



ST\*ART Spaces: Crome, Texture and Tales

## Hear me, See me!

Come on an audio amble and linger a while in the sounds, textures and people of John Crome's painting *Boulevard des Italiens, Paris 1818*.

### Transcript

**[The sounds of a busy marketplace, including a horse and cart, hubbub of French voices, birds and dogs. A breeze runs through the trees.]**

Welcome to a friendly stroll in the streets of Paris. We're going to spend a bit of time in the world of **Boulevard des Italiens** by John Crome.

Have a look at the painting: the slant of the shadows, the curve of the trees, the warmth of the light. Imagine you're looking across this view feeling the gentle breeze on your skin. You take a breath in...and out...listening to the friendly babble of folk amiably chatting.

Imagine...

It's a warm autumn evening and your day has been busy, but enjoyable. You are watching a busy Parisian market on your first visit to the city. You've come for the buildings and the architecture, but you're surprised to find that it is the people that you want to sketch.

After a day of sightseeing, it's hard not to notice the way the sunlight warms the pale ochre of the buildings. Somehow, here, they look less like manmade structures and more like something from the natural world: their tall walls like cliffs, their windows like craggy rock. They're protecting this little buzzing bustle of life in the centre of your view. The trees balance and sway softly like reeds in a river... Back and forth... Back and forth. Providing shade for the browsers below.

Your feet ache, so you find a place to sit. A café, and soon, a cool drink and a bite to eat. You delve for your sketch book wanting to capture this moment and these lives unfolding in front of you.

Look.

### **[A chatter of voices.]**

Your eye is drawn to the old vegetable-seller resting by the stone pillar. Her wares seem enormous! Carrots longer than your forearm and nearly as thick; huge tightly packed caulis; fat leeks - the clean white stems contrast the dark green, plentiful leaves. The seller sits and watches a rival seller opposite but doesn't seem to mind the younger woman. There is custom to share.

You are pleased to see the art stall and you make a note to take a look later, when your feet are less sore, your tummy full and your thirst quenched. It is pleasing to see landscapes featuring amongst the images. A dramatic seascape, a rocky outcrop. Judging by the seller's clothes, he does well for himself. The people of Paris know that art is as important as the food that they eat. It nourishes the spirit rather than the stomach but just as vital.

### **[Horses neighing]**

A clatter of horses' hooves draws your eye further into the market scene. Men dressed in fine uniforms halloo friendly shouts to others sitting enjoying the warmth of the sun. Their buckles, buttons and medals glint and wink in the light. The horses are well trained. Rider and horse move together as one, more like a mythological beast than two separate beings. The riders - soldiers - look striking with their straight backs and magnificent hats.

More soldiers are by the market. They are talking and stand side by side rather than face to face. You wonder if this is because they're used to fighting shoulder to shoulder on a battlefield. Old habits die hard. But, looking closer, it has probably got more to do with the young ladies gliding gracefully through the stalls. The ladies can admire a handsome uniform much more from this angle.

These ladies are wearing the latest fashion and look excitedly at the textiles for sale. They seek eagerly through fine silks, ribbons and lace to look for inspiration. Their beautiful gowns of pale muslin shift and gather around them

like robes on a Greek statue. They appear to glow in this autumn light. Fortunately, the weather is still warm, or else they'd feel the chill.

On your left and walking closer you notice a couple. A superbly moustachioed cavalry man – a Hussar – strolls arm in arm with a finely dressed lady. He looks quite hot in his pelisse – his fur-trimmed jacket. But – oh, how marvellous – you smile when you notice the two small dogs that the lady holds on two leads. One looks squarely on with a solid and determined intent, just like the hot Hussar. The other – frothier, more playful – matches the lady in appearance.

The hubbub of voices and dogs and horses is drowned momentarily with a clatter of wheels as a carriage speeds past, pulling you from your reverie and reminding you that time marches on. This scene would make a fine oil painting when you return to England. If you wish to sketch, now is the perfect moment. Everything feels set. The speedy with the steady. The fancy with the familiar. The young with the old. All seems balanced and collected to perfectly represent this day, this instance, these people.

You open your sketchbook and begin.

**[Sounds of the marketplace, horse and cart, people's voices, birds, dogs and the breeze]**



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