



ST*ART Spaces: Turner, Landscape and Light

Hear me, See me

Come on an audio amble and linger a while in the sounds, smells and sights of Turner's *Walton Bridges* landscape.

Transcript

[Soundscape down by the water's edge:

- **River water gently lapping**
- **Summer evening sounds of bees and birds**
- **Cows mooing**
- **Chat of voices of the workers on the far side of the river**

Only the river and the summer evening sounds remain for the rest of the piece with volume reduced so can just be heard under the spoken word]

Voice:

Welcome to a dreamy wander on the banks of the River Thames.

We're going to spend a bit of time in the world of **Walton Bridges** by JMW Turner.

Have a look at the picture: the depth of the sky; the calm of the water. Imagine you are looking across the view and can feel the warmth of the sun on the side of your face. You take a deep breath in... and out. Smelling the scented summery air.

Imagine...

You are south-west of London, on a walk you know well. You've been here many times in lots of different kinds of weather. It's late afternoon. You like it here best at this time of the day, especially when it has been hot and drowsy.

See how the sunlight picks out the warmth of the stone on the bridges here at Walton. Look at the bridge further in the distance. It is not over water, but

instead spans the marshy land so you don't have to slip and slither through mud before you get to the river crossing.

How often have you taken this walk, waiting for the light to be just right?

From where you stand on the shore, the closest bridge is clear. You notice how the rays of afternoon light catch the sides of the turrets, which run along the bridge and give space for the working horses to pass one another. Today, in the lazy heat, there isn't much hurrying going on.

It has been so hot. You've walked a long way to reach this place. Before you set up your easel and paints, you wander down to the deliciously cool water, take off your shoes and stockings and dip your toes into the relief of the gentle shallows of the river.

[Cows' moos and chatter of voices]

The cows moo contentedly, happy to have you join them down on the bank.

Your eye is caught by the boy on the other side of the water. He is wearing a red hat to keep the sun off his head. You see him gently lead the horses down to the river to drink and you wonder if he will join them in there, cooling his toes just as you have yours. He'll have to be sneaky as none of the other workers are relaxing.

[Chatter of voices]

They're busy lowering their masts so they can get their barges under the bridge and continue their journey downstream. You wonder what cargo they're carrying. Night soil? It could be. But you can't smell anything apart from the late afternoon pollen from the flowers and grasses.

Now the sun is getting lower. The light that time brings is important. You set up your kit near where you dabbled your feet. You think how much better painting outside – en plein air - is than working in a stuffy studio. This natural setting enables you to capture all the beauty of the here and now. The sounds, the smells, the tiny details and all the things you might not have noticed: the delicate white of the meadowsweet down on your left or the arrowhead plant next to it. You might be tempted to paint the arrowhead with flowers, but that wouldn't be right. It's not flowering yet. Nearly, but not quite. Painting here

out in the open means you must tell the truth of what you see. Otherwise, why bother?

[Cows' moos]

You feel pleased when you notice the little group of waterlilies and their cheery flowers gently bobbing about in the river. The cows nose them out of the way when they drink.

You scan the surroundings just as a final check. Yes. This is perfect. The sun is dropping below the high summer cloud so that the sky is golden to the west and darkening to the east. A meeting point. Day meets night. The bridges slice through the land and yet join it at the same time. The old ways of the natural world harmonising with a new age of vast bridges and modern engineering and progress. How strange that things that seem so opposite are so balanced. All here on this spot, at this time. The soft curve of the river divides and connects all creatures that live and work by it.

The boy has stayed on his horse – for the time being.

You take a breath, lift your arm, and begin.

[Sounds of the river water gently lapping and summer evening sounds of bees and birds, the cows' mooing and chat of voices of the workers on the far side of the river until fade]

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