

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites

The Story of the Gallery

A GIFT FOR THE PUBLIC

Dulwich Picture Gallery was founded in 1811 by a gift from the art dealer and collector Noel Desenfans, his wife Margaret and their close friend Sir Francis Bourgeois. They assembled one of Britain's finest collections of Dutch, Flemish, Italian, Spanish and French Old Masters. Two later gifts from William Linley in 1835 and Charles Fairfax Murray in 1911 added important British paintings.

The collection tells the story of European painting between 1600 and 1800. The three founders requested that their friend Sir John Soane design a building to display their paintings. It opened in 1817 as the world's first purpose-built public art gallery.

The Gallery's central enfilade of five rooms is painted in Mylands Dulwich Red, a unique shade evoking Sir John Soane's original design scheme.

Having passed Dulwich on trains to Victoria over nearly 40 years, I finally visited in September 2022 and plan to return soon! Here are some of my favourites from this first visit.

The current exhibition (finishes 12 March 2023) is called **Between Worlds** with over 100 paintings and drawings by Lithuanian artist and composer M K **Čiurlionis** (1875 – 1911). Photos in slides 2 to 22 are of his material.



Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Lightning

1909

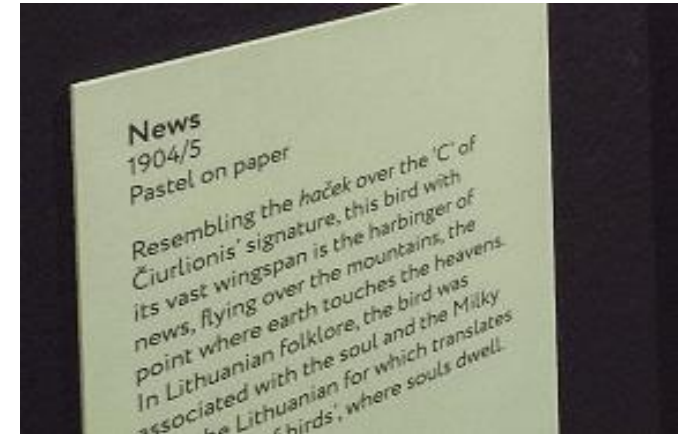
Tempera on cardboard

Whilst elemental and natural, here the work is graphic and dramatically mythological. Capturing the brutal force of nature, it pulsates with energy and noise, like a staccato piece of music. The formal repetition of the lightning bolts is unnatural, as if from the gods who have torn the sky apart in their anger.

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites

News 1904/5 - Čiurlionis

This bird with its vast wingspan is the harbinger of news, flying over the mountains, the point where earth touches the heavens. Photo 1 of 3 – straight on view.

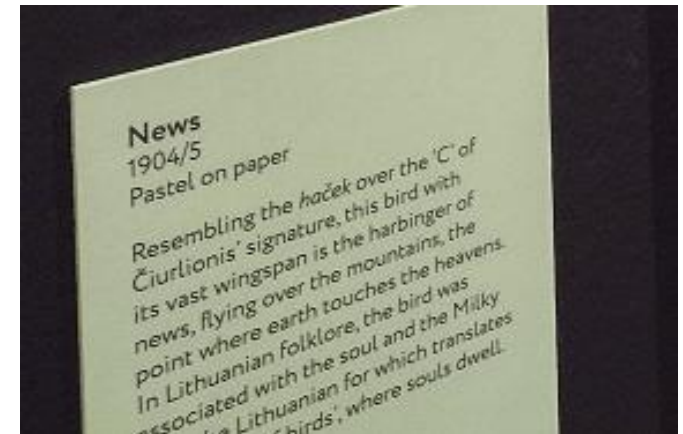


Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



News 1904/5 - Čiurlionis

This bird with its vast wingspan is the harbinger of news, flying over the mountains, the point where earth touches the heavens. Photo 2 of 3 – view from left.

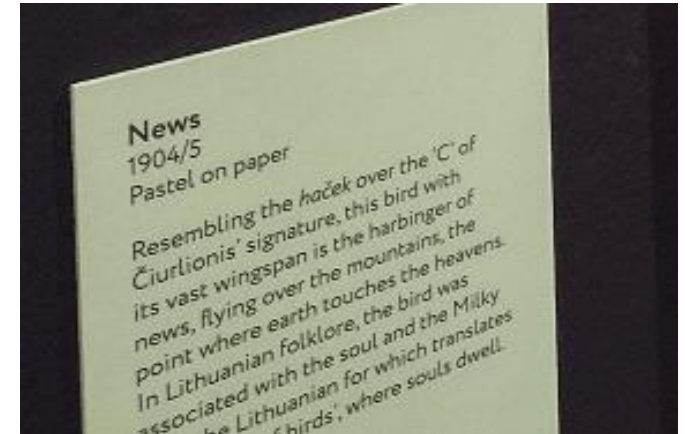


Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



News 1904/5 - Čiurlionis

This bird with its vast wingspan is the harbinger of news, flying over the mountains, the point where earth touches the heavens. Photo 3 of 3 – view from right.



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Night

1904/5

Pastel on paper

Japanese prints, which Čiurlionis would have seen in Warsaw, were fashionable at the time and often featured bridges. Their poetic depiction was also common in the work of artists such as Monet, Van Gogh and Whistler. Here it is as if a figure from Greek mythology ferries souls across the River Styx.

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Hymn I-III

1906

Tempera, oil on paper (I & III)

Pastel on paper (II)

Čiurlionis often worked in triptychs, the number three significant in Christianity, other religions and mythologies. In the central panel diminutive angels process towards Rex, flanked by curved, angelic forms that reappear regularly in his work. The planets hovering below referencing the earthly connectivity with the cosmos.

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Sparks I–III

1906

Tempera on paper

In Lithuanian mythology stars were considered 'sisters in the sky', responsible for taking care of graves, the temporary resting place of souls.

Recounting a boat trip on the Nemunas River Čiurlionis recalled: 'Way above us, stars wrapped up in balls of mist were rolling across our way. They shifted in their course, moving up and down, enveloped in spheres of miraculous fog. These stars were scattered by a black monster charging by. The air was shattered by the sounds of the symphony of the night storm... It turned out to be a train moving across with great commotion.'

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites

Fairy Tale I – III, Čiurlionis 1907

This tale represents a search for happiness, with a princess who will grant wishes. Photo of Fairy Tale I.



Fairy Tale I–III

1907

Tempera on paper

For Čiurlionis, painting was as much about storytelling as about giving life to his visions. It is said that a farmer saw this work and immediately understood the tale. Čiurlionis was delighted by the implication that his work could be understood by all, confirming his belief that the path to great national art was through its folklore.

This tale represents a search for happiness, with a princess who will grant wishes. It is filled with Čiurlionis symbols – the over-sized bird, strange fauna, scythe bearing angels or farmers, an anthropomorphic Rex-like mountain, castles and crowns.

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Fairy Tale I – III, Čiurlionis 1907

This tale represents a search for happiness, with a princess who will grant wishes. Photo of Fairy Tale II.



Fairy Tale I–III

1907

Tempera on paper

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Fairy Tale I – III, Čiurlionis 1907

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Fairy Tale I–III

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Tempera on paper

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The Zodiac: The Sun is Passing
the Sign of Aries
1906/7
Tempera on paper

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



The Sun

1907

Pastel on paper

In the early twentieth century, Polish society took great interest in philosophies and religions such as Hinduism, Ancient Egyptian sun worship, and the cult of Prometheus (who stole fire from the gods and gave it to mankind). Prometheus was celebrated by artists for his creative and rebellious spirit, as defined in Goethe's poem 'Prometheus'.

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites

Sonata No 7, Čiurlionis 1909

Sonata of the Pyramids – Photo of Allegro.



SONATA NO 7
Sonata of the Pyramids:
Allegro, Andante, Scherzo
1909
Tempera on paper

Čiurlionis' final, and unfinished, sonata takes us to Egypt where pyramids and peaks are topped by 'suns'. Delicately supported bridges connect worlds, contributing to the sense of double horizons where clouds or lightning are not where they should be. Čiurlionis plays with the representation of the triangle, dramatically emphasising it through light and shade. The palm trees referencing reincarnation. In *Allegro* the cloud-like forms suggest reclining mummies.

Andante is a detail of *Allegro*. Čiurlionis enlarges the bottom section of the latter, drawing more attention to the central, shadowed form, resembling a body prostrated in prayer and similarly repeated in the bridge in *Allegro*.

In *Scherzo* the architecture takes us to Japan, with its torii (temple gates), and to India with imagery reminiscent of temples and stupa.

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Sonata No 7, Čiurlionis 1909

Sonata of the Pyramids – Photo of Andante..



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The Altar

1909

Tempera on cardboard

The structure may reference the seven steps in the theosophical creation of humanity in which the celestial sphere begins on the fourth, here topped with the smoke of an offering. The altar towers above the landmass below, where ships travel out to sea. Čiurlionis' symbols, including a haloed centaur shooting an arrow skyward at a dragon-like creature, remind us of the struggle against evil.

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Fantasy (The Demon)

1909

Tempera on cardboard

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Prelude (The Knight Prelude)
1909
Tempera on paper

Here the architecture is intended by Čiurlionis to be a representation of Vilnius. The mounted knight bearing his sword symbolises the city and the fight for Lithuanian independence. The two figures in front of the knight echo the pose of Čiurlionis' angels in receipt of an offering.

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Fairy Tale Fairy Tale of the Knight

1999

The illuminated dome features 194 windows, symbolizing each year of Jesus' life and mission. The 12 windows representing the 12 apostles are prominent. On these, bright, three-dimensional windows in the shape of Jesus' earthly belongings — a wooden staff, stone, bread, manna, olive, and palm — are a bridge



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Angels (Paradise)
1855
Tempera on cardboard

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Angel (Angel prelude)

1909

Tempera on paper

In this work the figure is more clearly female and sits peacefully surveying the scene and the movement of people across the multiple bridge-like structures connecting Čiurlionis' worlds.



Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Jan Steen

Leiden 1626–1679 Leiden

The Wandering Musicians

c. 1665

Steen came from a family of brewers and for several years ran his own taverns. This gave him the perfect position from which to observe human behaviour. Here, a family watches a group of travelling musicians. In the background, a man takes advantage of the distraction to make unwelcome advances towards a young woman.

Oil on panel

L45 – On loan from a private collection

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Gerrit Dou

Leiden 1613–1675 Leiden



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A Woman playing a Clavichord

c. 1665

Dou trained as a glass and copper engraver and became a pupil of Rembrandt in the late 1620s. This painting is typical of Dou's style, with its exact rendering of materials, textures and light. This young woman has paused in her playing, perhaps welcoming her lover who will accompany her on the viola da gamba.

Oil on panel

DPG56 – Bourgeois Bequest, 1811

Adopted by the Friends of Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1991

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Jan Both

Utrecht 1618/22–1652 Utrecht

Road by the Edge of a Lake

c. 1638–42

A pair of travellers has stopped by the banks of a lake. Everything from the quality of the light to the landscape to the travellers' appearance suggests that this painting was conceived in Italy. However, it is painted on an oak panel, a wood more commonly used in Northern Europe, possibly a clue that it was produced soon after Both returned from Italy to the Netherlands.

Oil on panel

DPG15 – Bourgeois Bequest, 1811

Adopted by Russell and Ruth Vernon, 1995

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Jacob van Ruisdael

Haarlem 1628/9–1682 Amsterdam

Landscape with Windmills near Haarlem

c. 1650–52

Ruisdael's low vantage point makes this unremarkable rural scene dramatic and ominous. Precise details, such as the delicate leaves and the wisp of the smoke curling from the chimney, suggest he painted this after careful observation. This painting is only loosely based on reality however – Ruisdael used artistic license to exaggerate the theatricality of the Dutch country-side.

Oil on panel

DPG168 – Boogroets Beuist, 1811

Adopted in 1995 by Mrs Rosemary Dawson in memory of her uncle Mr Charles Brundie



John Constable

East Bergholt 1776–1837 Hampstead

Landscape with Windmills near Haarlem, after Jacob van Ruisdael

1830

Constable made this copy of Ruisdael's landscape near the end of his career. Copying Old Master paintings was common for art students, but more unusual for established artists like him. He wanted this work to encourage his students to study landscape painting. Emphasising the drama of Ruisdael's original, Constable demonstrated that landscape could stir the spirit and imagination just as much as paintings telling historical or religious stories.

Oil on panel

DPG657 – Acquired with funds given by an anonymous donor in memory of Bill and Anita Greenoff, 2007

Constable copied Ruisdael's
Landscape with Windmills.

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Meindert Hobbema

Amsterdam 1638 – 1709 Amsterdam

Wooded Landscape with a Watermill

Early 1660s

The son of the carpenter, at age fifteen Hobbema and his siblings were sent to an orphanage and, aged seventeen, he was taken on as an apprentice to a landscape painter. Hobbema developed his own distinctive style and became famous for highly detailed woodland scenes, populated with minute figures.

Oil on panel

DPG87 – Bourgeois Bequest, 1811

Adopted by Graham and Olwyn Fuller, 1998

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Arent de Gelder

Dordrecht 1645–1727 Dordrecht

Jacob's Dream

c. 1715

Long thought to be by Rembrandt, this was once among the most copied works in the Gallery. In 1946 the painting was cleaned, uncovering a signature in the bottom right corner and revealing Arent de Gelder as the true artist. He was Rembrandt's last student and closely followed his master's style.

Oil on canvas

DPG126 – Bourgeois Bequest, 1811

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Nicolas Poussin

Les Andelys, Normandy 1594–1665 Rome

Rinaldo and Armida

c. 1628–30

The sorceress Armida moves to kill the sleeping Rinaldo. Just as she is about to strike, however, she falls in love with him. Poussin creates a contrast between the violence of her action and the look of tenderness on her face. The subject of the painting comes from the epic poem 'Gerusalemme Liberata' by Torquato Tasso, published in 1581.

Oil on canvas

DPG238 – Bourgeois Bequest, 1811

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal)

Venice 1697–1768 Venice

**The Thames, London, from the
Terrace of Somerset House, the City
of London in the distance**

c. 1750

Canaletto's sweeping panorama allows us to step back in time to eighteenth-century London. His scene is populated with tiny but highly individualised figures, including hundreds of boatmen, a gardener, and members of the elegantly dressed upper classes. The voluminous dress worn by the woman in the foreground exemplifies the Rococo fashion for bright colours and wide silhouettes.

Oil on canvas

Loan from a private collection

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal)

Venice 1697–1768 Venice

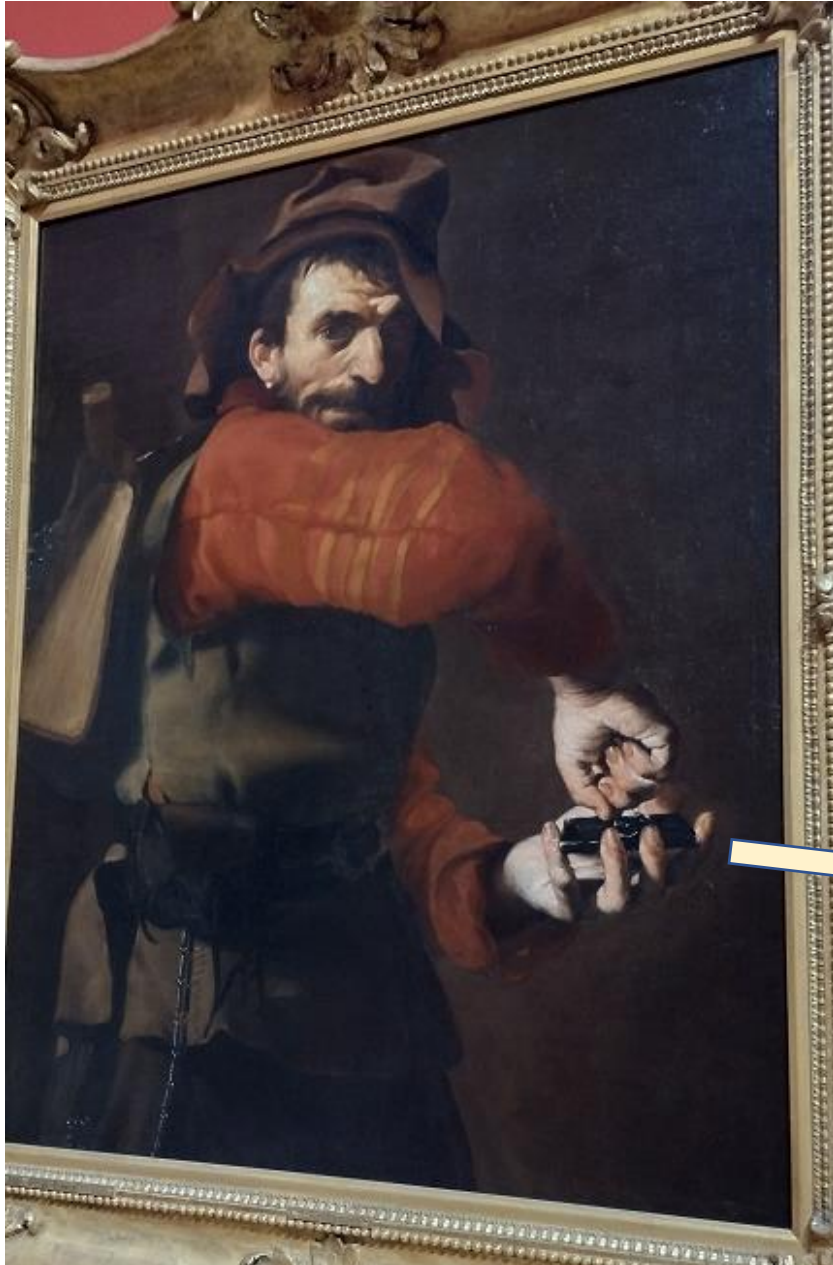
Westminster Bridge, London from
the north: The Master of the
Goldsmiths Company's Procession
c. 1750

In this depiction of Westminster Bridge, Canaletto shows us the excitement and splendour of the Goldsmith's Company's procession during Lord Mayor's Day. This annual event took place in May when the city elected its new Mayor. The Thames is filled with four elaborately decorated City barges as well as hundreds of oarsmen. Canaletto often idealised his views and this painting portrays many more boats than were present in reality.

Oil on canvas

Loan from a private collection

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – some favourites



Neapolitan

The Locksmith

c.1630-49

A figure is caught in the act of turning a key. A lock is held in his spot-lit hand. His raised right arm creates the sense that he is trying to shield himself from view. In seventeenth-century Naples, locksmiths were sometimes seen as shady characters. Alongside their trade, they were known to help thieves with picking locks and forging keys.

Oil on canvas

DPG233 - Bourgeois Bequest, 1811



This painting is hung on the left-hand side of the archway.



Dulwich Picture Gallery, London – a great day out

