

Claude

Claude Lorrain, (born Claude Gellée, called le Lorrain in French; traditionally just Claude in English; c. 1600 – 1682) was a French painter, draughtsman and engraver of the Baroque era. He spent most of his life in Italy, and is one of the earliest important artists, apart from his contemporaries in Dutch Golden Age painting, to concentrate on landscape painting. His landscapes are usually turned into the more prestigious genre of history paintings by the addition of a few small figures, typically representing a scene from the bible or classical mythology. By the end of the 1630s he was established as the leading landscapist in Italy, and enjoyed high prices for his work. These gradually became larger, but with fewer figures, more carefully painted, and produced at a slower rate. He was not generally an innovator in landscape painting, except in introducing the sun into many paintings, which had been rare before.



Landscape With a Piping Sheherd c1629-32

According to Sandrart, Claude did not do well at the village school and was apprenticed to a pastry baker. With a company of fellow cooks and bakers (Lorraine had a high reputation for pâtisserie), Claude travelled to Rome and was eventually employed as servant and cook by Tassi, who at some point converted him into an apprentice and taught him drawing and painting. Tassi (best known as the rapist of Artemisia Gentileschi) had a large workshop specializing in fresco schemes in palaces.

Landscape Painting and Claude Lorrain

Landscape painting developed in Rome, following the examples of Annibale Carracci and his school and of northern European artists who traveled to the city. During the first half of the seventeenth century, a significant group of foreign artists was based in Italy, painting landscapes for local and international patrons. The most lyrical of these works were by the French artist Claude Lorrain, who lived in Rome for most of his life and painted scenes from ancient history, mythology, and the Bible set in the beautifully observed and luminous surrounding countryside, the Roman Campagna.



The Roman Campagna 1639

The contrast between intense light in the background and the lyrical shadow in the foreground is characteristic of Claude's landscapes, as is the building to the left, similar to many still visible in the Roman Campagna.



***Seaport at Sunset* 1639**

"A Seaport at Sunset", by Claude Lorrain, does not depict a specific seaport. However, it was painted in 1639, which would have been ten years after the siege at Rochelle, and may show the kinds of things you could expect at a French seaport in that time.

Claude has depicted an imaginary port at sunset. The artist painted a number of imaginary seaports (see 'Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba' and 'Seaport with the Embarkation of Saint Ursula').



***An Artist Studying from Nature* 1639**

In "An Artist Studying from Nature," Claude painted an imaginary harbor dominated by a large tree and a fortified building and bathed in glowing light. The building is similar to the Castle of Palo, a fortified structure on the Mediterranean coast west of Rome. Although born in France, Claude lived in Italy from about age thirteen and traveled extensively through the countryside, sketchbook in hand. He made several drawings at the Castle of Palo, just like the artist in the lower right-hand corner of this painting. In the same way as Claude, the artist depicted here studies the specifics of nature in order to achieve an ideal result.

Claude drew a copy of "An Artist Studying from Nature" in his "Liber Veritatis" or "Book of Truth" (now in the British Museum), in which he meticulously recorded all his paintings to guard against forgeries.



***A View of the Campagna*, wash drawing**

It is known from the Claude Lorrain's early biographers of his constant excursions from Rome, wandering over the whole range of the country, sketching it with the pen, in wash, and even in oils. His surviving drawings confirm the extent and the subtlety of his observation. The variety of the drawings is endless. Some are prosaic notes of a building or a prospect, put down in a hard pen outline. Others are more carefully studied descriptions of a section of the landscape. Others, such as this drawing, are the immediate record of a suddenly perceived contre-jour effect.



Sunrise 1646-7

The relatively low horizon here, the emphasis on the upper atmosphere with its fine, trailing pink clouds, and the relative transparency of widely spaced trees create an effect of great luminosity and breadth. The extended procession of grazing animals and shepherds in the foreground, a device that appears frequently in Claude's landscapes, further stresses the composition's horizontality. Some spatial definition has been lost as the foreground and middleground have darkened over time, a not uncommon occurrence in Claude's paintings.



The Embarcation of the Queen of Sheba 1648

Depicts the departure of the Queen of Sheba to visit to King Solomon in Jerusalem, described in the tenth chapter of the First Book of Kings. A more usual subject would be their meeting; this is one of many harbour scenes painted by Lorrain. The Queen is departing from a city with classical buildings, with the early morning sun lighting the sea, as vessels are loaded.

The composition draws the eye to a group of people on the steps to the right, at the intersection of a line of perspective (the steps) and a strong vertical (the left column of the building's portico). The Queen wears a pink tunic, royal blue cloak, and golden crown, and is about to board a waiting launch to take her to her ship – perhaps the ship partially concealed by the pillars to the left, or the one further out to sea, over the picture's vanishing point.

The painting was one of the first works to be acquired by the National Gallery in 1824. This and similar works by Lorrain inspired J. M. W. Turner to paint *Dido Building Carthage* and *The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire*, which Turner left to the nation as part of the Turner Bequest on the condition that they were to be hung besides Lorrain's pair of works.



Turner, *Dido Building Carthage* 1815

This painting is one of Turner's most important works, greatly influenced by the luminous classical landscapes of Claude Lorraine.

In the first draft of his first will in 1829, Turner stipulated that he should be buried in the canvas of *Dido building Carthage*, but changed his mind to make a donation of the painting and *The Decline*

of the Carthaginian Empire to the National Gallery, on condition that his two paintings should always be hung either side of Claude's Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba. His revised will of 1831 changed the bequest, so Dido building Carthage would be accompanied by Sun rising through Vapour, and the two works would be exhibited alongside Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba and Landscape with the Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca (also known as The Mill).



Coastal scene with a battle on a bridge, from Liber Veritatis



Aeneas's Farewell to Dido in Carthage 1675-6

The story of Dido and Aeneas is one of the world's most tragic love stories, first described in Virgil's Aeneid, then Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage and Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate's opera Dido and Aeneas. Before Aeneas founded Rome, he was a Trojan soldier. When Troy fell, he left with his followers in seven ships. He was shipwrecked on the shores of Carthage, the great African city ruled by Queen Dido. Dido and Aeneas fell deeply in love, but the gods called Aeneas away to fulfill his destiny in Italy, and Dido was left heartbroken and alone. In her despair, she built a funeral pyre and committed suicide atop it. Virgil gives the story as the explanation for Rome and Carthage's ancient grievance that culminated in the Punic Wars. In reality, there was a Queen Dido of Carthage, and she did commit suicide, but it was to avoid marrying a rival king, Iarbus.

Compared with Poussin, Claude had a relative lack of interest in his subject-matter, believing that the subject should be obvious to those who looked for it but that it should not spoil the viewer's appreciation of the beauty of the landscape. From the 1640s onwards Claude invented a perfect compromise between subject and landscape: instead of repeating his favourite earlier subjects such as the Flight into Egypt (which was used merely as a vehicle for a landscape) he began to use the poetry of Virgil as a major source of his subject-matter.

Unlike Poussin, who tried to imitate his source in as accurate a manner as possible, Claude used the poetry as a source of general inspiration for his pictures, which remained landscapes first and foremost. Virgil's pastoral poetry, the Eclogues and the Georgics, had already been used by Claude in a generalized way for his many scenes of shepherds resting, dancing or simply minding their flocks in an ideal landscape. The almost wistful verse of Virgil could be translated into paint by Claude without any pedantic references to specific passages, and without arousing any argument over the precise passage illustrated.