

ART IN FOCUS

# The British Castle

A SYMBOL IN STONE



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YALE  
CENTER  
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BRITISH  
ART

## The British Castle – A Symbol in Stone

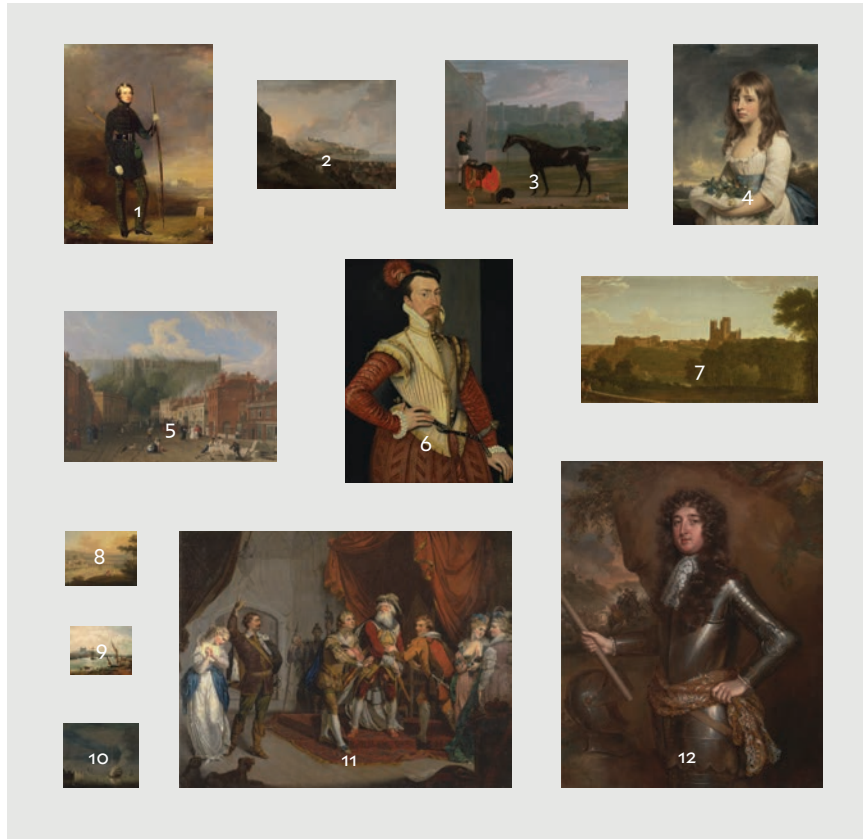
Castles have been a constant presence in the British landscape for the past thousand years. Essentially, a castle is a fortified residence of a royal or noble family. Unlike a palace, which is usually the unfortified home of royalty, or a fort, which is not a family home and primarily serves a military purpose, a castle both commands the surrounding landscape and forms the nucleus of a domestic community. Although some later residences have borrowed the trappings of a castle, true castles are the product of the middle ages. Hundreds of medieval castles dot the British landscape today – many are now ruins, but some are still inhabited by aristocratic and royal families or serve as government buildings. The story of these medieval structures in the modern era provides a singular lens for viewing British history.

This exhibition displays a collection of paintings that explore the place of castles in the British landscape and imagination, examining the ways in which these structures have intersected with the lives of people and communities from the Tudor period to the present. Over the centuries, the castle has had a range of meanings in British literature and art. As physical seats of power, castles were emblems of government; as the residences of aristocratic families, they became images of social continuity and domesticity; as great bastions, they became symbols of resistance in times of peril; as ruins, they became potent bearers of legend and folklore – from tales of princesses and chivalrous knights to the settings of gothic horror novels.

Dominating the surrounding landscape, a castle stands alone as the subject of a gaze, the setting of a story, or as the center of a reign. A vision of dynastic power and wealth, castles are among the most expensive structures realized for personal use. They are objects of multiple metonymies, becoming emblems of local community, markers of family identity, or icons of global empire. Thus they are bearers of local, national, or even global significance. Few structures have such a powerful pull on our collective imaginations.



John Constable, *Sketch of Hadleigh Castle*, 1828 to 1829, oil on millboard, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



## Wall 1

- |    |                     |                                                                                      |
|----|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Mungo Burton        | <i>Dr. John Logan Campbell</i>                                                       |
| 2  | Richard Wilson      | <i>Dover</i>                                                                         |
| 3  | Edmund Bristow      | <i>Outside the Guard House at Windsor</i>                                            |
| 4  | Sir William Beechey | <i>Portrait of a Girl</i>                                                            |
| 5  | George Vincent      | <i>A View of Thames Street, Windsor</i>                                              |
| 6  | Unknown artist      | <i>Robert Dudley, first Earl of Leicester (1532/3–1588)</i>                          |
| 7  | Unknown artist      | <i>Durham</i>                                                                        |
| 8  | Edward Dayes        | <i>Rochester</i>                                                                     |
| 9  | Frederick Nash      | <i>Rochester Cathedral and Castle</i>                                                |
| 10 | Charles Brooking    | <i>A Two-Decker on Fire at Night off a Fort</i>                                      |
| 11 | Unknown artist      | <i>Cordelia Championed by the Earl of Kent, from Shakespeare's "King Lear," I, i</i> |
| 12 | Willem Wissing      | <i>An Unknown Man, Probably the ninth Earl of Derby</i>                              |

## The Inhabited Castle

Castles in British history mattered precisely because they were inhabited. Even as modern domestic technology and planning meant that genuine medieval castles were no longer the most comfortable houses available, their dominant position in the landscape and the symbolic role they played in connoting their owners' ancient lineage meant that they remained desirable seats for powerful families.

After the English Civil War and during the start of the Industrial Revolution, castles took on a more complex role in modern society. Constitutional changes led castles to become strongholds of monetary and political power rather than military strength, while the development of cities and industry eroded the power of the aristocracy.



Richard Dadd, *Sketch for the Passions: Pride*, ca. 1854, watercolor, black ink, and graphite on paper, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

In these paintings, castles loom over developing industrial centers as reminders of an old way of life, lend a mark of status to portraits, and reflect the changing nature of the homes of the aristocracy. This wall includes stylized portrayals of life in castles as it was lived by those from all levels of society, from horse grooms to the children of court officials to the castle owners themselves. The wall also includes paintings that demonstrate the role of the castle as it finds its place in modern and growing cities.

1

## Dr. John Logan Campbell

**Mungo Burton, 1799–1882**

1838, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1974.3.2

2

## Dover

**Richard Wilson, 1714–1782**

between 1746 and 1747, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1976.7.173

The site of Dover Castle has been significant since at least Roman times. Since its construction in the eleventh century, the structure has stood fast against invasions from France, even serving as an important military site during the Second World War. As the fortress located at the point closest to the Continent, its prominence in the British imagination is reflected in its nickname “the key of England.” Richard Wilson’s painting offers a view of Dover from afar that captures its elevated position in the surrounding landscape, overlooking the English Channel.

3

## Outside the Guard House at Windsor

**Edmund Bristow, 1787–1876**

early nineteenth century, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B2001.2.258

4

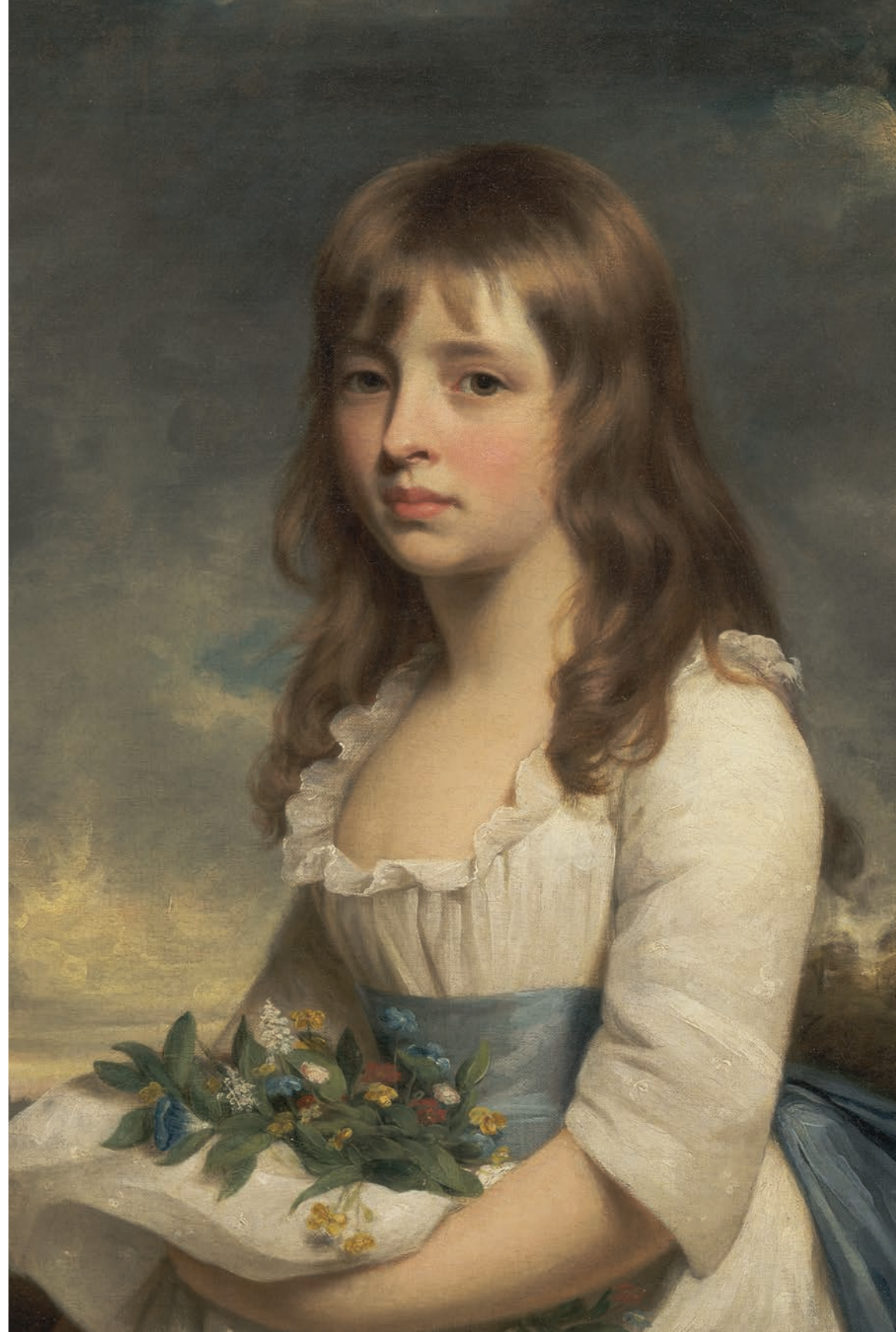
## Portrait of a Girl

**Sir William Beechey, 1753–1839**

ca. 1790, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1976.7.5

Sir William Beechey, *Portrait of a Girl* (detail),  
ca. 1790, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art,  
Paul Mellon Collection





Richard Wilson, *Dover* (detail), between 1746 and 1747, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



5

## A View of Thames Street, Windsor

**George Vincent, 1796–1832**

1827 to 1830, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.646

Thames Street, Windsor's main commercial thoroughfare, proves a vibrant cityscape on George Vincent's canvas: workers drag goods and chisel stone, families parade past storefronts, and white smoke wafts from chimneys. Equally central to urban life on London's eastern periphery, though, is the figure of Windsor Castle itself—quite literally elevated above the street's hurried activity. Like those workers and families, the castle is a character. Stately, omnipresent, and implacable, it appears an architectural manifestation of the British royal family. From their perch above these pedestrian happenings, monarchs keep watch over their domain.

6

## Robert Dudley, first Earl of Leicester (1532/3–1588)

**Unknown artist, sixteenth century**

ca. 1565, oil on panel

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.445

7

## Durham

**Unknown artist, eighteenth century**

ca. 1795, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1976.7.126

8

## Rochester

**Edward Dayes, 1763–1804**

1799, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1976.7.109

9

## Rochester Cathedral and Castle

**Frederick Nash, 1782–1856**

ca. 1825, oil on artist's board

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.478

This cityscape is full of motion: the river Medway glistens, smoke curls, and ships crowd around the docks. Rochester Castle anchors the scene with its twelfth-century tower, the tallest castle tower in all of Europe. Frederick Nash, who trained as an architect but primarily painted landscapes, carefully positions three vertical points of interest (the cathedral, the castle, and the ships) to denote three pillars of nineteenth-century British society—church, state, and commerce. Nash draws upon the historical prominence of Rochester Castle to highlight its endurance, a fortification that will stand for centuries more while modern industry develops in its shadow.

*Unknown artist, Robert Dudley, first Earl of Leicester (1532/3–1588), ca. 1565, oil on panel, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection*





10

## A Two-Decker on Fire at Night off a Fort

**Charles Brooking, 1723–1759**

ca. 1740, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1976.7.9

Charles Brooking's use of the term "fort" denotes the castle's purpose as a military stronghold, and yet the building seems eerily abandoned, its gray-green stone melting into the glassy sea. The tranquility of the scene is interrupted by a burning ship being evacuated not far off shore. The haunting image juxtaposes the ideal function of a fort with its visible emptiness and contrasts the symbolic strength of a castle with the ephemerality of fire and human existence. The burning ship embodies the sublime in both scale and sudden disaster, simultaneously evoking fear and awe in a viewer. This is Brooking's earliest known work, painted and signed when he was seventeen. A talented marine painter, he died at age thirty-six, leaving behind a collection of atmospheric seascapes.

11

## Cordelia Championed by the Earl of Kent, from Shakespeare's "King Lear," I, i

**Unknown artist, eighteenth century**

between 1770 and 1780, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, B1975.5.15

As Shakespeare was dubbed England's national poet in the eighteenth century, his works took on fresh importance as the country was swayed by cultural and political tensions. The family became a visual symbol of the state, with the relationship between a father and his children becoming a proxy for a more expansive relationship between the people and the king. The unattributed *Cordelia Championed by the Earl of Kent* therefore advances the values of the private, domestic, and filial with the marginalized Cordelia as the image of passive feminine piety. She and Kent balance the red-dominated center of the painting, and despite her sidelined position, she becomes an alternate focal point of dazzling purity contrasting with the male passions that define the rest of the painting.

preceding spread:

Joseph Nash, *Corfe Castle, Dorset*, 1862, watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

Unknown artist, *Cordelia Championed by the Earl of Kent*, from Shakespeare's "King Lear," I, i, between 1770 and 1780, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund



12

## An Unknown Man, Probably the ninth Earl of Derby

**Willem Wissing, ca. 1656–1687, and background by Jan Wyck, ca. 1645–1700**

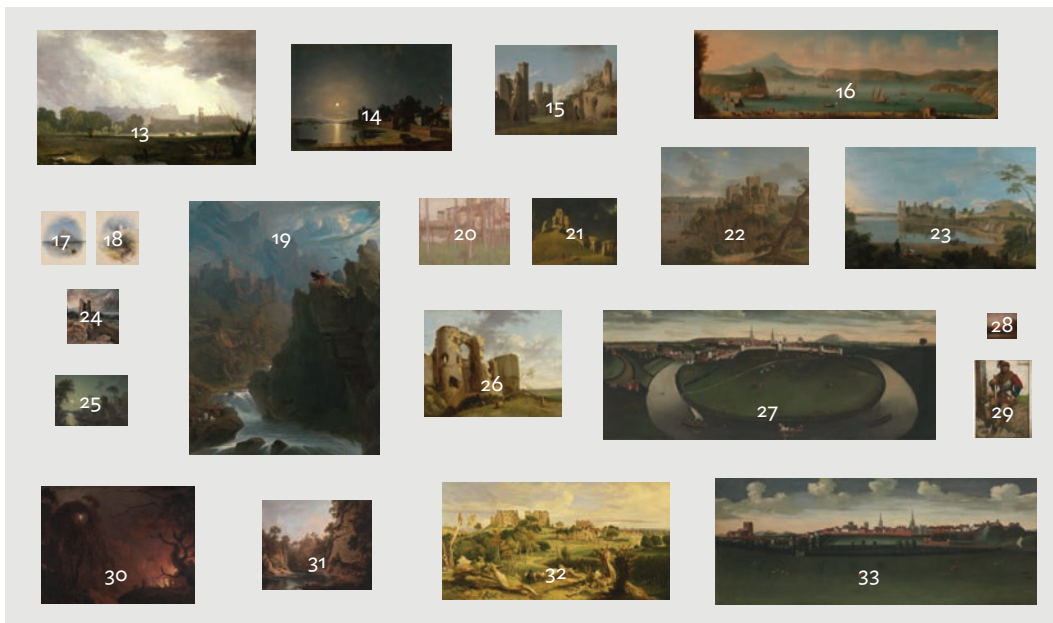
1684, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, B1979.18

It may not be a coincidence that a generation before this painting of William Stanley, ninth Earl of Derby, was completed, his family's castle was destroyed in a scene that likely looked similar to the one in the portrait's background. Greenhalgh castle, constructed in 1490 by the first Earl of Derby, surrendered after a two-year-long siege (1644–45) launched by Oliver Cromwell's forces during the English Civil War and was promptly slighted (partially destroyed) to ensure that it would never again be used for military purposes. In his portrait, Stanley grips a baton of command, signaling that his family's loss did little to diminish his authority.



George Vincent, *A View of Thames Street, Windsor* (detail), 1827–30, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



## Wall 2

13	Sir Augustus Wall Callcott	<i>Windsor from Eton</i>
14	Henry Pether	<i>Upnor Castle, Kent</i>
15	Joseph Farington	<i>Caernarvon Castle</i>
16	Gaspar Butler	<i>Port Mahon, Minorca</i>
17	Thomas Creswick	<i>St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall</i>
18	Thomas Creswick	<i>Dolwyddelan</i>
19	John Martin	<i>The Bard</i>
20	David Gauld	<i>The Haunted Chateau, Grez-sur-Loing</i>
21	John Inigo Richards	<i>Corfe Castle, Dorset</i>
22	Hendrik Frans de Cort	<i>Chepstow Castle</i>
23	Richard Wilson	<i>Caernarfon Castle</i>
24	John Constable	<i>Sketch of Hadleigh Castle</i>
25	Sebastian Pether	<i>Moonlight River Scene</i>
26	John Hamilton Mortimer	<i>West Gate of Pevensey Castle, Sussex</i>
27	Unknown artist	<i>Shrewsbury and the River Severn</i>
28	Francis Danby	<i>Study for "Calypso's Grotto"</i>
29	Edwin Austin Abbey	<i>Man in Armor</i>
30	Joseph Wright of Derby	<i>Cottage on Fire at Night</i>
31	Alexander Nasmyth	<i>Hawthornden Castle, near Edinburgh</i>
32	James Ward	<i>Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire</i>
33	Unknown artist	<i>Shrewsbury Abbey</i>

## The Symbolic Castle

The castle has historically occupied an important place in the British cultural imagination. Throughout the modern era, artists have used the iconography of castles to allude to a variety of aesthetic, political, and historical themes. The works on this wall are representative of the diverse ways that castles—either real or imaginary—were deployed in art; they functioned as emblems of specific cities, illustrations of mythological tales, or reminders of past ways of life.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the enduring ruins of castles served as inspiration for romantic art and writing, a movement that celebrated emotion and imagination. They were favored subjects in both the picturesque tradition and the sublime. William Gilpin, an important eighteenth-century theorist of the picturesque, noted that if a structure is to be endowed with “picturesque beauty,” one must “turn it into a rough ruin.” Alternatively, the irregularity of their decay and their often dramatic settings allowed artists to convey the awe-inspiring enormity of the sublime through their portrayal. Thus castles could feature in tranquil scenes or they could be sites of tumult and terror.

13

## Windsor from Eton

**Sir Augustus Wall Callcott, 1779–1844**

between 1808 and 1809, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B2001.2.235

Augustus Wall Callcott’s dramatic rendering of Windsor Castle—at the time, the residence of an elderly and infirm King George III—celebrates the ancient construction that Britain’s rulers called home. A famed landscape painter, Callcott depicted the looming, silhouetted Gothic palace, built originally in the eleventh century, from the bucolic pastures of Eton, just across the river Thames. Here, dark clouds part, casting the pastures and castle alike in the golden glow of sunlight. In this way, Callcott, who was knighted in later years, uses symbolism to laud the monarchy: Windsor Castle presides over the romantic British countryside.

14

## Upnor Castle, Kent

**Henry Pether, active 1828–1865**

ca. 1850, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1976.7.139

In *Upnor Castle, Kent*, Henry Pether (possibly the son of Sebastian Pether, whose *Moonlight River Scene* also appears in this exhibition) paints a castle that once served as an Elizabethan artillery fort. Originally built to protect the dockyard and ships of the Royal Navy, it later became a naval ammunition depot for gunpowder, ammunition, and cannons. Pether's depiction captures the passage of time and the changing function of the castle: he does not allude to the strategic role that Upnor Castle once played. Instead, the artist places the castle within an idyllic scene of daily life. Two men dock a boat while puffs of smoke drift out of a chimney on the right. The castle recedes into a moonlit background, a trait for which Pether was well known.

15

## Caernarvon Castle

**Joseph Farington, 1747–1821**

ca. 1780, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1976.7.118

Edward I constructed Caernarvon Castle after his conquest of Wales in 1282, envisioning it as a symbol of English dominance over the region. The castle derived further authority from its association with the Roman myth of Magnus Maximus, father of Constantine and first independent king of Britain. Appropriating the status of this prestigious predecessor, Edward drew inspiration from Roman design; the polygonal towers and multicolored stone reference Roman forts and the walls of Constantinople. Eighteenth-century artists favored Caernarvon for its folkloric associations with Rome. Here, Joseph Farington positions the viewer inside the castle, emphasizing its grandeur and timelessness, even in ruin.

16

## Port Mahon, Minorca

**Gaspar Butler, active ca. 1718–1730**

ca. 1735, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.84



Thomas Creswick, *St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall*, ca. 1838, oil on panel, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



John Inigo Richards, *Corfe Castle, Dorset*, 1764, oil on canvas,  
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

17

## St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall

**Thomas Creswick, 1811–1869**

ca. 1838, oil on panel

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.178

St. Michael's Mount is a small island off the coast of Cornwall crowned by a church and castle. This jewel-like painting captures the castle's romantic setting, where twice a day, the tide recedes to allow access to the island via a cobblestone causeway. In legend, the archangel Michael guards England from a stone seat atop the mount; John Milton embraced that imagery in his famous poem from 1637, "Lycidas." The artist, Thomas Creswick, was a member of the Birmingham School of landscape artists, which distinguished itself by a fascination with minute and accurate depictions of nature.

18

## Dolwyddelan

**Thomas Creswick, 1811–1869**

ca. 1838, oil on panel

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.179

19

## The Bard

**John Martin, 1789–1854**

ca. 1817, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.439

Based on a dramatic poem by Thomas Gray, *The Bard* was painted by John Martin around 1817, at the height of the romantic period. Amid a powerful landscape with ominous clouds, a raging river, and gnarly walnut trees, the castle's stony architecture parallels the peaks around it, making this emblem of English power a seemingly indestructible part of the landscape. Awestruck by the scene, the viewer must take care to notice the figure of the last remaining Bard, defiant after Edward I ordered all the bards to be put to death when he conquered Wales.



20

## The Haunted Chateau, Grez-sur-Loing

**David Gauld, 1865–1936**

1896, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Isabel S. Kurtz in memory of her father,  
Charles M. Kurtz, B1989.17.1

21

## Corfe Castle, Dorset

**John Inigo Richards, 1730/31?–1810**

1764, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.526

22

## Chepstow Castle

**Hendrik Frans de Cort, 1742–1810**

ca. 1795, oil on panel

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.163

23

## Caernarfon Castle

**Richard Wilson, 1714–1782**

ca. 1745, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1976.7.174

24

## Sketch of Hadleigh Castle

**John Constable, 1776–1837**

1828 to 1829, oil on millboard

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B2001.2.141

John Constable's election as a full member of the Royal Academy in February 1829 came just months after the devastating death of his wife, Maria. Despairing, he wrote: "could I get afloat on a canvas of six feet, I might have a chance of being carried away from myself." He began this oil sketch in 1828, more than a decade after visiting Hadleigh Castle in the summer of 1814 and describing it in a letter to Maria. In spite of, or perhaps fueled by, both his depression and the pressure of being a full Academician, he delivered the completed six-foot painting to the Academy in 1829. This impressive work can now be viewed in the Center's fourth-floor galleries.





25

## Moonlight River Scene

**Sebastian Pether, 1790–1844**

1840, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.502

Sebastian Pether's father, Abraham Pether, was also an accomplished painter, and he was known as "Moonlight Pether" for his frequent nocturnal landscapes. The younger Pether continued to romanticize moonlight and fire in night scenes, where color harmony is as instrumental as subject. He would frequently place castles in his imaginative landscapes. Here, Pether paints an intimate glimpse of life by the riverside, humanizing the castle by focusing on life outside of it.

Unknown artist, *Shrewsbury Abbey*, ca. 1720, oil on canvas,  
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

26

## West Gate of Pevensey Castle, Sussex

**John Hamilton Mortimer, 1740–1779**

between 1773 and 1774, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, B1984.9

27

## Shrewsbury and the River Severn

**Unknown artist, eighteenth century**

ca. 1720, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.264



33

## Shrewsbury Abbey

Unknown artist, eighteenth century

ca. 1720, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.265

These two sweeping views (27 and 33) celebrate the market town of Shrewsbury, just east of the Welsh border. The panoramic perspective accentuates the town's role as a source of culture and influence in the broader landscape, highlighting the trade and travel that the river Severn facilitates in one view and the bountiful pastureland and abbey in the other. Shrewsbury Castle, a red sandstone behemoth built along with the abbey in the late eleventh century, is conspicuously absent from both views, suggesting that the castle, in private hands at the time of the painting's completion, had diminished relevance in comparison to the town's religious and economic life.

28

## Study for "Calypso's Grotto"

Francis Danby, 1793–1861

ca. 1843, oil on panel

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.199

Francis Danby, an Irish-born romantic painter, is best remembered for his oscillation between poetic and quasi-apocalyptic subject matter. This painting captures this stark dualism by portraying an evocative sunset and introspective glow characteristic of Danby's works, while imparting a sense of the sublime through the steep incline of the coastal cliffs on the right. Calypso, a classical archetype of the beautiful but deceptive woman, might allude to the expanding underbelly of manufacturing hubs in Britain. The contrast of the jagged cliffs with the calm ocean links the classical, embodied in Calypso, to the realities of the turbulent political situation in 1840s Europe. Danby harkens back to mythology nostalgically, while stressing the sense of unease and isolation resulting from rapid social and technological change.

29

## Man in Armor

Edwin Austin Abbey, 1852–1911, Yale MA (Hon.) 1897

ca. 1900, oil on pressed paper board

Yale University Art Gallery, Edwin Austin Abbey Memorial Collection, 1937.2585





30

## Cottage on Fire at Night

**Joseph Wright of Derby, 1734–1797**

between 1785 and 1793, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.714

31

## Hawthornden Castle, near Edinburgh

**Alexander Nasmyth, 1758–1840**

between 1820 and 1822, oil on canvas

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.482

32

## Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire

**James Ward, 1769–1859**

1840, oil on panel

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.1.24

Throughout its history, Kenilworth Castle served as both a fortress and a palace, as a site of siege and a source of artistic inspiration. The castle is a palimpsest of construction projects, the most extensive of which were ordered by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (whose portrait hangs on the opposite wall), in preparation for Queen Elizabeth I's visit in 1575. The castle of Dudley's creation would become an icon of Elizabethan court ceremony and a source of continued fascination for romantic artists such as James Ward. In this work, Ward envisions Kenilworth as a living ruin; despite its dilapidated state, it is integrated into a productive landscape.

*Art in Focus* is an annual initiative for the Center's Student Guide Program, providing curatorial experience and an introduction to all aspects of exhibition practice. Student curators select objects for exhibition, write text panels and object labels, and make decisions about installation under the supervision of Center curators and staff. In researching and presenting this exhibition, the students were guided by David Frazer Lewis, Postdoctoral Research Associate; Linda Friedlaender, Senior Curator of Education; and Jaime Ursic, Assistant Curator of Education. The student curators are Irene Chung, BR '17; Zoe Dobuler, TC '17; Julia Fleming-Dresser, TD '19; Claire Goldsmith, ES '18; Caroline Kanner, JE '18; Daniel Leibovic, TC '17; Catherine Liu, ES '18; and Nicholas Stewart, JE '18. This exhibition and accompanying brochure are generously supported by the Marlene Burston Fund and the Dr. Carolyn M. Kaelin Memorial Fund.

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left:

James Ward, *Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire*, 1840, oil on panel, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

cover:

Joseph Farington, *Caernarvon Castle*, ca. 1780, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



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