

# **A Bit of Slap and Tickle: Constable's Brighton Paintings 1824-1828 - Materials and Techniques**

Background Notes

**Sarah Cove — 19 October 2022**



**Sarah Cove, founder of the Constable Research  
Project at work**

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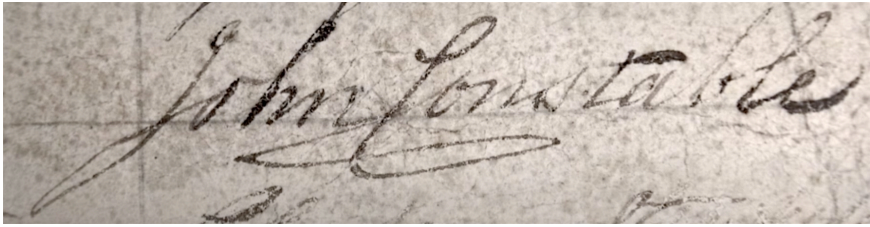
**Sarah Cove ACR** is an Accredited Paintings Conservator, technical art historian and lecturer. She is a specialist in British portraits and 19th and 20th century landscapes. She is the recognised expert on John Constable's painting materials and techniques and is a consultant to international museums, salesrooms and collectors. She has appeared twice to much critical acclaim on BBC1's 'Fake or Fortune?: Constable' (Series 3 2014/ Series 6 2017) and 'Art on the BBC: Constable' (2021).

## **The Constable Research Project**

In 1986 Sarah Cove ACR founded the Constable Research Project to study John Constable's oil painting materials and techniques. In 1989 she was a Visiting Fellow at Yale. In 2005 she gave the inaugural lecture to The Constable Trust at East Bergholt. In 2006 she co-led the 'Constable's Great Landscapes' symposium at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. and in 2007 she lectured at the Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino, CA.

After more than 30 years, the Project continues to flourish with on-going research and consultancy proposals, a popular Facebook page and sometimes the discovery of an unknown masterpiece! Sarah has been instrumental in the attribution of many previously unrecognised works

Sarah's publications include essays in the Tate Gallery's exhibition catalogues for 'Constable' (1991) and 'Constable: The Great Landscapes' (2006), conference papers, essays for professional journals, international salerooms and privately published catalogues.



## Constable's Brighton Paintings 1824 - 1828: Materials and Techniques

In the mid-1820s, Constable added the newly fashionable seaside resort of Brighton to his familiar motifs of the Suffolk countryside and the skies of Hampstead Heath. His family began to take regular holidays there from 1824 in response to his wife's deteriorating health (she died of consumption in 1828). In Brighton, Constable was confronted with the hustle and bustle of cosmopolitan life against the backdrop of traditional fishing and coastal industry. He adapted practised painting techniques such as 'slapping' the paint on with a palette knife and 'tickling' it about with the point of a brush handle to create movement and texture in some of the most fabulous depictions of the British coast and sky ever painted. From an accumulation of virtuosi outdoor oil sketches and studio studies he created one of his most famous 'six-footers', *The Chain Pier, Brighton*, 1827 (Tate). This lecture includes recent research and images of oil sketches from the V&A and Royal Academy of Arts collections, studio studies and the full-size *The Chain Pier, Brighton*, examined during the Constable Research Project, and it also touches on Sarah's examination of *A Sea Beach, Brighton* for BBC1's 'Fake of Fortune?: Constable' in 2014. In addition, the seminar will discuss the significance and influence of Constable and his reputation in France. Finally, it will look at the newly discovered Constable, *The Colliers' Barge*, found in France but currently on show in Brighton and which Sarah had to authenticate for Sotheby's.

## Publications

For the history, methodology and results of the Constable Research Project go to my website:

<https://www.sarahcoveacr.com/constable-research-publications>

Scroll down to **'Fit for Purpose: 30 Years of the Constable Research Project'** and press 'HERE' for the link. Go to pp. 94-108.

**Cove, Sarah**, 'The Painting Techniques of Constable's "Six-Footers"', (pp. 50-67) and catalogue entry for Constable's palette and paintbox (pp.194-197) in *Constable, The Great Landscapes*, exhibition catalogue, Tate, London, 2006

**Lyles, Anne & Hargreaves, Martin**, *Late Constable*, Royal Academy, 2021

**Lancaster, Shan**, *Constable and Brighton: Something out of Nothing*, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, 2017

## TV and Media

**'Secret Lives of the Artists: Constable in Love' (Andrew Graham-Dixon), BBC2, 2003**

Excerpt:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQy0Rue06gU> (1.37 min in) (DVD of the complete show available for personal use only from Andrew Graham-Dixon's website)

**'Fake or Fortune?: Constable', BBC1, Series 3, 2014**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b03srsjl/fake-or-fortune-series-3-2-constable>

**'Fake or Fortune?: Constable', BBC1, Series 6, 2017**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b092sh3q/fake-or-fortune-series-6-1-constable>

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