

Claude Lorrain

a biography



The French artist Claude Gellée was born in a small village in the Duchy of Lorraine (a duchy is a territory of a duke or duchess) in northwestern France in 1604 or 1605. In Italy, where he spent most of his life, he came to be known as Claude Lorrain, though he is usually referred to in English simply as Claude. Little is known of his early life other than that his parents died when he was young, and that he subsequently lived with an older brother who was a printmaker in Freiburg, Germany.

In the early 1620s, Claude moved to Italy, initially working as a pastry chef. While there he studied with several artists, first working in Rome under the landscape painter Agostino Tassi (ca. 1579–1644), and later in Naples with the

German-born Goffredo Wals (ca. 1605–ca. 1638), also a specialist in small views and landscapes. After a brief stay in his home country assisting the principal court painter for the Duchy of Lorraine, Claude Deruet (1588–1660), on the completion of frescoes for a Carmelite church in Nancy, he settled in Rome in 1627, where he lived for the rest of his life. Although very little of the artist's own writing remains by which to judge his personality, his biographers describe him as quiet, disciplined, and good natured. He never married and lived continuously in the artists' quarter of Rome, devoting himself singularly to his work.

Joining the large community of Italian and foreign-born artists in Rome, Claude developed his own style and technique, and established himself as an independent artist. His paintings typically feature idealized landscapes, populated by small figures to convey historical, mythological, or Biblical narratives, a formula which remained consistent throughout his career. His work was particularly



IMAGES (LEFT TO RIGHT): Portrait of Claude, possibly a self-portrait, used as a frontispiece to the *Liber Veritatis*, 1635–1682, pen, ink, and chalk on blue paper, 10 7/16 x 12 3/4 in. (26.5 x 32.3 cm), The British Museum, Donated by HM Government, 1957, 1214.6 © The Trustees of the British Museum; Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorrain (French, 1604/05–1682), *Landscape with Aeneas at Delos*, 1672, oil on canvas, 39 1/4 x 52 7/8 in. (99.6 x 134.3 cm), The National Gallery, London, Wynn Ellis Bequest, 1876, NG1018

Although the account of the Flight into Egypt is mentioned only briefly in the Bible (Matthew 2:15), by Claude's time, many legends had emerged which elaborated on the story of the Holy Family's journey through Egypt to the Holy Land in order to escape persecution by Roman authorities. The Flight into Egypt and the related Rest on the Flight into Egypt, for which there is no Biblical account but many apocryphal ones, appealed especially to artists with an interest in landscape, and Claude painted many versions of these stories throughout his career. Joslyn Art Museum's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, dated 1634–35, is one of the earliest examples. In this painting, Claude skillfully balanced the depiction of the Biblical tale with the depiction of an imagined landscape setting.

Conforming to the general artistic conventions which had developed for illustrating these stories, Claude depicted the Holy Family and their donkey, resting beneath a palm tree. According to the legend, the infant Jesus commanded the palm tree to bow down and offer its fruit. The painting also includes the infant John the Baptist, three cherubs, and a lamb. Though most accounts of the Flight into Egypt did not include Saint John and only mention one angel, these figures had become part of the standard imagery for illustrating the story; Claude's inclusion of these elements may have helped contemporary viewers to identify the subject. Indeed, in Claude's lifetime, the Bible remained a primary source of inspiration, and the elaboration of a Biblical narrative elevated the status of a painting to the highest esteem.

Claude is considered throughout history to be one of the greatest landscape painters. In this sensitive interpretation of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt, the setting is as compelling and integral to the Biblical narrative as the characters. His masterful handling of light adds a sense of realism to an imagined landscape. The shimmering leaves of the trees on the left side of the painting appear convincingly illuminated by the rising sun in the distance. The subtle gradation of tones from the cool colors of the foreground to the brightly lit hills of the background evoke the atmosphere of the early morning. Claude also succeeded at intimating a sense of depth by layering the foreground, middleground, and background planes and by positioning the palm tree and the large boulder across from it to act as framing devices, furthering the illusion of recession towards the horizon. However naturalistic, Claude's landscapes were deliberately composed visions of reality. His methodology, which combined observation and construction, had a profound influence on the trajectory of landscape painting.



IMAGES (ABOVE AND BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT): Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorrain (French, 1604/05–1682), *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, 1646, oil on panel, 12 11/16 x 14 15/16 in. (32.2 x 38 cm), The Clark Art Institute, Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1921, 1955.677; Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorrain (French, 1604/05–1682), *The Flight into Egypt*, ca. 1635, oil on canvas, 28 x 38 1/2 in. (71.12 x 97.79 cm), The Clowes Collection, 2003.171, Courtesy of Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields; Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorrain (French, 1604/05–1682), Detail, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, early 1640s, oil on canvas, 81 7/8 x 60 1/16 in. (208 x 152.5 cm), The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund, 1962.151; Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorrain (French, 1604/05–1682), *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, 1654, oil on canvas, 44 7/8 x 61 7/8 in. (114 x 157.2 cm), The State Hermitage Museum, 1814, F3-1235



Landscape Painting

Claude Lorrain's status as a master landscape artist continued after his death in 1682, and his unique and emotive style of landscape painting significantly influenced future generations of landscape painters. This impact is particularly evident in two nineteenth-century landscape paintings in Joslyn Art Museum's permanent collection, *Antique Landscape* by Jean Victor Bertin (1767–1842) and *Château-Thierry* by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875). These French artists shared Claude's passion for the natural world.



A landscape painter of the Neoclassical tradition, Bertin produced idealized, Italianate landscape compositions with allusions to classical antiquity. Like Claude, Bertin sketched out of doors, but then returned to his studio to produce highly finished works that reflected a refined view of nature. These meticulously ordered compositions were known as *paysages composés*, or composed landscapes, and they served as settings for figures from ancient Greek and Roman mythology and the Bible, which appealed to a late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century taste for classical narratives. *Antique Landscape* demonstrates Bertin's fidelity to the model espoused by Claude, combining the direct observation of nature with the principles that governed formal landscape painting. A pastoral scene which includes a stream over a softly lit valley, a shepherd and a man playing a lute, both in antique drapery, evokes an Arcadian paradise.



A student of Bertin, Corot extended this legacy, combining the conventions of academic landscape painting with a new, and more poetic, spirit. Inspired by his teacher's Italian landscapes, Corot traveled to Italy where he honed his sketching skills and developed the characteristics which came to define his style. Corot was also connected to the contemporary landscape painting movement in his native France led by a group of artists who gathered around the small town of Barbizon who championed the landscape as a primary subject. The Barbizon School painters preferred to work outdoors and paint directly from nature, seeking to capture the initial impression of the landscape itself rather than use its various elements to construct an idealized vision. Corot followed this tendency to a certain extent, producing many painted "sketches" from nature

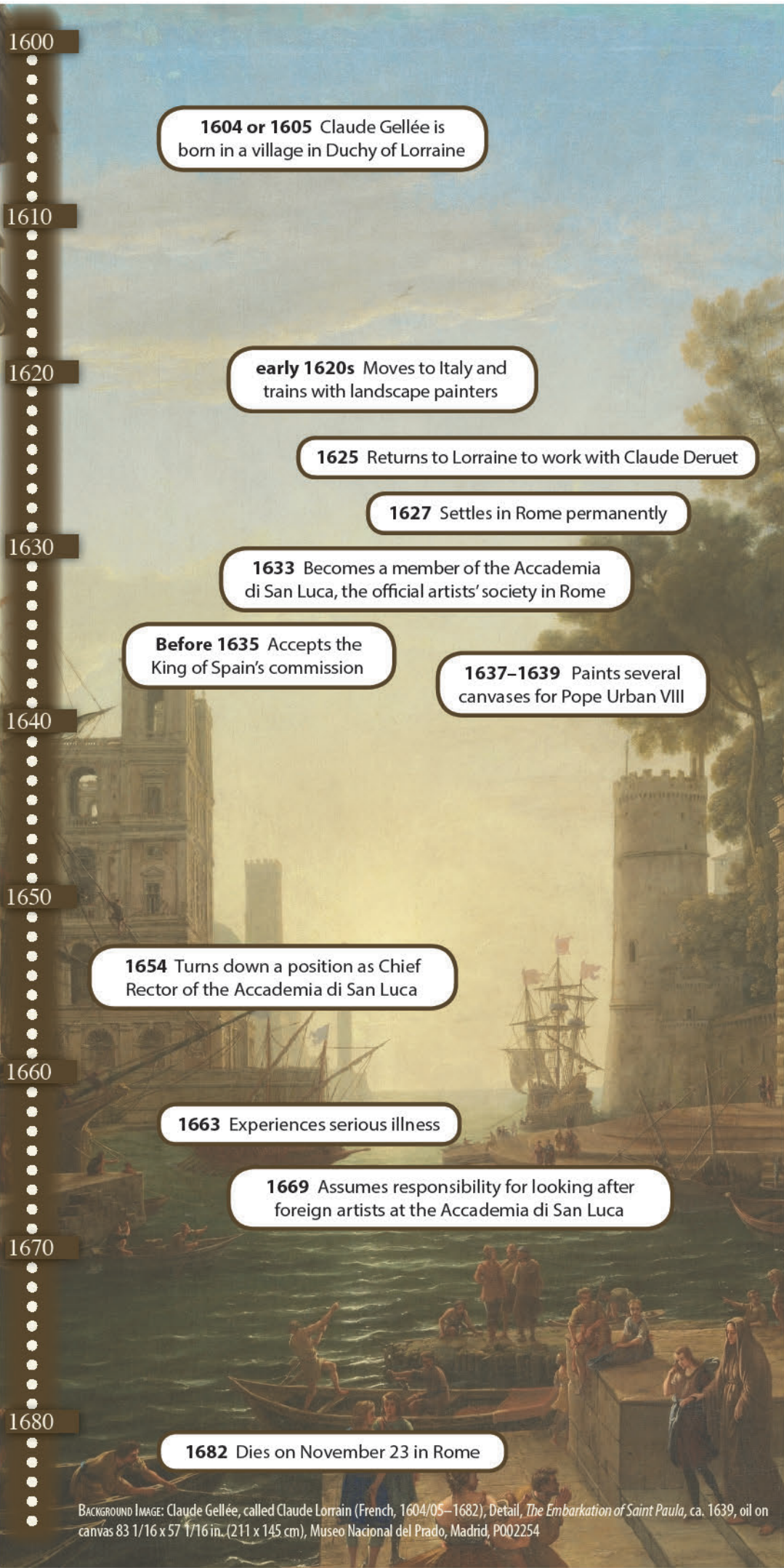
and from memory, in which he prioritized atmosphere and mood over detail and specificity. *Château-Thierry* exemplifies a type of painting that Corot referred to as a "souvenir," a recreation from memory of a place he had been. This intimate view of daily life in the countryside is comprised of basic, though carefully rendered, elements: houses, trees, river, and peasant figures. As in the scenes produced by Claude and Bertin, there is a rational order imposed upon the natural world. However, the blurring of outlines and muted color palette reflect a resolution of traditional values with a certain freedom in rendering sensations.

As these paintings by Bertin and Corot demonstrate, Claude continued to affect artists centuries after his death, particularly through his method of carefully observing the natural world. On the other hand, later artists also used their own ingenuity to devise new ways to convey the beauty of nature, as in Corot's attempt to move away from the idealized and deliberately constructed pictures of his predecessors and toward a style which conveyed the emotional impact of landscape scenes.



IMAGES (TOP TO BOTTOM): Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorrain (French, 1604/05–1682), *Landscape with David at the Cave of Adullam*, 1658, oil on canvas, 43 7/8 x 73 7/16 in. (111.4 x 186.5 cm), The National Gallery, London, Holwell Carr Bequest, 1831, NG6; Jean Victor Bertin (French, 1767–1842), *Antique Landscape*, ca. 1802, oil on canvas, 15 1/4 x 18 1/4 in. (38.73 x 46.35 cm), Joslyn Art Museum, Museum purchase, 1984.13; Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (French, 1796–1875), *Château-Thierry*, 1855, oil on canvas, 13 3/4 x 23 in. (34.93 x 58.42 cm), Joslyn Art Museum, Museum purchase, 1942.1

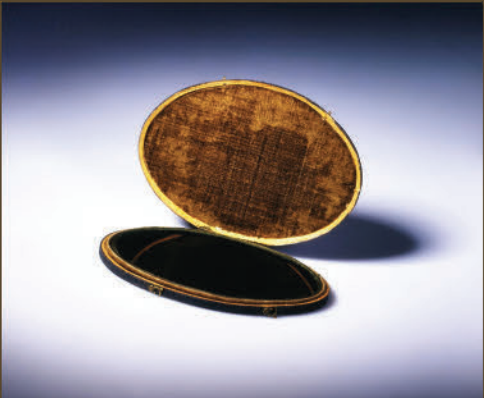
Timeline



Claude Glass



Although Claude Lorrain was renowned in his own lifetime, he achieved an almost legendary status in Britain in the eighteenth century. The French artist's idealized landscapes appealed to the Romantic sensibility, which characterized both the art and literature of the period. Amateur artists seeking to produce pleasing views of nature, embarked on sketching tours of scenic locales throughout the English countryside, sometimes employing a device known as a "Claude glass." This small, oval-shaped mirror (usually five to six inches across) was backed with a reflective black material as opposed to the usual silver. The artist, turned away from the view



IMAGES (LEFT TO RIGHT): Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorrain (French, 1604/05–1682), *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel*, 1646, oil on canvas mounted on wood, 20 1/2 x 16 5/8 in. (52.2 x 42.3 cm), The National Gallery of Art, London, Presented by Sir George Beaumont, 1828, NG61; Claude glass, 1775–1780 (made), Blackened mirror glass, 8 1/4 x 5 1/2 in. (21 x 14 cm) open, Given by the Rev. R. Lewis, P.18-1972 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London; William Gilpin (English, 1724–1804), *Tintern Abbey*, 1782, Aquarell on paper, 3 15/16 x 6 11/16 in. (10 x 17 cm), RPN 642 W Cutter © 2009, Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI



they wished to sketch, would use the mirror to reflect the scene. The reflected image was somewhat less defined than in a typical mirror due to the black backing, emphasizing general forms over details and possessing a gradation of tone from strongly darkened foreground to lighter background. The convex shape of the mirror also sent background objects into the far distance, adding a stronger sense of depth. The device's small size allowed the artist to create a sketch roughly the same size as the mirror without having to scale anything down, like William Gilpin's (1724–1804), *Tintern Abbey*, 1782. The picturesque qualities created by the mirror were thought to resemble the beloved landscapes of Claude. Although regarded as an antiquated device favored only by eighteenth-century amateurs, some artists and photographers continue to prize its unique visual effects today.



CLAUDE GELLÉE, CALLED CLAUDE LORRAIN
French, 1604/05–1682, active in Italy

REST ON THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT
1634–35, oil on canvas, 30 x 36 1/4 in.

JOSLYN ART MUSEUM® OMAHA, NEBRASKA
Museum purchase, 1957.17