

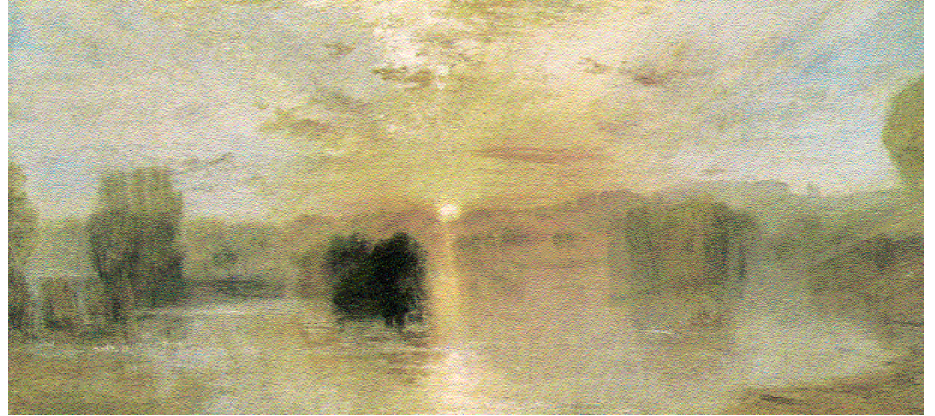
# *The Lake, Petworth, Sunset* 1828

## JMW Turner (1775–1851)

Turner painted *The Lake, Petworth, Sunset* as a sketch. His patron, Lord Egremont, did not like it, it was too modern, so Turner made another, more detailed version, *Petworth: Sunset, Stag Drinking*. This version was accepted and is now in Petworth House.

What aspects of *The Lake, Petworth, Sunset* do you think upset Lord Egremont?

Look at one small part of this painting on its own. Can you tell what you are looking at? The brushstrokes are so loose that without the rest of the painting, a tree may seem just like a blob! Why do you think Turner painted it in this way?



**The Lake, Petworth, Sunset** c1828

Think how taste in art has changed over the centuries. Many artists like the French Impressionists, who were considered revolutionary in their time for their broad brushwork, are now very much admired.

Which version of the lake, at sunset would you have preferred?



**The Lake, Petworth: Sunset, a Stag Drinking** c1829

Until the eighteenth century, landscape painting was seen as a minor branch of art and landscape artists were not taken very seriously. Landscape was either painted as a background to an historical or mythological subject or it was descriptive, a visual record of place. It was Romanticism in the eighteenth century that changed this view by focusing attention on the correspondance which exists between the moods of nature and of man. It was still not acceptable, however, to make atmospheric landscape the only subject of a major painting.

In *The Lake, Petworth, Sunset*, Turner has reduced the scene down to its simplest forms, as if it had been viewed through blurred vision. He did so to intensify a still, reflective mood at the close of day. If an uninitiated viewer were to isolate one small part of the painting on its own, he would not necessarily be able to make it out. The painting needs to be looked at as a whole to understand what it depicts. This was

considered unacceptable at the time. The finished version, *The Lake, Petworth, Sunset: a Stag Drinking*, which was accepted by Lord Egremont, is clearer, with focused details of stags drinking and swans floating on the lake.

Nineteenth-century artists had to rely on the people who could afford to buy art (like Lord Egremont of Petworth House) to support them. This meant that they were dependent on their patrons as to what and how they could paint.

*The Lake, Petworth, Sunset* was not a finished piece in Turner's eyes and indeed in the eyes of his contemporaries. However, as a result of changing tastes and attitudes as to what can be considered 'art', it now appears to most people as a complete work in its own right.