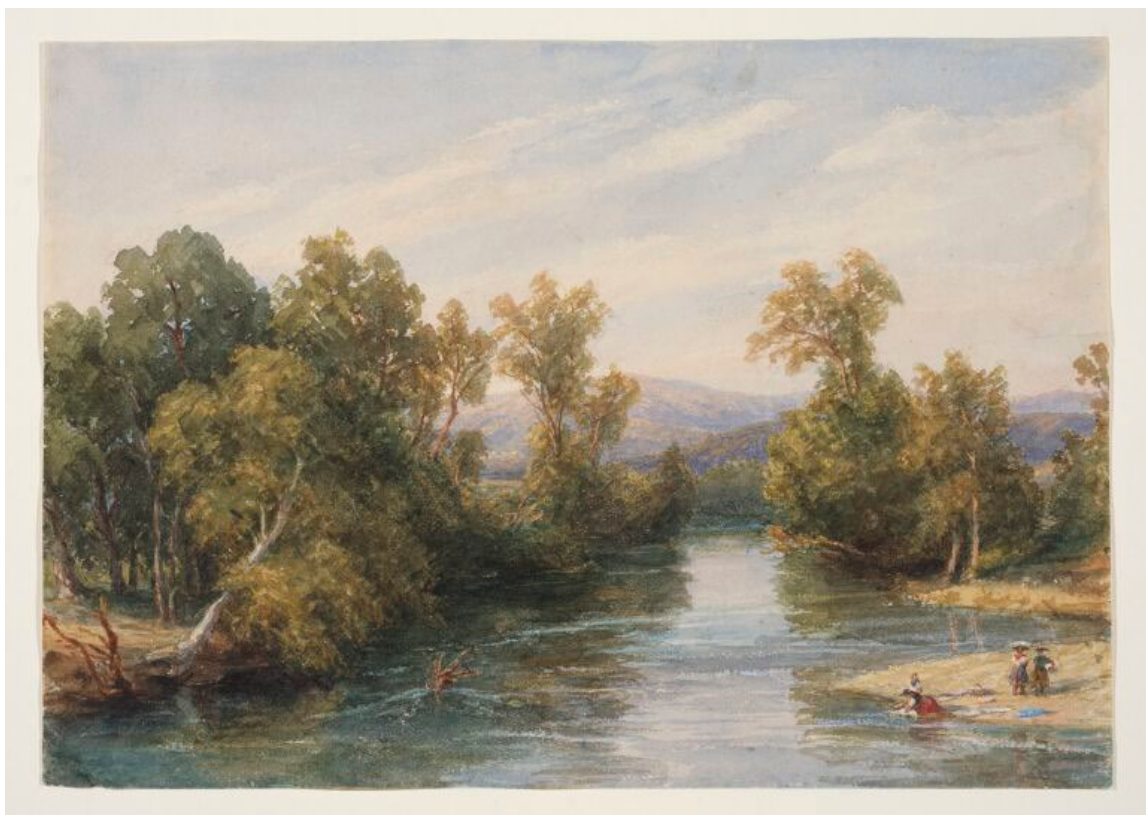
River Siagne, near Cannes

1865

Watercolour and opaque watercolour over traces of graphite on wove paper

Blake made this lively watercolour on a tour of France and northern Italy in 1865-66, one of several sketching trips she made in Europe. The loose handling and sparse preliminary underdrawing, as well as the relatively small size of the sheet, suggest that she painted it on the spot with some speed. She used a dry brush to render the surface of the river, evoking the rapid flow of water over a shallow riverbed.

Private collection. Promised gift of the Courtauld Gallery (Samuel Courtauld Trust)



Lady Mary Lowther (1738-1824)

Long Meg and Her Daughters

1766

Graphite, pen and brown ink, watercolour and opaque watercolour on laid paper

Long Meg and Her Daughters from the Gate

1766

Graphite, pen and brown ink, watercolour and opaque watercolour on laid paper

Long Meg and Her Daughters, a Neolithic stone circle, is one of the most important prehistoric sites in northern England, but it was little known when Lady Mary Lowther made these two watercolours. The daughter of an earl, she enjoyed extensive artistic training during her youth.

Art later offered a vital escape from her unhappy marriage to the Cumberland landowner and politician Sir James Lowther. During the 1760s, she travelled the area and drew prolifically, producing the first substantial body of Lake District landscapes. This pair of watercolours shows her sensitivity not only to the particulars of place but also to the ever-changing effects of weather, seen most clearly in her depiction of a rainstorm sweeping over the distant fells.

On loan from The Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere





Long Meg and her Daughters

Mary Mitford (born around 1742; active until around 1780)

Millbrook Church with a view of Southampton

Graphite, pen and grey-black ink and watercolour on wove paper

Between Florence and Arezzo

1770

Pen and grey-black ink, watercolour and opaque watercolour over traces of graphite, with scratching out, on laid paper

Very little is known about Mary Mitford, including her life dates. Two of her brothers studied drawing with the artist and travel writer William Gilpin, and she may have trained with him as well. Her work began to emerge on the art market in the late 20th century.

Using the cool, restricted range of colours and the clear outlines characteristic of watercolour in the mid-18th century, her drawings depict sites in England - such as the view of Southampton harbour on view here - and in Europe. Mitford is not known to have travelled abroad and it has been assumed that her European views, like this Italian landscape, are copies of her teachers' drawings. However, it is possible that she travelled and made them on the spot. In any case, they show her to be an artist of considerable skill.

Private collection. Promised gift of the Courtauld Gallery (Samuel Courtauld Trust)





Mary Smirke (1779-1853)

A willow by the Thames near Barnes

1810s?

Pen and brown ink and watercolour over traces of graphite with scratching out on wove paper

The Thames near Richmond

Around 1811

Graphite, watercolour and opaque watercolour on wove paper

Apparently working from a boat mid-stream, Mary Smirke used minute brushstrokes to create the shimmering reflections on a quiet stretch of the Thames west of London. Despite its small size, the exquisite precision of this watercolour earned it a place on the walls of the Great Room - the largest and most prestigious space - in the Royal Academy's 1812 exhibition at Somerset House, where the Courtauld Gallery is now located.

Smirke was an ambitious artist who drew prolifically, sometimes working in a looser, more graphic manner, as in the larger Thames landscape above. She exhibited at the Royal Academy every year between 1809-1814, although she was sometimes hindered by her artist father, who was on the hanging committee. One year, dissatisfied with the placement of her work, he had it removed from the show altogether.

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Richenda Gurney (1782-1855)

Ladies' Bathing Cove, Torquay, in Sketches of Torquay and its environs

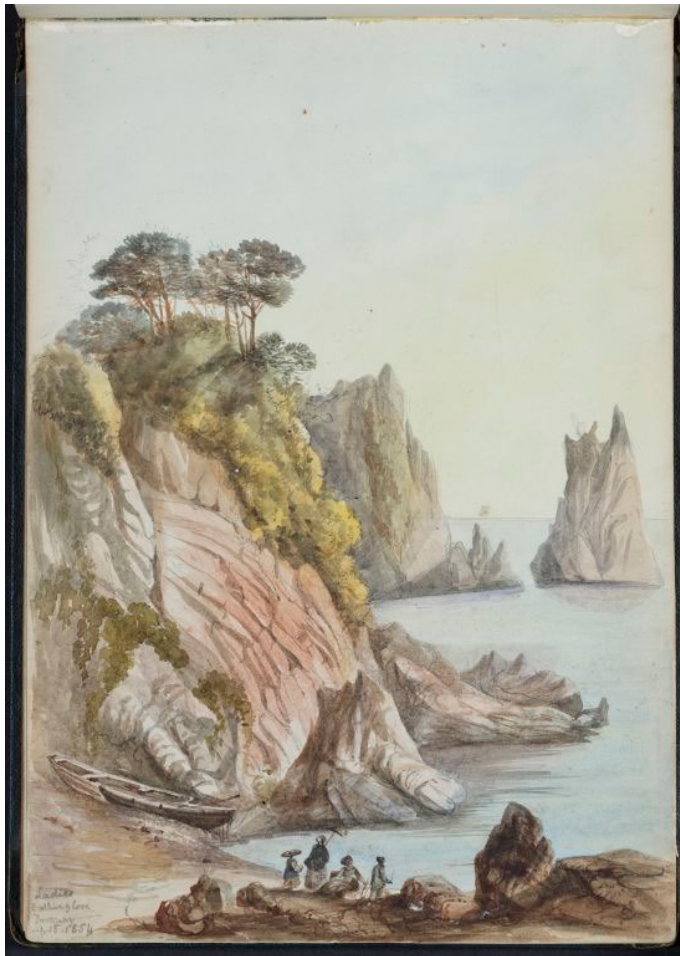
April and May 1854

Watercolour and graphite on wove paper

The sixth of twelve children of a prominent Norfolk Quaker family, Richenda Gurney's artistic talent was encouraged from an early age and she studied with the landscape painter John Crome. This striking watercolour fills the first page of the sketchbook Gurney used on a tour of Devon. An oblong sketchbook would normally be used for horizontally orientated landscapes, but Gurney chose to use hers in a vertical orientation. This emphasises the height of the cliffs surrounding the cove, lending drama to the composition.

The recent expansion of the railway made travel to previously remote areas like Devon more accessible. The presence of a group of tourists - including a woman bent over a drawing board, observing the scene, perhaps a stand-in for Gurney herself - alludes to these changes.

Courtauld Gallery: Spooner Trust gift, 2023



Fanny Blake (1804-1879)

A rainbow over Patterdale Churchyard, Cumbria

1849

Watercolour and opaque watercolour over graphite, with scratching out, on wove paper

By the mid-19th century, Lake District scenery was a mainstay of British landscape watercolours. Fanny Blake's intensely Romantic view of St Patrick's church in Patterdale in the aftermath of a rainstorm, the sky illuminated by a double rainbow, was likely painted in the studio. Her attention to weather and atmosphere, however, suggests firsthand observation.

The daughter of an economist, Blake studied watercolour with the acclaimed landscape painter Peter de Wint. She never married and likely had a private income, leaving her free to pursue her art. This work's large scale, finesse of execution and intricate composition are typical of 'exhibition' watercolours of the period, implying that Blake intended it for display. It may have been included in a London exhibition of amateur artists' work in 1851.

Gift from a private collection in memory of W. W. Spooner, 2025. Jointly owned by the Samuel Courtauld Trust and The Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere.



Amos Green (1735-1807) and Harriet Lister (1751-1821)

A waterfall ('From a Blot')

1795

Watercolour and opaque watercolour over traces of graphite on wove paper

According to the inscription, this boldly theatrical view of a waterfall was not made from life, but from a 'blot'. Lister and her future husband, Amos Green, were interested in the theories of the artist Alexander Cozens, who devised a method for creating landscape drawings that was intended to liberate the imagination. This involved using a random ink blot on a sheet of paper to stimulate the artist's mind to picture mountains, rivers, trees and other elements of a landscape, thus inspiring a purely imaginary composition.

Lister and Green collaborated on this watercolour the year before they married, signed with their combined initials, 'A + HG'. As Lister's mother strongly opposed the match, the partly obscured signature may be a secret declaration of their union.

Private collection. Promised gift of the Courtauld Gallery (Samuel Courtauld Trust)



Elizabeth Frances Batty (1791-1875)

Papigno, near Terni; Castel Gandolfo; Lake Agnano, near Naples; Lago Maggiore and Isola Superiore; Simplon Road between Baveno and Gravellona; Domodossola

1817

Graphite, pen and brown ink, brush and brown wash on wove paper

The meticulous detail and skilful rendering of space in these views of northern and central Italy belies their small scale. They are part of a group of sixty drawings created by Elizabeth Batty whilst undertaking the Grand Tour of France, Switzerland and Italy with her father in 1817. Following her return to London, the drawings were engraved and published as *Italian Scenery* (1820), a book which enjoyed critical and popular success. Batty's drawings show an innate understanding of how a tonal drawing would look translated into the linear medium of print. This suggests that she may have secured a commission for the book before starting her travels.

Batty's marriage in 1822 brought her artistic career to a premature end. Forty-four of the *Italian Scenery* drawings - the only ones by her hand that survive - were rediscovered in 2019.

Courtauld Gallery: Spooner Trust gift, 2022







