

JOHN LINNELL
1792–1882

THE ISLE OF WIGHT FROM LYMINGTON QUAY



Oil on panel

11 1/4 x 15 3/4 inches; 286 x 400 mm

Signed and dated bottom right: 'J Linnell 1826'

Collections: Edward Thomas Daniell (1804-1842), commissioned from the artist 1825, (returned it to the artist in 1832); James Fenton, Norton Hall, Gloucestershire; Fenton sale, Christie's 28 February 1880, lot 443, bought Wertheimer; Christie's 7 July 1883, bought in but subsequently sold Christie's, 17 May 1884, lot 61, (£409 10s) bought Adair; Adair sale Christie's 22 May 1890, lot 96, bought Ellis; Private collection, 1992; Private collection

Literature: Alfred T Story, *The life of John Linnell*, 1892, p. 264; Katherine Croan, *John Linnell, Truth to Nature (A Centennial Exhibition)*, 1982, p. 22, reproduced in colour, pl. 28; David Linnell, *Blake, Palmer, Linnell and Co, the life of John Linnell*, 1994, pp. 143-4, 359, reproduced in colour.

Exhibited: London, Martyn Gregory Ltd and New York, Davis and Langdale, *John Linnell, Truth to Nature*, 1983, cat no. 63, reproduced in colour; London, Lowell Libson Ltd. and The Fine Art Society, *Power & Poetry: The Art of John Linnell*, 2008, cat. no.3, reproduced in colour.

This shimmering landscape was made at a key moment in John Linnell's career, shortly after he had met and started working with the younger Samuel Palmer. It was from Palmer – and the older William Blake – that Linnell's naturalism was tempered with something more vital and visionary. Linnell increasingly saw that divine revelation could only come by scrupulous observation. In the present limpid scene, Linnell has invested a view of Lymington Quay and the distant coast of the Isle of Wight, with a numinous quality, the clear early evening light illuminating every detail. It is a landscape that is both deeply felt and beautifully realised, a work that responds to the world of Palmer and Blake, but also looks beyond Britain to broader trends of European Romanticism.

In 1818 Linnell met William Blake. Their shared approach to both art and religion resulted in a strong connection and Linnell was to play an important part in Blake's last years, commissioning the engravings for the *Book of Job* in 1823, which Linnell published in 1826,

the year of the present work and the astounding series of watercolours for Dante's *Divine Comedy* in 1824. It was Linnell who was to introduce Samuel Palmer to William Blake in 1824, Palmer noted that: 'it pleased God to send Mr Linnell as a good angel from Heaven to pluck me from the pit of modern art.' Linnell, in turn, visited Palmer at Shoreham in the late 1820s, their surviving correspondence reveals a stimulating relationship, not without its tensions. Palmer increasingly rejected naturalism, seeing it as a diversion from his mission to paint his inner visions in keeping with Blake. Linnell, by contrast, was passionately interested in observing the natural world. As a student at the Royal Academy, he had spent time sketching out of doors with other young artists, particularly William Mulready, William Henry Hunt and the more established painter, John Varley.

Linnell's early career was devoted to landscape. When the Society of Painters in Water Colours changed its name to the Society of Painters in Oil and Water Colours in 1813, Linnell was a founding member, and contributed fifty-two works (probably all oils) to its exhibitions between 1813 and 1820. Many of these were based on sketching trips made in 1813, 1814, and 1815. In 1813, with George Robert Lewis, he visited north Wales, where he was impressed by the wild scenery, writing many years later, 'I could almost fancy myself living in the times of Jacob and Esau and might expect to meet their flocks.' Like Palmer, Linnell increasingly viewed his landscape paintings as being more complex than merely representations of the natural world. It was friendship with Cornelius Varley, brother of John, that seems to have stimulated both a religious conversion and a heightened interest in the genre. He joined the Baptist church in January 1812, becoming a member of the chapel at Keppel Street, Bloomsbury, and bought drawing instruments which would enable him to transcribe what he saw with scientific accuracy. He read the writings of William Paley, whose natural theology encouraged Linnell to regard the study of landscape as a valuable response to the work of God.

The present beautifully preserved oil on panel landscape was commissioned by one of Linnell's most significant patrons, the wealthy amateur painter Edward Thomas Daniell. Linnell had met Daniell whilst he was still at Oxford when he asked him to help promote the sale of *Illustrations of the Book of Job* by Blake. Daniell, who would go on to be ordained, found in Linnell a sympathetic mentor. He commissioned Linnell to paint a rare portrait of JMW Turner (National Portrait Gallery, London) and encouraged him to complete his great Biblical scene *St John the Baptist Preaching in the Wilderness* offering to buy it if it failed to sell. Daniell commissioned Linnell to paint *The Isle of Wight from Lymington Quay* for a cost of 20 guineas after seeing *Itchen Ferry* (now Private Collection) in Linnell's studio. The picture was delivered in August 1826; however, Daniell returned it in 1832 because he was unhappy with its condition. Linnell had originally worked up the composition in a mixed-media of oil, watercolour and varnish and it had not worn well. Linnell was, perhaps, unsurprised at this, as he had noted in his journal, 'Pro[ceded] with Isle of Wight in watercolour experiments.' Linnell offered either to repair the work or to paint a new version but Daniell preferred to exchange it for another composition altogether. After its return Linnell worked over the entire composition in oils and subsequently resold it.

The view depicts the quay of the small Hampshire town of Lymington, looking across the Solent to the Isle of Wight, three figures in the foreground are shown hauling in a sail and moving a keg, the lengthening shadows suggesting the scene is set in early evening. In the centre of the composition is a single moored boat, silhouetted against the pearly sky, other

vessels have clearly been readied for the night. Linnell diffuses the scene with a remarkable luminosity, articulating the surface with touches of pure white highlight. In the fresh and free application of paint Linnell signals himself as part of the plein air tradition of Bonington, but in its meticulous observation of every detail of basket, boat and wharf he indicates his own studious application to landscape. In mood the painting seems to echo the greatest landscapes of his European contemporaries, particularly Caspar David Friedrich, Johan Christian Dahl and Christen Købke. Furthermore, in its strong inner-light and Linnell's almost religious desire to follow an artistic creed of 'Truth to Nature', this small painting anticipates some of the pre-occupations of the Pre-Raphaelites.



Caspar David Friedrich
Evening on the Baltic Sea. 1831
Oil on canvas
21 ¾ x 28 ½ inches; 554 x 725 mm
Albertinum, Gal. No. 2197 C
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Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Photo:
Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut



Samuel Palmer
View of Lee, North Devon
Oil on canvas
10 ½ x 15 inches; 267 x 381 mm
Painted 1834-1835
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