**Light and Soul: Audio described tour - transcript**

Welcome to the Cooper Gallery and to this audio descriptive guide to *Light and Soul, Early Impressions of the French Landscape.*

Twenty-one works are described, most of them arranged around the walls of one large room. They are hung in thematic groups, interspersed with panel information, excerpts of which will be included within the descriptions. There will be brief directions to guide you from one work to the next, and the whole guide should take around an hour to listen to. There is a bench in the centre of the exhibition, or if you would like to take a folding stool around with you, please ask a member of staff.

We’re starting in the Shop, from which there is level access into the gallery space. At the start of our tour, panel information gives a brief overview of the themes of the exhibition, telling us it brings together 17 exceptional artists including Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, Camille Corot, Rosa Bonheur and Eugène Boudin. All were pioneers who experimented with subject matter, style and technique and whose influence shaped the work of generations to follow.

The exhibition is the culmination of a research project into the French drawings and paintings at the Cooper Gallery, funded by the Headley Fellowship through Art Fund. The project focused on 19th century landscape artists, including those who worked in the Forest of Fontainebleau and along the coastal areas of Normandy, their work inspired by ancient forests and valleys, contemporary life in the landscape and the shifting light over rivers and seas.

An open double doorway marks the entrance into one end of a small corridor-like space where we find our first described painting. This darker space, measures some 5 metres long by half as wide. It has white side walls and a wooden floor. On the right-hand wall are 3 oil paintings. On the left, printed information introduces the themes of the exhibition. At the end of the corridor, a small partition wall juts out from the left, to create a corner. It’s about 1 metre wide and over 2 metres high, and painted a pale green. Please be aware that there is a shin-high barrier cord running around the gallery, about 75 centimetres from the walls. Our first description is of an oil painting – the only work displayed on this partition wall. You may like to pause this audio until you are there.

Image number **1** is titled *In the Forest of Fontainebleau* by Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Pena, this landscape is painted in oil on canvas. It measures approximately 30 centimetres high by 40 wide and is held within a deep gilt frame. Painted in 1864, it depicts a sun dappled forest scene. Numerous tall trees curve inwards from the left and right to create a leafy archway overhanging a grassy path. It’s as though we are on the path, which stretches away from us towards the back of the painting. A small indistinct female figure is standing on the path roughly in the centre of the painting, facing towards us.

The scene is dominated by dense woodland with trees of full green foliage, suggesting summertime. Nearer the front, gnarly silver tree trunks and crooked branches are picked out by the sun, but these become more indistinct as they get further away. Although the treetops curve inwards to create the arch, right at the top of the painting small patches of blue sky break through the leaves, creating the dappled effect on the ground. Shades of pinks, reds, and purples appear amongst the greenery on the path, showing some growth of different shrubs and plants.

The trees tower over the small figure of the woman. She is wearing a dark coloured, floor length dress with a white apron tied around her waist. The overall mood of the scene is peaceful, like she might be enjoying a summer walk through the woods in the sunshine.

Diaz painted remote and picturesque subjects on location, especially in the Forest of Fontainebleau. The motif of a lone figure, usually a woman, in the centre of a forest landscape is one he used frequently. He visited the forest every year after 1835 and owed a huge debt to Theodore Rousseau in the development of his landscape style, having been inspired by Rousseau’s own paintings of the Forest of Fontainebleau.

Our next description is of a pair of images which are on a second partition wall, just inside the entrance to the main gallery. Before we go into the space, here’s a brief description of it.

The rectangular gallery measures around 8 metres long, 7 metres wide and 3 metres high. It has a parquet wood floor with the walls to left and right painted white, and the rear wall painted pale green. It’s the same green as the small partition wall on which the Diaz is displayed. The drawings and paintings are hung at various levels, clustered around panel information. The lowest works are about 50 centimetres up from the floor, the highest reach to about 2 metres. All the works are framed and a black number is painted on the wall beside them. The drawings are generally framed with wide white borders and thin wooden frames. Oil paintings are hung in a variety of deep gilded frames. Please remember that there is a shin-high barrier cord running around the gallery, about 75 centimetres from the walls. With no natural light coming into the room, the works are picked out with spotlights, giving the space an uneven, mottled feel. In the centre, a long wooden bench runs on a diagonal, facing the rear left corner. You may like to listen to the descriptions from here, or to walk around at your own pace. Our route takes us around in a clockwise direction.

To enter the larger space, you need to walk forward 7 paces or so, past the end of the first partition wall. A second pale green partition wall, to the right, continues the line of the corridor, and this is where we’ll find our next described images. There are three images on the partition, with an oil painting above, and two drawings side by side below. It’s these drawings, numbered **6** and **7** we are going to describe. Behind the partition is a screen on which films about the exhibition play. You may be able to hear the audio as you go around.

You may like to pause this audio and find somewhere comfortable to stand inside the entrance, near to the paintings.

Both drawings are watercolour and pencil works by Georges Michel, made sometime in the early 19th Century, and both measure some 18 centimetres tall by 25 wide. Michel believed there was no need to look further than Paris and its surrounding countryside to be inspired by nature. He followed the tradition of creating studies in the open air but rejected historical landscape themes.

The drawing to the left is of a watermill and its immediate surroundings, including the mill stream.

The watermill is the central focus of the work, and dominates the middle of the painting, though the piece has a hazy quality to it and is blurred around the edges as the watercolour paint has faded. Different roof levels and materials suggest the building has been extended over the years, with a tall, long section to the right and a shorter,lower section joined to it on the left. The walls are grey, and a faded brown wooden water wheel is attached to the left side. There are few sharp details, with features such as a door and windows indicated simply - tiny squares within its high walls. Its steeply pitched roof is washed in different colours. The roof of the longer section to the right is pale blue, as though in the shade. The lower part of the building to the left has a deep red roof.

From the water-wheel on the left, a stream flows across the front of the image, disappearing out of its lower right corner.

The immediate surroundings and ground around the mill are a faded yellowy-green, perhaps indicating dry or drying ground. A figure is present in front of the mill, the same colour as the ground. The pencil outline defining them suggests they are walking away from the building.

The second image, to the right, is called *A carriere St Denis.*

Made in 1836, this watercolour and pencil sketch shows the yard outside a farmhouse. A corner of the building, to the left, takes up almost the full height of the sketch. Its walls are washed a pale pink, with the wall to the left in slight shadow. Near the top of the image, the sloped and slightly sagging roof is covered in terracotta tiles. Built on a slope, small rectangular shuttered windows in the building’s sunny gable end show three upper storeys. A wooden door to the left indicates a lower level as the ground falls away towards the bottom left corner of the work.

A rustic outbuilding is built against the gable wall to the right of the door, and beyond this is a row of trees. With dark slender trunks, the squiggly foliage has been given a wash of orangy yellow. Another tree over to the right of the image is sketchier still, with a paler wash of colour. The scene is filled with the paraphernalia of a working farm, though there are no people. A ladder rests up against the farmhouse wall, a cart-wheel lies nearby, with trugs, pails and wooden barrels left out in the green-washed yard. Also in the yard, in the centre of the work, are three presumably French hens.

Carrières-Saint-Denis was a northern suburb of Paris, known as Carrières sur Seine from the early 20th century. Originally a hamlet founded in the 12th century, good quality limestone was found here, giving the name ‘carrière’ which means ‘quarry’.

Born in 1764, Michel died in 1843 and was never really recognised in his own lifetime. Nowadays his works are found in museums across the world, and he is thought of as an important forerunner of the Barbizon School.

With your back to these two images, walk two or three paces ahead. You walk into a corner created by the back of the first partition wall, which is now to the left, and the main gallery’s white wall which is straight ahead. Our next two images are displayed on the partition wall to the left. These two sketches, numbers **8** and **9**, hang one above the other. You may like to pause the audio until you’re there.

Both sketches are by Jean Baptiste Camille Corot.

The upper pencil sketch, measuring some 22 centimetres high and 35 centimetres wide, shows a view of Rome from the Church of St John and St Paul. Drawn with a light touch, much detail is merely suggested.

The outline of trees and buildings create a distant horizon about halfway up the picture. Beneath this, a series of light gently curving lines form a rough diagonal, from the bottom right to the centre left, suggesting that the buildings are on the far side of a valley. The large area beneath the diagonal, in the bottom left corner of the work, is almost completely empty.

Darker pencil lines focus our attention on the buildings in the centre of the work. Just left of centre, a domed building dominates with, to its right, the tops of two more domes. Further to the left, where the horizon meets the diagonal valley, is a line of hastily sketched trees.

Just to the right of centre, a tall thin bell-tower or campanile juts up from a large rectangular building, its bold straight lines contrast with the more sketchy circular trees and foliage nearby. A horizontal row of windows along the top appears as so many dots. To the right of this tower, and closer to us, a few simple lines describe three arches with the suggestion of stained glass, but the ragged walls around them and the lack of roof imply they are part of a ruin - the area nearby surrounded by shrubs and trees.

Corot spent three years in Italy in the 1820s, visiting Rome, the countryside around the city and Naples. This was a significant period in his artistic life, resulting in an abundance of drawings in sketchbooks.

The label tells us that Corot’s work evolved from a traditional, classical style to innovative experiments. He believed strongly in painting and sketching in the open air and immersed himself in nature throughout his long career. A watermark to the left of the paper reads J WHATMAN, Turkey Mill, 1825. James Whatman was the pioneer of ‘wove’ paper which provided a stronger, smoother, more regular surface than laid paper. It became extremely popular for use by artists on sketching trips, including JMW Turner.

The lower image is a similar size and titled *Un Village à Flanc de Coteau* which translates as “A Village on a Hillside”. In pencil on white paper it dates from 1852.

The hillside slopes down from about halfway up the image on the left, towards the bottom right corner. Again characterized by a simplicity of line, the hillside is simply a couple of generously curved lines, with undulations in the hillside created by subtle shading. A few immature trees populate the slope, their bendy branches lightly covered with leaves. The village of the title takes the form of a church just to the right of centre, only its tower sticking up above the hill. The square tower, with multiple windows and a tall pitched roof, dominates both the scene and the valley below.

Just to its left, the tops of two poplar trees stand higher than the tower. Like tall slender brushes, their soft shading is in contrast to the tower’s straight and more heavily drawn lines. Down the slope, at the bottom of the valley to the right of the work, the faint outlines of buildings indicate the rest of the village.

In the bottom left corner, sitting on the sloping hillside, a small lightly sketched figure leans back lazily on their elbows, looking out at us.

This work is probably a sketch for the finished oil painting “Le Village de Presles, près de Beaumont-sur-Oise”, painted around 1850 and now in the Museum Langmatt in Baden, Switzerland.

Turning to your right, with the two Corot works on your left, you’ll be facing the long white side wall of the gallery. Some twenty works of different sizes are hung along its 8 metre length. Our next description will concentrate on four of them, right ahead of us. They’re displayed around the label “Connecting with Nature”.

Above the text panel is a work by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot called *Figure dans une gorge boisee*, which translates as “Figure in a wooded gorge”. It’s numbered **11**. It was made around 1870 and measures some 43 centimetres high 26 centimetres across.

In charcoal and brown ink on beige paper, the image has a dark, brooding quality. The figure of the title is made tiny by the gorge on the left and huge trees on the right. The foot of the gorge, coming in to the bottom left corner, has a smooth almost vertical rocky surface, with a number of plants sprouting from it or lodged in crevices. It marks the side of a track on which the figure stands. To the right, dark trees create a looming presence over the figure, reaching the full height of the image and swallowing up most of the space. Few vertical branches are visible within the mass of heavy shading that angles down ominously towards the figure, the charcoal strokes creating a sense of movement.

The panel information tells us that drawing and painting in the open air was an established practice for landscape artists. To develop an understanding of the natural world, artists spent endless days sketching outdoors and observing their surroundings. The artists in this exhibition were part of a generation who started to portray more realistic views of their environment rather than idealised versions. They also focused more on the landscapes of France rather than those of Italy.

The image immediately beneath the information panel, number **10**, is also by Corot and titled *Landscape with Trees*. Dated 1852 it is in pencil, black chalk and grey wash on thin cream paper, and measures around 24 centimetres high by 36 wide. The top of the work is about 1 metre up from the floor.

Hazy and atmospheric rather than accurate, a low shaded field boundary creates a horizontal line close to the bottom of the image. It’s lined with 10 or so young trees, their trunks slender and bendy, their foliage lightly shaded on top, giving a sense of air and movement. To each side of this body of trees, and further back, detail is sketchier still, though there’s the faintest suggestion of a horizon behind the trees, about halfway up the image. The location of the sketch is unknown but could have been drawn by Corot during his wide-ranging travels throughout France, Switzerland, Belgium and Holland during the 1850s.

Directly to the right of this image is a slightly smaller sketch by Rousseau. Undated, it’s titled simply *Trees and Fields* and measures about 16 centimetres high by 24 centimetres wide. It’s numbered **12**.

Again, the location of the sketch is unknown, but it represents one of the vast number of drawings of trees by Rousseau and is thought to have been taken from a sketchbook.

A few simple marks in black crayon create a field in the foreground, with grass on its gentle undulations and a boulder to the left. A wavy horizontal strip of white beyond suggests a river, with another faint shaded line forming the far bank. Two trees feature on our side of the river. One to the left of the boulder has a smooth straight trunk and spiky plumes of foliage which disappear out of the image to the left.

A second tree, just right of centre, is the focal point of the sketch. With its roots in the shaded riverbank, the thick dark trunk divides into a series of ever more slender branches, which twist and turn, like arms dancing in the air. Light coming from the right sets the left side of the tree in shadow, indicated by heavier shading.

The heavily defined and animated branches of this central tree, which takes up around three quarters of the width of the sketch and almost all of the height, suggest this was the element being purposefully studied, with other components such as the second tree and the river left much less distinct.

In contrast to artists such as Millet, very few of Rousseau’s drawings can be directly related to his finished oil paintings. The significance of his many drawings lay in the practice of the close study of nature. He tried a range of papers in colour and texture, diverse media to draw with, and experimented with the effects created by different combinations of lines. His drawings were for his own study, not for public display, and he kept them meticulously organised in his studio where they were only discovered after his death.

Our next image is to the right of this one and hung above head height. It’s numbered **18**.

Titled *Landscape with Trees*, this large sketch by Jules-Louis Dupré was made using black chalk and crayon on white paper. It measures about 58 centimetres high by 85 centimetres wide, and dates from around the 1830s.

In this open landscape, a wide path sweeps through tall statuesque trees, their fine-drawn detail dark against a vast white sky which takes up around two thirds of this large-scale drawing. The path comes into the image from the bottom left corner, curving towards the low horizon in the centre - with the trees forming an avenue either side. The tree closest to us, to the right of the path, is precisely drawn, with a network of branches and foliage which disappears out of the top of the frame. Near its base, new growth has sprouted, concealing most of the trunk behind a shaggy bush of tiny leaves.

In the background to the left, a sparse line of trees follows a gentle slope down towards the path. To the right of the path are more-rounded trees, whose foliage overlaps in soft, blurred abundance.

In front of these, to the bottom right of the picture, an area of longer grass is suggested by small black strokes, sketched hastily in different directions to create a tufted uneven surface which seems full of movement. Light coming from high on the left adds to this sense of movement, casting shadows from the tall trees and creating a row of dark stripes across the central path.

Although Dupré is known as part of the Barbizon School of artists, he did not often paint in the Forest of Fontainebleau, preferring instead L’Isle Adam and its appealing locations along the river Oise and on the edge of the nearby forest. The perspective of tall and almost distinguished trees in an otherwise open landscape, though, is one that features many times in Dupré’s work, and he produced a number of works of a similar scale in the 1830s, showing trees, avenues and low horizons.

Continue along the long white wall for two or three paces. Our next two sketches, both by Théodore Rousseau, are displayed one above the other, with an information panel between. They’re numbered **20** and **21**. Pause the audio until you’re there.

The upper of the two images is titled *The Forest of Fontainebleau* and is pencil and black chalk, heightened with white chalk, on paper. It measures about 28 centimetres high and 45 centimetres across.

The sketch emphasises the many textures of the forest. It’s as though we’re on a rocky plateau, which takes up most of the bottom half of the image, with a view across a deep valley to trees beyond. In the foreground, the surface of rock is broken up with tufts of grass and small gnarly shrubs which poke out of its nooks and crannies. To the left of the plateau, a large clump of trees has foliage so well-defined it creates an almost brooding presence - patches of intense dark lurking among the busily overlapping squiggles of leaves. A little further off, and to the right, a couple of trees are more evenly shaded, then further away still, on the far right, the shading is so loose as to be merely a suggestion.

The area beyond the outcrop has little detail, but the suggestion of distant trees and fields is made more distant still by a wash of white chalk that creates a haze across it. A strip of sky at the top of the image has faint chalky lines suggesting cloud.

The label tells us that the majority of the artists in this exhibition are known to have worked in the Forest of Fontainebleau, the attraction being the varied character of the landscape. The dense woodland, imposing boulders, great plateaus and sandy plain were a haven for observing nature and, most critically, its multitude of different atmospheres.

The work beneath the label, also by Rousseau, has the title *Chemin à travers les rochers*, which translates as “Path through the rocks”.

The work is in black and white chalk on paper which measures about 24 centimetres high by 36 centimetres wide. It was made between 1845-1850.

Rocks dominate the foreground, but instead of a flat plateau, we have the rounded forms of boulders - through which cuts a central path. Deep shadow gives volume to the boulders, and a sculpted quality that makes them appear simultaneously fluid and immovable. White chalk highlights the uneven surface of the path which stretches away from us - as though we were walking along it - before it plunges quite steeply down between the rocks.

Small trees, their slender trunks silvered in white chalk, sprout precariously on the rocky ridge to the left of the path, their scratchy branches reaching the top of the image. A couple more trees appear to the right, but further down the path so that only their wispy tops are visible.

In the distant background, to the right, light shading creates a wall and two farm buildings. A field enclosed by the wall contains delicate stripes, suggesting cultivation - the straight lines of civilisation contrasting with the wild and fluid turbulence of the foreground.

Rousseau’s visits to the forest began in 1833 and he would set off on great expeditions to discover new views, rocks and vegetation, drawing and painting endlessly in the open air, often joined by other artists.

He was considered by many, both at the time and now, to be the leader of the group of artists who gathered at the village of Barbizon, on the north-west edge of the forest, who would become known as the ‘Barbizon School’. The existence of this artistic community to share ideas and walk out sketching together was of great importance in fuelling the development of landscape painting.

Our next descriptions are hung at the end of this long white wall, so walk along it until you reach the corner. Pause the audio until you’re there.

There are two oil paintings featuring sheep, with a label between them. We’re going to describe the lower painting by Constant Troyon. It’s numbered **24** and measures 24 centimetres high by 36 centimetres wide.

This richly coloured oil painting shows a rural scene. The quick, sketchy and unfinished style of the work suggests it was a study painted in the open air. In the top third of the painting is a cloudy sky, with small patches of blue breaking through. Beneath, a rolling green and brown landscape has gentle hills to the right and lower farmland to the left. In the far distance, some small, indistinct farm buildings nestle in the fields.

In the foreground, taking up almost the whole width of the canvas, is the front of a line of white sheep, the focus of the painting. They are at the head of a flock which comes from the middle right of the painting, processing over a small hillock with red and green moorland foliage. The line starts as a blurred, fuzzy mass, before curving to face us head on, the sheep becoming more defined as they get closer to us. Deep shadows within the flock appear as vibrant reds and oranges, making the sheep in the foreground glow. Some of the sheep at the front have stopped to graze and others appear to be looking out at us. One single sheep to the right is moving away from the others, perhaps investigating some grass further afield.

This is a pleasant, ambient example of an animal painting by Troyon who shows no human figures in the work, Troyon concentrates on the sheep, the scene is tranquil and calm. S J Cooper, after whom the Gallery is named, in his 1891 notebook about his paintings, referred to this work as *Troupeau des Moutons dans l'Auvergne*. He also notes that he bought it from the French art dealer Emmanuel Weyl. A red stamp in the lower left corner of the painting 'VENTE TROYON' indicates it was sold at the artist's posthumous sale in early 1866 at the Hotel Drouot.

The next three images form a column at the far right of this wall, and are all by Jean Francois Millet. At the top, above head height, is *Vache a L'Abreuvoir*. It’s numbered **27**.

This simple 11cm tall by 18cm wide black charcoal sketch, drawn onto discoloured white paper, is of a cow drinking at the edge of a shallow pool of water, with a figure tending to the animal.

The cow and figure are central to the sketch with a more distinct outline and shading. There is some detail for the water in the bottom left as the cow dips its head to drink from it, with its shadow or reflection being indicated with the charcoal. The cow is shown side on, its front legs partially in the water. The figure stands on our side of the cow, by the cow’s flank, facing away from us. Their clothing is indistinct. Holding reins in their left hand, they bend to the left with the cow so the animal can reach the water. In the top right of the sketch, a series of upright markings suggest trees. In the upper left section, beyond the water, is the impression of reeds with vertical lines and a hint of low hills on the horizon.

The sketch has some discolouration and has creasing at the top. In the bottom right are the initials of the artist, J.F.M.

Directly beneath this, Millet’s *The Shepherdess* is numbered **26**. Measuring 30 centimetres high by 19 wide, this black and white charcoal drawing shows a young shepherdess in simple rural clothes and leaning against a tree, against a background lightly shaded with charcoal. It is a full-length drawing, and the shepherdess is the sole focus, positioned just left of centre and taking up the majority of the image. She is standing side on to the viewer, facing towards the right of the picture, although her head is turned to look directly at us, as if posing for the drawing. Although she seems to be posing, her expression is neutral.

A cloth headdress is draped over her hair and covering her shoulders, and she wears an ankle length dress with a white apron and sturdy flat shoes. She is holding a thin crook in front of her with both hands, one at the top and one part way down. The bottom of the crook rests against the ground. Standing with her back against a darkly shaded tree trunk, she leans softly against it, perhaps keeping an eye on her sheep not depicted in the image.

The lower of the three images, number **28** is titled *The log splitter* and is in crayon, ink and wash on paper. It measures 11 and a half centimetres high and 6 and a half centimetres wide and dates from around 1860.

In this tiny heavily shaded sketch, the figure of a young man takes up almost the full height of the work. Simply dressed in shirt and trousers, he stands to the left and faces right. Placing his feet quite wide apart and flat on the bare earth, he bends his knees as he lifts a long handled mallet above his head. The head of the mallet is in the top left corner. Diagonally opposite, in the bottom right, is the log he is splitting, which lays across another log. The splitting wedge which penetrates the upper log is highlighted with white. The background is indistinct and quite dark, with light from the right highlighting the young man’s chest and upper thighs. His face is turned down, as he concentrates on the splitting wedge, leaving his eyes in deep shadow.

The sketch relates to a larger oil painting called The Woodchopper. Although the painting isn’t displayed here, it allows us to make sense of some of the background details which in this image are indistinct. For instance, in the oil painting it’s clear that just behind the figure, to the left, is a neatly stacked pile of cut wood. The dark outline of a low wall and gatepost to the right is also recognisable as the Porte aux Vaches, one of the entrances to the Forest of Fontainebleau - the trees themselves suggested by heavy vertical shading.

Millet was born in 1814, and growing up in a small village in Normandy, was familiar with daily rural life. As he first went to the Forest of Fontainebleau in 1849, this sketch must date from after that time. He used its setting several times as a location in his paintings and drawings. Millet was one of the founders of the Barbizon school, and was often categorized as part of the Realism art movement, placing a greater emphasis on the people in his landscapes, choosing to portray agricultural labourers who were often the poorest of the poor.

Our next image is on the adjacent wall, the gallery’s green end wall. It’s positioned to the left of the wall, the upper of two paintings. It’s numbered **30**.

*Women Fishing* is an oil painting on canvas. It measures 37 centimetres high by 45 centimetres wide and is attributed to Corot.

This peaceful rural scene is two-thirds sky. A low, flat horizon of greeny-brown meadow is created by impressionistic smears of paint, the line broken by a couple of cottages, with pale walls and steeply pitched red roofs. Above them the vast area of pale blue sky is dotted with fluffy wisps of cloud that warm from white into pale pink.

In the foreground, to the left, is a curved body of water and the small figures of two women. The water’s smooth, glassy surface is pierced by spiky clumps of reed, their reflection mingling with the reflection of sky and clouds. Just at the water’s edge, the bulbous brown trunk of a pollarded, or heavily pruned, tree has sprouts of new growth on top. Light dabs of silver foliage reach up to the top of the work, and are wispy, like the clouds. A smaller pollarded tree stands further back, close to the horizon on the right.

At the foot of the larger tree, by the water’s edge, and right in the centre of the image, two women are fishing. The one closest to the tree is standing sideways on to us. She wears a dark dress with a blue apron. Her face is obscured behind the wings of a white cotton bonnet, as she looks intently over the water on the left. Closer to us, a woman is sitting on the grassy bank, her feet close to the water. The pink sleeve of her blouse glows warm in the sunlight. She too concentrates on the water.

The text panel to the right of this work tells us that just as artists explored the use of colour as a key subject of a painting, the effects of natural light became an increasingly important element for contemplation and expression. This included studying the impact of weather, seasons and time of day and looking at the varied quality of light according to geographical location. Many artists had a handful of favourite views and regions across France and in some cases small colonies of artists gathered who were drawn to a certain place.

The Normandy coast became a popular destination with its combination of wide open beaches, picturesque towns and skies which could be endlessly serene or intensely restless. Water in particular offered a different array of light effects to capture, whether it was the sea, lakes, waterfalls or rivers. The paintings in the exhibition by Corot and Daubigny demonstrate how they captured atmosphere through their interpretation of light, as well as their handling of tones and brushstrokes. They were close friends and both had a profound influence over the next generation of artists who were absorbed by the question of how to create an ‘impression’ of a landscape.

With *Women Fishing* to your left, continue some three or four paces, to the centre of the green wall. Our next group of four descriptions are all works related to water. The first, positioned just above head height, is a dramatic piece with the title *The Entrance into Port* by Eugène Isabey. It’s numbered **33**

*The Entrance into Port* was painted in oil on canvas around 1867, and measures 50 centimetres high by 75 centimetres wide.

Coming into Port during a storm must have been a frightening experience, and Isabey dramatises this for us by putting us down on the turbulent waves with other sailboats.

Beneath us the sea churns with violent slashes of browns and blues, topped with frothy white. To our left, a curved sea wall and a sheer cliff loom up at an unnatural angle, waves crashing against their dark brown sloping sides. Buildings above and beyond the wall are a blur of colour, though a large crucifix silhouetted against grey clouds may give us hope.

To our right, other vessels pitch and roll, getting dangerously close to each other as they jostle for position at the entrance to the port. Dark sails flap in the angry sky, as water whips up and over their wooden hulls. It’s not clear how many sails there are - as we try to count they seem to move about and merge with each other. A sail boat to the right tacks left, its bowsprite jutting into the centre of the painting as it narrowly avoids colliding with a smaller rowboat. Flashes of red and yellow suggest sailors on the sea-lashed decks, their figures indistinct as they try to man-handle their vessels and navigate them to safety.

Isabey had a reputation for a swift and chaotic manner of painting, a method of execution which produced works full of movement, vigour and expression. He developed a dark palette with light touches as highlights for his more dramatic scenes - evident here in the very dark tones of the cliffs and the sails which tower above the tiny figures in the boats. The changing colours of the sky, from grey clouds over the buildings to the left, to dark blue among the fluttering sails suggests the strength of the winds.

But Isabey was also capable of creating lighter, more serene scenes - and the painting to the right of this one, titled *Boats Leaving Shore* - is a good example of this. It’s numbered **34**.

Painted in oil on wooden panel, this work is unusual in being just 11-and-a-half centimetres high and over half a metre wide - that’s almost five times as wide as it is high. It was painted between 1860 and 1870.

*Boats Leaving Shore* has a fresh and breezy feel, giving us a panoramic view, of open sea to the left and a hillside to the right, on which sits a cluster of buildings. In the far distance a cliff juts out to sea. In the foreground, the mottled yellow hillside leads down to the shore of the title, a wide expanse of pale sand. A number of people are walking along this beach, towards us and the centre of the painting - a main group of five, with one single figure closer to the water’s edge. Lightly painted, their clothes are suggested by splashes of colour, and their faces by tiny ovals of pink. Pale blue water pools on the beach itself, blurring the point at which the beach becomes the sea, but as we move to the left of the image, the colours gradually darken to deeper blues and browns, and the texture gradually changes from smooth sand to vigorous wind-smacked waves.

Nine or ten sailboats are out on the water, the line of them marking a horizon just under halfway up the painting. Those to the right and closest to the shore are more colourful, like the people walking along it - their features are more defined against patches of bright but cloudy sky. As the vessels get further out, to the left of the image, they take on the browny yellow tones of both the sea and the sky, as though they will soon dissolve and become a part of the landscape.

Directly beneath the stormy *Entrance to Port* is another oil painting, numbered **35**. Painted in 1873 by Johan Barthold Jongkind, it’s titled *Les Patineurs*, which translates as “Skaters.” It measures 25 centimetres high and 32 across.

This impressionistic work shows a river scene with a low horizon under a winter-sky, which takes up roughly the top two thirds of the image. We are positioned low down, as though on the frozen river, which snakes away from us towards the right. Two windmills mark the distant horizon, silhouetted against the sky.

On the river bank to the left of the image, a building nestles behind a line of tall, dark trees with bare branches. To the right of the trees, in the centre of the work, a small boat with a tall, thin vertical mast, is trapped in the ice.

Further out on the frozen water to the right of the boat, is a group of skaters. Few individual people can be made out, but the closest figure is slightly hunched forward, as though skating past the boat and towards us.

A Dutch printer and painter, Jongkind was considered one of the forerunners of Impressionism, and this is evident in this painting which has loose brushwork throughout. Nothing is depicted in much detail. The sky has the milky quality of a winter day, with merging tones of blue, lilac, and grey, with wispy-white and yellow clouds, and a faint sun just breaking through in the centre right. Just above the horizon small dark slashes create a skein of birds, perhaps heading for warmer climes.

Les Patineurs was conserved in 2022 and a great deal of surface dirt and yellowed varnish was removed. What had looked like a hazy, muted view, was revealed as a crisp winter’s day, with Jongkind using rich browns, greens, oranges and blues for the detail of the trees, houses and water, thickly but quickly applied.

In 1873, when this scene was painted, it had been four years since Jongkind had visited Holland and he relied on his considerable memory, producing some 14 similar views of skaters between 1863 and 1887. One work *Patineurs en Hollande* shows the same scene but in reverse, and at a larger size. It’s possible that the painting Cooper bought was a study for this larger work.

In the bottom right hand corner, the artist has signed the work ‘Jongkind, 1873’ in brown ink.

Another small partition wall juts out of the green end wall at right angles. Like the others it’s about a metre wide and two metres tall. Our last two descriptions are displayed on it; one is on this side, and the other on the far side.

On this side is *River Landscape* by Eugène Le Poittevin. It’s numbered **38**.

Painted in oil on canvas, *River landscape* is around 40 centimetres high and just over 30 centimetres wide.

This colourful scene manages to be both busy and peaceful at the same time. The river bank, to the left, is an almost vertical mass of dark green and brown reaching about halfway up the image and a third of the way across. Its river side has been strengthened by a number of vertical timbers, one of which provides the mooring for a small boat that is the focus of the painting. A second boat with a sail, is behind this and to the right of the image, leaving only a small area of water visible in the lower right corner. In the background, in the centre of the work, is a windmill, a pale grey almost shadowy form in a muted sky.

The foreground is much more colourful and a hive of activity. To the left, on the flat top of the river bank, a man stoops down feeding two pigs, their pink sun-kissed rumps and little tails towards us. In the sailboat, to the right, a woman in pink skirt and wide brimmed straw hat has her arms in a wooden crate, although it isn’t clear what else is in there. The dirty brown sail of her vessel hangs limp, its edges ragged.

In the central boat among crates and fishing nets are three figures in a triangular composition. A woman stands up in the boat facing us. She’s right in the centre of the image, her shape echoed by that of the shadowy windmill in the background behind her. She wears a dark blue dress with white sleeves, and a headscarf of white and pink. She’s holding a wide but shallow round basket against one hip. She gazes down towards a small blond child, dressed in creamy yellow, who leans on the edge of the boat to the right. The child gazes down at the dark water, his arm reaching over the edge, perhaps having thrown down some scraps for three ducks floating in the bottom right corner. To the left of the child and in front of the woman, a man, sideways on to us, in bright red waistcoat and floppy hat is reaching down into the boat, lifting a wooden barrel.

The label tells us that Le Poittevin was a versatile artist, skilled in academic, classical and romantic painting. He had a passion for representing daily working life, particularly in the fishing villages and on the beaches of Normandy.

Whilst travelling in Europe he developed a deep affinity with the work of the Dutch landscape painters of the 17th century, and the Dutch influence is evident here in elements such as the windmill, and in the way Le Poittevin makes the subject matter of everyday work on the river into something more picturesque. The boat featured resembles the famous ‘caique’, a particular kind of fishing vessel typical of the ports of Étretat and Fécamp at this time, and the end of the boat is inscribed with his ELP monogram.

Skirting around the right end of this partition wall, our last description is of an oil painting on the other side. It’s numbered 39.

It’s titled *A Bavarian Lake* and is by Eugène Ciceri. It was painted in 1877 in oil on panel and measures just over 30 centimetres high by 46 centimetres wide.

It’s a peaceful scene, showing the lake at daytime, under a wide expanse of sky. The lake dominates the foreground to the left, opening out into the centre of the work, where it’s fringed by a distant horizon of trees. In the foreground to the right, a steep bank of brown earth juts out, its sparse covering of trees creating dappled shade. There’s the hint of a bay curving around to the right behind it.

It's in this bay that a row of four wooden boats are moored alongside each other, sideways on to us. Occupying the centre of the image, they’re tied to long wooden posts which stick up out of the shallow water. They appear small, as if seen from a distance. The boat closest to us is long and narrow, and from the stern to the left, a figure in blue is fishing with a slender rod. A couple more figures occupy one of the boats further back, and in the last boat, the smallest of the four, a man stands as he pushes off from the bay.

Stretching across the top half of the painting, the sky is dominated by banks of cloud, their cotton-wool contours taking on shades of purple and grey. Reflected in the lake, these colours intensify, creating an almost magical iridescent light. A break in the clouds, to the left of centre, reveals a clear blue sky, and sunlight brightens the edges of the clouds so they glow white.

To the left of the image, about half way up, mature trees grow on the far bank of the lake. Their foliage is brown in the shade, and reflected in the lake beneath. The tops of the trees, though, hit by the sun, are a rich, luminous green. A tantalizing glimpse of this same lime green suggests the sunniest spot is the bay around to the right, just beyond the boats and the muddy headland in the foreground.

The label tells us that Ciceri was devoted to landscapes throughout his career. Nephew to Eugène Isabey, Ciceri studied alongside Jongkind in Isabey’s studio in Paris and travelled with them both to Normandy. His uncle taught him how to sketch outdoors and he absorbed Isabey’s fondness for the picturesque. He also developed his own style with calmer brushstrokes, a more tranquil feel and fine detail.

This is the end of the audio described tour of Light & Soul. We hope you’ve enjoyed it.

As you face *Bavarian Lake*, there is a doorway to the right leading to the permanent gallery, or to exit, turn so that the painting is on your right. You need to walk ahead the length of the gallery, some nine or ten paces, towards a set of double doors which stand open. Two films will be showing on a screen just to the right of these doors, and there’s a wooden bench in front of the screen. One documents some of the conservation work that has been done to the works in this exhibition and the other is a tour of the exhibition by curator Natalie Murray, in both English and French.

Going through the doors, you enter a much lighter lobby. The floor slopes up a little as the route dog-legs left and right, heading towards the gallery’s main entrance, where the floor has black & white checkerboard tiling. There is a café to the left, and the shop, where the tour started, will be on your right. If you borrowed a headset from the gallery, please remember to hand it back here.