

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



John Constable (East Bergholt 1776 - London 1837)

Portrait of Dr. William Travis (c.1752-1835), bust-length, in a black coat and white cravat
oil on millboard

44 x 36.8 cm (17¼ x 14 ¼ in)

Literature:

G. Reynolds, *The Early Paintings and Drawings of John Constable*, New Haven and London, 1996, p. 214, no.15.54, pl. 1265.

Artist description:

John Constable was an English Romantic painter. Born in Suffolk, he is known principally for his landscapes paintings of Dedham Vale, the area surrounding his home, now known as "Constable Country".

Constable was born to Golding and Ann (Watts) Constable. His father was a wealthy corn merchant. Although Constable was his parents' second son, his older brother was mentally handicapped, so John was expected to succeed his father in the business. Constable worked in the corn business after leaving school, but his younger brother Abram eventually took over the running of the mills.

In 1799, Constable persuaded his father to let him pursue art. Entering the Royal Academy Schools as a probationer, he was inspired by paintings by Thomas Gainsborough, Claude Lorrain, Peter Paul

Rubens, Annibale Caracci and Jacob van Ruisdael. By 1803, he was exhibiting paintings at the Royal Academy.

His early style has many of the qualities associated with his mature work. Constable's usual subjects, scenes of ordinary daily life, were unfashionable in an age that looked for more romantic visions of wild landscapes and ruins. In order to make ends meet, Constable took up portraiture, which he found dull work – though he executed many fine portraits..

Constable married Maria Bicknell, his childhood friend, in 1816. At the same time, a greater emotional range began to register in his art.

In 1819, Constable was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. In 1821, Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) saw *The Hay Wain*. It won a gold medal at the Salon de Paris 1824. In his lifetime Constable was to sell only twenty paintings in England, but in France he sold more than twenty in just a few years.

He was elected to the Royal Academy in 1829, and in 1831 was appointed Visitor at the Royal Academy, where he seems to have been popular with the students.

He died on the night of the 31st March 1837.