

LANDSCAPE

A SENSE OF PLACE

Before the 17th century – when landscapes became a separate ‘independent’ subject – the outdoors was usually only painted as a background or as a space in which to place a narrative subject. Much like a stage set, the landscape was used to enhance the story being told and provide different areas in which the story could be played out. The kind of nature and weather chosen was also a way of adding atmosphere, mood and extra character to the story. In this section you will explore how artists have manipulated images of landscapes so that they can be used to create or record a sense of place.

KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS

Atmosphere, storytelling, personification, symbol

KEY WORKS



Salvator Rosa, *River Landscape with Apollo and the Cumaean Sibyl*, c. 1657-58



Antoine Watteau, *Fête Galante in a Wooded Landscape*, c. 1719-21



Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rainbow Landscape*, c. 1636

RIVER LANDSCAPE WITH APOLLO AND THE CUMAEAN SIBYL

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TITLE River Landscape with Apollo and the Cumaean Sibyl
DATE c. 1657-58
SIZE 173 x 259 cm
MATERIALS Oil on canvas

ARTIST Salvator Rosa
DATES 1615-1673
PLACE Naples and Rome, Italy

THE PAINTING

This dark and atmospheric landscape depicts an extensive view, but rather than linger in the shadows of the cliffs and woodlands, our eyes are drawn to the foreground where two figures are highlighted with brighter colours. They appear to be spot-lit like actors on a darkened stage.

These two figures are identifiable as the Cumaean Sibyl and the Roman god Apollo – shown with his lyre, an ancient instrument he was famed for playing well. A 'sibyl' is a prophetess, priestess or fortune-teller in ancient cultures. This one lived in the ancient town of Cumae on the western coast of Italy.

The Roman poet Ovid recounts their story in his celebrated book *Metamorphoses* and describes how Apollo promised to grant the Sibyl a wish if he she became his lover. She asked to live for as many years as the number of grains of sand she held in her hands but when her wish was granted she still refused Apollo's advances.

Apollo granted the Sibyl longevity and she lived to be about 1,000 years old, but as a punishment she did not retain her youthfulness. She retreated to live in a cave (referenced at the right hand side of the painting) and grew older and older; her body wrinkled, shrank and withered away until she eventually became so small that she was kept in a jar and only her voice was left. The darkening sky and low-lying sun add to the story's sense of doom, creating a foreboding and frightening atmosphere: a reminder to be careful what you wish for.

THE ARTIST

Salvator Rosa was an Italian painter who was born in the bustling city of Naples and later worked in Rome and Florence. He was a painter who tackled many different kinds of subjects including portraits, landscape and scenes of witchcraft but is often remembered for his unconventional life and for becoming a hero of later Romantic artists in the 18th and 19th century.

DISCUSS



- Would you like to go for a walk in this landscape?
- Where are your eyes most drawn to in this picture? If you half close your eyes, which areas or details stand out?
- When do you think this scene is set?
- Who do you think these people are? Are we given any clues?
- What is the woman holding in her hand?
- How does the artist tell us the man is speaking? What do you think he might be saying?
- Do you think this is a rising or setting sun? How does the sky and weather affect the mood of the picture and the story?
- Do the rocks and trees look inviting and pretty? Can you see any scary faces in the rocks?
- How has the artist created a sense of doom and fear?
- Do you think this is going to be a happy story?
- What wish would you ask for?

ACTIVITIES



- Consider the story of Apollo and the Cumaean Sibyl. Investigate other stories where wishes are asked for and granted. Discuss the phrase 'be careful what you wish for'.
- Use personification in writing or speech: describe a tree or a rock as if it was a human.

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IN DETAIL



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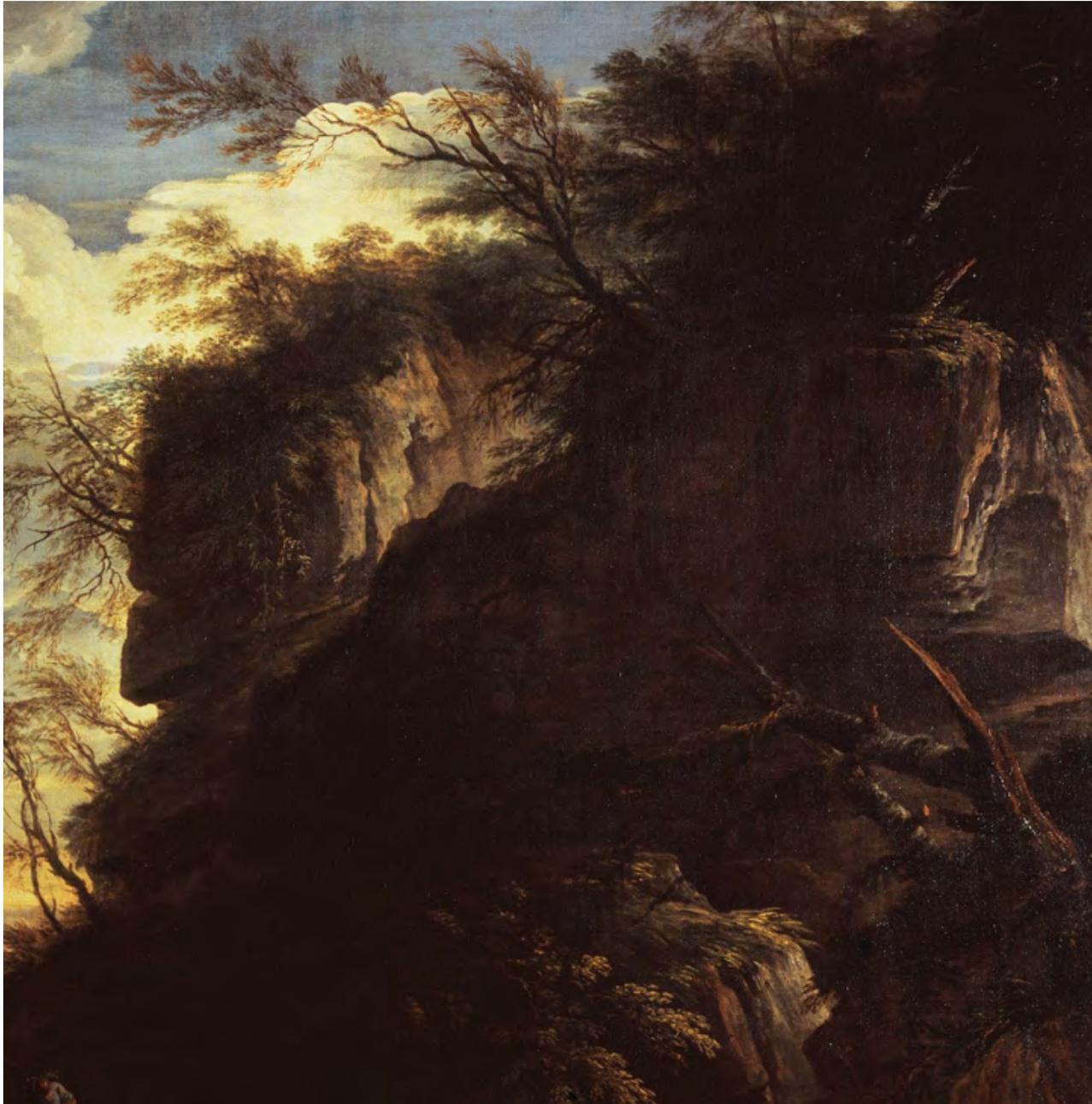


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FÊTE GALANTE IN A WOODED LANDSCAPE

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TITLE Fête Galante in a Wooded Landscape
DATE c. 1719-21
SIZE 127 x 191 cm
MATERIALS Oil on canvas

ARTIST Antoine Watteau
DATES 1684-1721
PLACE Paris, France

THE PAINTING

Antoine Watteau invented a new kind of landscape painting in the 18th century which was called a *fête galante*. This roughly translates from the French as a gallant or genteel party or gathering set outside, perhaps to celebrate a wedding.

This painting is a celebrated example and depicts a pleasant wooded park where elegant and wealthy people relax and enjoy themselves away from the restrictions and strict behaviours of the court or city.

Small groups of revellers are scattered around in relative isolation amongst the trees, participating in different activities. In the foreground a larger group chat and play with gathered flowers while two children play with their dog.

Further back two musicians serenade a group of people picnicking; others dance. In the distance we can spot couples flirting and romancing.

Overlooking this hive of gentle activity is a marble sculpture on a pedestal, a nude figure evoking classical antiquity and the myth of Arcadia. Arcadia is an area in Greece that came to symbolise the idea of harmony with nature for artists and writers from the Renaissance onwards.

THE ARTIST

Watteau was a French artist who became celebrated for making smaller-scale paintings of gentle subjects such as his *fêtes galantes* and of performers and actors in costumes.

Influenced by Rubens' fluid brushstrokes, Watteau created serene and pleasant images which were particularly collected and prized by the wealthy urban classes and the aristocracy.

The popularity of his paintings led to a number of other artists copying his style and subject matter.

DISCUSS



- Is this a pleasant landscape?
- Do you think this is a wild or an inhabited environment? How far is the town?
- Why have people gone outside and what are they doing?
- What is the weather like?
- Do all the people in this landscape know one another?
- Do you think they are wealthy? What do their clothes tell us about them?
- What ages are the people? Can you see any children?
- Do you ever have picnics? Walk a dog? Play music? Gather flowers, make daisy chains? Dance in your local park?
- Are there any sculptures in your local parks or gardens?
- What would you like to be doing in this landscape?

ACTIVITIES



- Use a local park or garden to restage this picture. Regroup the class in smaller groups and make a contemporary equivalent of this image. Take a series of photographs. Think about scale when taking each photograph. Make a collage back in the classroom.
- Act out different scenes from the painting, then create dialogue using speech and thought bubbles (see page 17).

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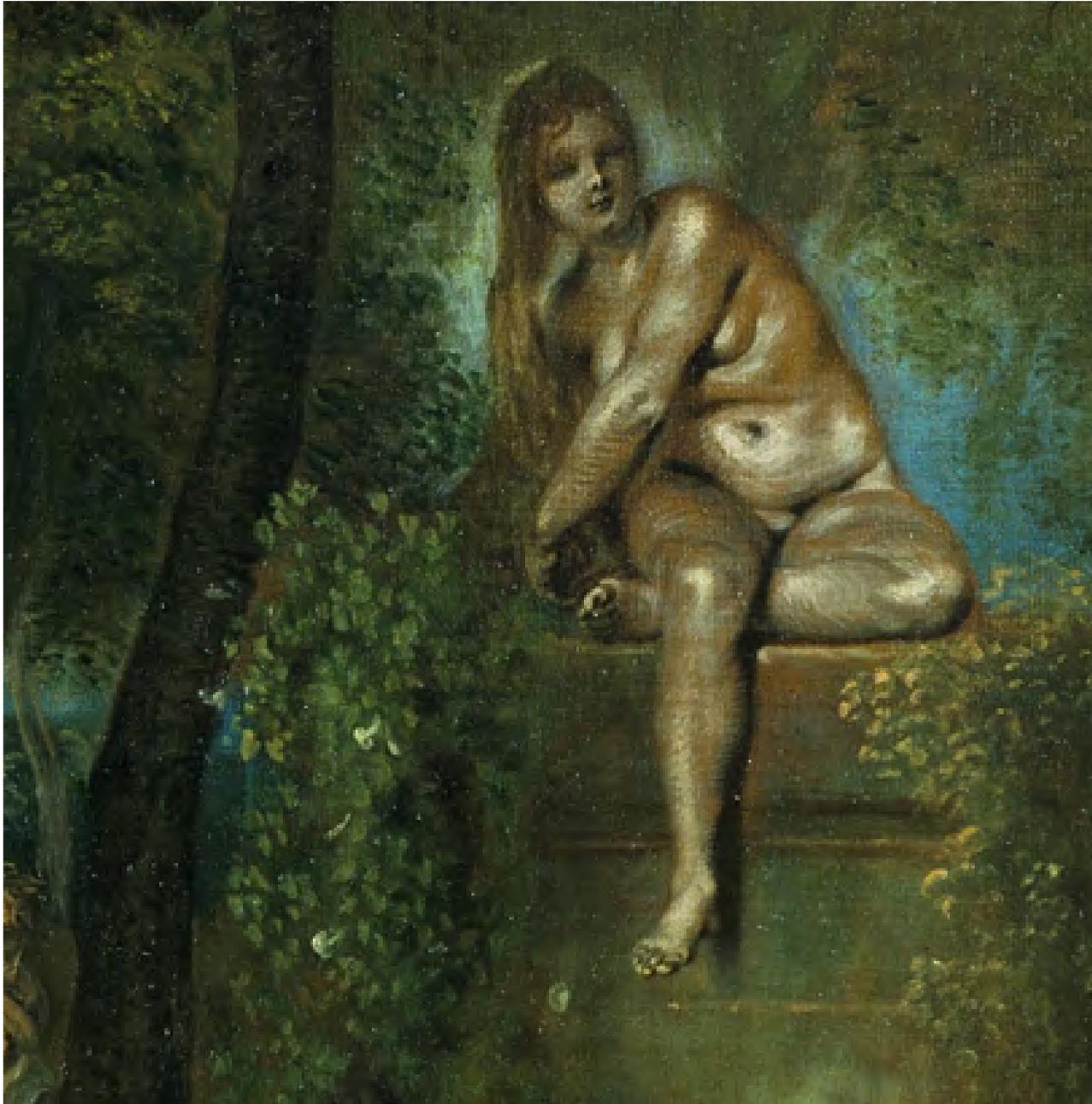
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ACTIVITY Dialogue activity



THE RAINBOW LANDSCAPE

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TITLE The Rainbow Landscape

DATE c. 1636

SIZE 137 x 233 cm

MATERIALS Oil on oak panel

ARTIST Peter Paul Rubens

DATES 1577-1640

PLACE Flanders

THE PAINTING

This painting captures a glorious panoramic view of the sweeping countryside of Brabant in Flanders, one of the three regions of present-day Belgium. It takes in the view from Het Steen, the manor house and estate of the artist who created this work, Peter Paul Rubens, commonly known by just his last name.

Rubens spent his summers here in semi-retirement from 1636 until his death in 1640, observing and painting the landscape at different times of the day.

The picture shows an idealised view of a working landscape; haymaking is underway, cattle are being herded, there are ducks on the edge of the stream, milkmaids and a farm worker welcome the driver of a hay wagon. Curving across the sky, holding the composition together, is a double rainbow, something that is technically very challenging for painters to represent.

The rainbow also has religious significance, as a symbol of God's promise to conserve the earth and all the creatures that live on it. This sense of reconciliation was important to Rubens, who had been an active diplomat on behalf of the Netherlands government, a seeker of peace.

THE ARTIST

Rubens was the consummate 17th-century artist; productive and professional, he moved easily through Dutch artistic and political society, achieving respect, fame and wealth.

After a conservative period in art, Rubens brought in a new exuberance, using movement, colour, drama and sensuality into his paintings, which included classical, religious and mythological subjects, hunting scenes and portraits of friends and of himself. It was in later life that he started to paint landscapes, including *The Rainbow Landscape*.

Rubens was influential in establishing the concept of the artist's studio, a busy workshop employing many assistants and apprentices to produce a stream of works for the nobility and art collectors throughout Europe.

DISCUSS



- Can we tell the time of year in this painting? What are the clues?
- How do the people look?
- How does this painting make you feel?
- Is this how we harvest crops today? What do we use?
- If you were out in fields today, what other things might you see? Are there some things about the countryside that haven't changed?
- Why is there a rainbow? How do rainbows make you feel?
- Can you think of a story which ends with a rainbow? Why was there a rainbow?
- The artist Peter Paul Rubens lived in a house just next to the trees. Why do you think he painted this painting?

ACTIVITIES



- Use a prism to refract light and observe the colours.
- Arrange the colours of the rainbow into a colour wheel.
- Think about a food you like to eat and draw its journey from where it is grown to your dining table.
- Collect natural materials in your local landscape, park, playground and make nature prints (see animation on page 26).

THE RAINBOW LANDSCAPE



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ANIMATION > NATURE PRINTING

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