

## Claude Lorrain

Claude Lorrain was born around 1604 of very poor parents at the village of Champagne in Lorraine. When it was discovered that he made no progress at school, he was apprenticed, it is commonly said, to a pastry-cook, but this is extremely dubious. At the age of twelve, being left an orphan, he went to live at Freiburg on the Rhine with an elder brother, Jean Gele, a wood-carver of moderate merit, and under him he designed arabesques and foliage. He afterwards rambled to Rome to seek a livelihood; but from his clownishness and ignorance of the language, he failed to obtain permanent employment. He next went to Naples, to study landscape painting under Godfrey Waals, a painter of much repute. With him he remained two years; then he returned to Rome, and was domesticated until April 1625 with another landscape-painter, Augustin Tassi, who hired him to grind his colours and to do all the household drudgery.

His master, hoping to make Claude serviceable in some of his greatest works, advanced him in the rules of perspective and the elements of design. Under his tuition the mind of Claude began to expand, and he devoted himself to artistic study with great eagerness. He exerted his utmost industry to explore the true principles of painting by an incessant examination of nature; and for this purpose he made his studies in the open fields, where he very frequently remained from sunrise till sunset, watching the effect of the shifting light upon the landscape. He generally sketched whatever he thought beautiful or striking, marking every tinge of light with a similar colour; from these sketches he perfected his landscapes.

Leaving Tassi, he made a tour in Italy, France and a part of Germany, including his native Lorraine, suffering numerous misadventures by the way. Karl Dervent, painter to the duke of Lorraine, kept him as assistant for a year; and he painted at Nancy the architectural subjects on the ceiling of the Carmelite church. He did not, however, relish this employment, and in 1627 returned to Rome. Here, painting two landscapes for Cardinal Bentivoglio, he earned the protection of Pope Urban VIII and from about 1637 he rapidly rose into celebrity. Claude was acquainted not only with the facts, but also with the laws of nature; and the German painter Joachim von Sandrart relates that he used to explain, as they walked together through the fields, the causes of the different appearances of the same landscape at different hours of the day, from the reflections or refractions of light, or from the morning and evening dews or vapours, with all the precision of a natural philosopher. He elaborated his pictures with great care; and if any performance fell short of his ideal, he altered, erased and repainted it several times over.

His landscapes present to the spectator an endless variety; so many views of land and water, so many interesting objects, that, like an astonished traveller, the eye is obliged to pause and measure the extent of the prospect, and his distances of mountain and of sea, are so illusive, that the spectator feels, as it were, fatigued by gazing. The edifices and temples which so finely round off his compositions, the lakes peopled with aquatic birds, the foliage diversified in conformity to the different kinds of trees, all is nature in him; every object arrests the attention of an amateur, every thing furnishes instruction to a professor. There is not an effect of light, or a reflection in water which he has not imitated; and the various changes of the day are nowhere better represented than in Claude. In a word, he is truly the painter who, in depicting the three regions of air, earth, and water, has combined the whole universe. His atmosphere almost always bears the impress of the sky at Rome, whose horizon is, from its situation, rosy, dewy, and warm; his skies are aerial and full of lustre, and every object harmoniously illumined. His distances and colouring are delicate, and his tints have a sweetness and variety till then unexampled. He frequently gave an uncommon tenderness to his finished trees by glazing. He did not however possess any peculiar merit in his figures, which are very indifferent and insipid, and generally too much attenuated; but he was so conscious of his deficiency in this respect, that he usually engaged other artists to paint them for him, among whom were Courtois and Filippo Lauri. Indeed, he was wont to remark to the purchasers of his pictures that he sold them the landscape, and presented them with the figures gratis. In order to avoid a repetition of the same subject, and also to detect the very numerous spurious copies of his works, he made tinted outline drawings (in six paper books prepared for this purpose) of all those pictures which were transmitted to different countries; and on the back of each drawing he wrote the name of the purchaser. These books he named Libri di yenta. This valuable work has been engraved and published, and has always been highly esteemed by students of the art of landscape. Claude, who had suffered much from gout, died in Rome at the age of eighty-two, on the 21st (or perhaps the 23rd) of November 1682, leaving his wealth, which was considerable, between his only surviving relatives, a nephew and an adopted daughter.

Many choice specimens of his genius may be seen in the National Gallery, London and in the Louvre; the landscapes in the Altieri and Colonna palaces in Rome are also of especial celebrity. A list has been printed showing no less than 92 examples in the various public galleries of Europe. He himself regarded a landscape which he painted in the Villa Madama, being a cento of various views with great abundance and variety of leafage, and a composition of "Esther and Ahasuerus," as his finest works; the former he refused to sell, although Clement IX offered to cover its surface with gold pieces. He etched a series of twenty-eight landscapes, fine impressions of which are greatly prized. Full of amenity, and deeply sensitive to the graces of nature, Claude was long deemed the prince of landscape painters, and he must always be accounted a prime leader in that form of art, and in his day a great enlarger and refiner of its province.

Claude was a man of amiable and simple character, very kind to his pupils, a patient and unwearied worker; in his own sphere of study, his mind was stored (as we have seen) with observation and knowledge, but he continued an unlettered man till his death. Famous and highly patronized though he was in all his later years, he seems to have been very little known to his brother artists, with the single exception of Sandrart. This painter is the chief direct authority for the facts of Claude's life (*Academia Artis Pictoriae*, 1683); Baldinucci, who obtained information from some of Claude's immediate survivors, relates various incidents to a different effect (*Notizie dei professori del disegno*).

Claude Lorrain died on November 23, 1682 in Rome.

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