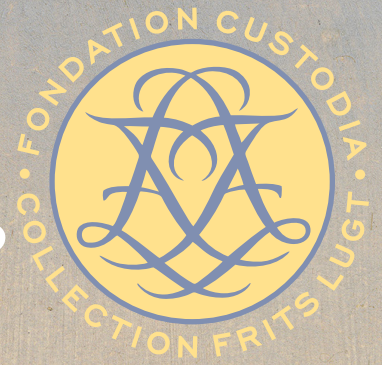


Fondation

121 rue de Lille  
Paris VII



*True to Nature*

*Open-air Painting*

1780 — 1870

Custodia

Every day  
except Monday  
12 – 6 pm

3 December 21 – 3 April 22

Jules Coignet  
*View of Bozen with a Painter, 1837*  
National Gallery of Art, Washington

The  
Fitzwilliam  
Museum  
CAMBRIDGE

**National  
Gallery  
of Art**



# EXHIBITION AT THE FONDATION CUSTODIA

from 3 December 2021 to 3 April 2022

## *True to Nature* *Open-air Painting* 1780–1870

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HIS EXHIBITION brings together over one hundred and fifty oil studies from the collections of the Fondation Custodia in Paris, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, The Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and a private collector, offering a fresh look at open-air landscape painting in Europe between 1780 and 1870.

Although earlier examples exist – most notably Claude Lorrain's experiments in Italy as recounted by his biographer and the remarkable group by François Desportes (1661–1743) preserved in Sèvres – making oil sketches *en plein air* only became an essential part of the artistic training of European landscape painters from the late eighteenth-century. Occupying a place between painting and drawing, these *études* – or studies – were small-scale works, mostly executed on paper, and painted quickly before the motif in order to train the hand and the eye in capturing fleeting effects of light and colour. Though some were later embellished in the studio, they were not seen as finished pictures intended for sale or exhibition, but as a precious resource which artists could draw upon to bring a sense of freshness and immediacy to their official work.

Artists from all over Europe (and wider) dedicated themselves to sketching in oil on paper or a piece of canvas in the open air. Included in the exhibition are works by Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, Achille-Etna Michallon, Camille Corot, John Constable, Joseph Mallord William Turner, Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, Johan Thomas Lundbye, Vilhelm Kyhn, Johann Martin von Rohden, Carl Blechen, and many others. The exhibition is not organized chronologically or by school but by motif: trees, rocks, water in its different appearances, volcanoes, skies, rooftops, Rome and the Roman Campagna, Capri.

### **Ger Luijten, one of the curators of the exhibition:**

‘This is done in order to arrive at a poetic rather than a didactic display of the selected works and to underline differences as well as similarities in approach by artists from various countries and from roughly four successive generations. The studies have a timelessness and are often difficult to date. The joy the artists experienced while making them, we re-lived while organizing the exhibition and preparing the installation. Most of the painters would have never dreamed of exhibiting their oil studies. They were essentially private works, intended as *aide-mémoires* to inspire larger-scale studio compositions, and would only have been seen by an intimate circle of friends,

colleagues or students. Today, however, their freshness and immediacy make them much more appealing than much of these painter's official oeuvre. *True to Nature* presents an extraordinary opportunity for the close study of these highly original landscapes which, despite their modest scale, depict the world around us in all its luminous wonder.'

The Fondation Custodia has been collecting landscape oil sketches for the past decade, following the bequest in 2010 of a substantial group by its former director Carlos van Hasselt (director of the Fondation Custodia from 1970 to 1994) and his partner Andrzej Nieweglowski. It has done so with the aim of building up a reference collection which now includes works by celebrated artists and pioneers of the technique such as Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, Simon Denis, Thomas Jones, Camille Corot, Carl Blechen and John Constable, whose recently discovered view of gardens at Hampstead will be exhibited here for the first time (fig. 1).



1. John Constable (East Bergholt 1776 – 1837 London)  
*View of Gardens at Hampstead, with an Elder Tree, c. 1821-22*  
 Oil on cardboard. – 17.6 x 14 cm  
 Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris,  
 inv. 2019-S.58

The National Gallery of Art, Washington, has a wonderful select group of oil-studies donated and bequeathed by various collectors and built up by former curator Philip Conisbee (1946-2008). In 1980 Philip was co-organizer of the pioneering exhibition *Painting from Nature* in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, an institution which has always showed an interest in the subject and has collected sketches widely. The exhibition is a dialogue between the paintings from these three institutions and a very nice set of one of the most dedicated private collectors in the field. She is thanked here once again for her stimulating role in the organization.

## Painting in Nature

The exhibition opens with a section called *Painting in Nature*, which brings together a diverse group of oil sketches which all seem to pose the same question – what does it mean to paint in the open air? They evoke the sensation of being confronted with nature, while also encouraging the viewer to think of the practicalities of working out-of-doors. In order to make these studies, artists had to carry all of their materials with them, often on long hikes to remote locations. In Coignet's view of Bozen, the paraphernalia required by the *plein air* painter – paint-box, folding stool and parasol – is depicted just as carefully as the vast mountainous landscape (fig. 9).

## The Natural Elements – Trees, Water, Rocks, Skies and Atmospheric Effects

The development of open-air landscape painting was fuelled by a growing interest in the natural world and new sciences such as meteorology and geology. This inquisitive, empir-

ical attitude informed the *plein air* painters in their investigations of the natural elements which form the building blocks of landscape painting. Trees, Water, Rocks, Skies and Atmospheric Effects each have their own section in this exhibition. This systematic classification and breakdown of the elements of a landscape was advocated by Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, whose influence can be felt throughout the exhibition. His treatise *Éléments de perspective* (1799/1800) laid out guidelines for *plein air* painting that were followed throughout the nineteenth century. It championed the close study of nature and recommended, among other things, that painting sessions be limited to a maximum of two hours at a time, to ensure consistency in the rendering of light, colour and atmosphere.

## Trees



2. **Simon Denis** (Antwerp 1755 – 1813 Naples)  
*Trees in Front of a Valley*  
 Oil on canvas. – 68.8 x 91.1 cm  
 Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, inv. 2017-S.18

Trees were a crucial motif for any landscape painter, and Valenciennes encouraged his readers to make careful painted studies of them, either in isolation or in groups, faithfully recording details of the bark, moss, branching, roots and, especially, foliage. A pioneer of *plein air* painting, Simon Denis presents a close-up of a tree bathed in golden light (fig. 2). Its impressive scale and cropped composition lend it a monumental quality. Decades later, the Danish artist Janus La Cour made a detailed study of an ancient olive grove (fig. 10). The inscription “Tivoli 18–30 April” suggests that he followed another of Valenciennes’ recommendations, and returned to his subject for brief sessions over several days, at times when he could be sure of working in consistent light conditions.

## Water: Cascades and Coasts

Water was a particularly alluring motif for the *plein air* painter, faced with the challenge of depicting the shape-shifting, transparent qualities of this element and the impossibility of fixing in oils the mesmerizing rhythms of its waves, currents and ripples. The German artist Christian Morgenstern captured the force of the water gushing down a waterfall on the River Traun, in Bavaria (fig. 3). He worked quickly, yet conveyed with great naturalism the complex textures and translucency of the



foaming water and the shadows beneath its surface – he emphasized the speed with which he worked by inscribing the location and date into the still-wet paint. With remarkable freedom of touch, Baron Gerard's sketch evokes the power of the stormy sea and crashing waves, set against a fiery orange-red sunset. Here, the artist is less concerned with the depiction of a specific place than with the mystery and immensity of the sea which fuelled the Romantic imagination (fig. 11).



3. **Christian Ernst Bernhard Morgenstern**  
 (Hamburg 1805 – 1867 Munich)  
*Waterfall in the River Traun, Bavaria*, 1826  
 Oil on paper: – 28 x 36.4 cm  
 Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris,  
 inv. 2019-S.16

At the confluence of water and land, coastal landscapes and lake shores also offered picturesque qualities, often enhanced by mercurial weather conditions. A subject as unpretentious as a sand dune could convey the magical quality of the sunlight on a particularly fine day along the Danish coast (fig. 12).

### Rocks, Caves and Grottoes

The variety of shapes, colours and textures of the earth's crust were just as fascinating to the painter of landscape studies. Stratigraphic layers, geological formations and eroded cliffs prompted a contemplation of time which dwarfed human history, and transcribing the sculptural qualities of rocks and cavernous interiors in oil paint was a valuable test of skill. In Vilhelm Kyhn's surprising study, rocks are meticulously rendered in shades of brown and grey-blue, and the calm body of water becomes an almost abstract background (fig. 13). Artists in Italy were particularly attracted to the caves and grottoes which riddled the volcanic terrain, such as the one depicted by Louise-Joséphine Sarazin de Belmont (fig. 4). Little-known today, she enjoyed great celebrity during her lifetime, and is one of the only female landscape painters to work out-of-doors in the early nineteenth-century.

### Skies and Atmospheric Effects

The most immaterial of all the natural motifs, skies offered an endlessly variable opportunity for practice. According to Valenciennes, a painter should begin with the sky, as it was the source of all light in nature. Capturing the shifting patterns of light and shade as clouds move across the sky meant working very quickly, and for particularly



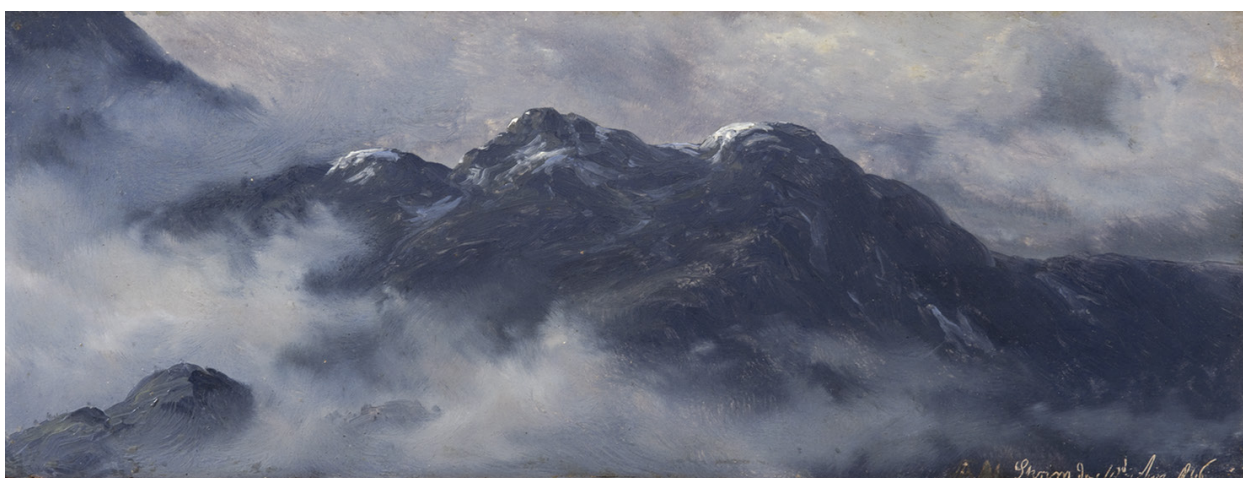


4. Louise-Joséphine Sarazin de Belmont  
(Versailles 1790 – 1870 Paris)  
*Grotto in a Rocky Landscape*  
Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 42.2 × 57.4 cm  
Private collection

ephemeral phenomena such as sunrises or sunsets, Valenciennes recommended spending no longer than thirty minutes. Stormy or serene, overcast or brilliant, John Constable was one of the sky's most systematic chroniclers. He would venture on sketching trips he called "skying", swiftly recording the appearance of clouds in different weather conditions. In this luminous study, the artist left a fingerprint in the still-wet paint (fig. 14). The dramatic atmospheric effects created by storms and mist were also particularly appealing to painters of a more Romantic sensibility (fig. 5).

### The Light of Italy: Rome and the Campagna

Italy plays a central role in the history of *plein air* painting, as it is where most artists of the period initiated their experiments with the technique. Drawn to Rome by a desire to imbue themselves in classical culture and study the Old Masters, young painters travelled to Italy from all over Europe to complete their education. The grand



5. Anton Melbye (Copenhagen 1818 – 1875 Paris)  
*Skyrim (Kongsberg, Norway)*, 1846  
Oil on paper, mounted on cardboard. – 12 × 30 cm  
Private collection



views and ancient ruins, the magical quality of the southern light and the fairly consistent weather conditions created the optimal setting for painting *sur le motif*. Vibrant communities of expatriate artists were formed, and the best sites and methods for working out-of-doors were shared. Painting from his lodgings at the French Academy in Rome, André Giroux captured a rare view of the Eternal City after a snowfall (fig. 15). He worked quickly, and his delight in the materiality of the paint is evident from the variety of textures and impasto in the foreground. Giroux was in Rome at the same time as Camille Corot, a pivotal figure in the history of *plein air* painting, who embodies the transition from the neoclassical academic tradition to the experiments of the Impressionist avant-garde who followed him. With its bold geometry, Corot's strikingly modern view of San Bartolomeo is considered one of his masterpieces (fig. 6).



6. **Camille Corot** (Paris 1796 – 1875 Paris)  
*The Island and Bridge of San Bartolomeo, Rome, 1825-28*  
 Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 27 x 43.2 cm  
 National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Patrons' Permanent Fund,  
 inv. 2001.23.1

The countryside surrounding Rome combined the natural beauty of its rugged landscape with the majestic ruins of its classical past. Known as the Campagna, it became an artistic laboratory for *plein air* painters who went on sketching excursions together, often working side by side. Caruelle d'Aligny's intriguing view of Olevano, for example, was painted during a trip he made alongside Corot in April 1827 (fig. 16).

### Southern Italy: The Bay of Naples, Volcanoes and Capri

In addition to Rome, many artists ventured further South to visit the Bay of Naples. Edgar Degas had family ties to the city, and in his youth painted a group of *plein air* oils on paper which beautifully capture the pearly quality of the Neapolitan sky (fig. 18). Vesuvius was an alluring motif and appears in a number of studies of the region, most often as a dormant rocky giant in the background. The period covered by this exhibition, however, was one of intense volcanic activity and many artists undertook often-perilous journeys to witness one of nature's most awe-inspiring sights. Jean-Charles-Joseph Rémond's study captures a particularly dramatic view of the eruption of Stromboli on 30 August 1842 (fig. 7).





7. **Jean-Charles-Joseph Rémond**  
(Paris 1795 – 1875 Paris)  
*Eruption of Stromboli, 30 August 1842, 1842*  
Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 27 x 37 cm  
Private collection

The island of Capri was an especially popular destination with northern European painters, and a number of renowned German and Scandinavian artists painted iconic views of its rocky coastline and inky blue sea. One of the jewels in this section of the exhibition though, is an anonymous study of a terrace bathed in dazzling sunlight (fig. 17). Due to their informal nature and often educational purpose, many landscape oil studies were not signed and questions of attribution regularly remain unanswered.

## Rooftops, Yards and Ruins

The final section of the exhibition shows artists turning away from the classical evocations of Rome and the idealised Italian landscape and focusing instead on much humbler motifs, often in their native land. These are impromptu views of rooftops, farmyards, dilapidated buildings and other overlooked corners of the world. Looking out from a window, Frederik Rohde carefully rendered the red roof tiles he saw, but his true subject appears to be the wind, which blows through the poplar trees offering a glimpse of a church tower in the distance (fig. 19). Executed with much looser brushwork, Augustus Egg's farmyard shares this sense of immediacy (fig. 8).



8. **Augustus Leopold Egg** (London 1816 – 1863 Algiers)  
*The Farmyard*  
Oil on board. – 20.2 x 25.3 cm  
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, bought from the Fairhaven Fund, inv. PD.38-1980



## Working in Nature: from Drawing to Painting

The development of painting in oils *en plein air* has its origins in drawing, and the motifs explored by this exhibition had been depicted by artists in charcoal, chalks, or pen on paper as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth century. In order to highlight this long-standing tradition of working in nature, a selection of drawings from the rich collection of the Fondation Custodia has been included in the exhibition rooms (fig. 20 and 21).

*True to Nature. Open-air Painting 1780–1870* is curated by Ger Luijten, director, Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, Mary Morton, curator and head of the department of French paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington and Jane Munro, keeper of paintings, drawings and prints, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

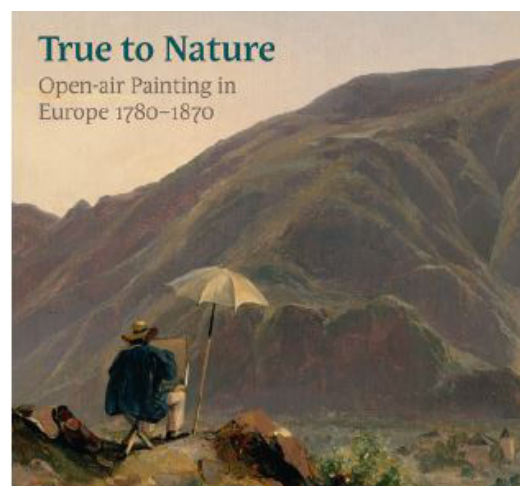
**National  
Gallery  
of Art**

The  
Fitzwilliam  
Museum  
CAMBRIDGE

### Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue in English and in French with essays by the curators and leading experts in the field, Michael Clarke, Ann Hoenigswald and Anna Ottani Cavina, presenting new scholarship about this important aspect of European art history.

*Sur le motif. Peindre en plein air 1780–1870* |  
*True to Nature. Open-air Painting in Europe 1780–1870*  
Ger Luijten, Mary Morton and Jane Munro (ed.)  
London, Paul Holberton Publishing, 2020  
280 pages, c. 140 colour illustrations,  
24 x 25,5 cm, hardback  
ISBN 978 1 911 300 78 6 (French edition)|  
978 1 911 300 83 0 (English edition)  
€ 40,00



The Fondation Custodia will also publish a fully illustrated online display with illuminating texts written by Alice-Anne Tod for all the works exhibited in Paris, some forty hors catalogue.



Voices in the press on the venue of the exhibition in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, which opened in February 2020:

The show is radical. And so intensely *beautiful*. You walk in and ... wow! If you have any capacity for feeling, you gasp. Fresh snow on the roof and grounds of Rome's Trinita dei Monti church, as seen through a window of the Villa Medici. Gorgeous! Warm sun illuminating the buildings and bridges on the island of San Bartolomeo. Oh! Vesuvius in the distant haze, beyond the backlit buildings of Naples. ... The effect of light rinsing the eyes, of freshness and immediacy, of truth — it shouldn't be so striking, so unaccountably emotional. But it is.

*The Washington Post*, Sebastian Smee – 25 February 2020

As you proceed through this splendid show, the spontaneity and refreshing vividness of the works exert their subtle power so that the gallery walls seem pierced by a series of windows opened onto a now-departed, less threatened world—one deftly, joyously and candidly recorded in all its natural glory.

*The Wall Street Journal*, Barrymore Laurence Scherer – 5 August 2020



# TWO EXHIBITIONS AT THE FONDATION CUSTODIA

from 3 December 2021  
to 3 April 2022  
Fondation Custodia, Paris

## Practical Information

### EXHIBITIONS

*True to Nature. Open-air Painting 1780-1870*  
3 December 2021 to 3 April 2022

*Charles Donker. Always Looking*  
3 December 2021 to 3 April 2022

### OPENING HOURS

Every day except Monday, from 12 to 6 pm

### ADMISSION CHARGES

Full price € 10 / Reduced € 7  
The entrance ticket gives access to both exhibitions.

### LOCATION

Fondation Custodia  
121, rue de Lille – 75007 Paris – France  
[www.fondationcustodia.fr](http://www.fondationcustodia.fr)

### ACCESS BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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## Images Available to the Press

### *True to Nature* *Open-air Painting* 1780 – 1870

9. **Jules Coignet** (Paris 1798 – 1860 Paris)

*View of Bozen with a Painter, 1837*

Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 31 × 39 cm

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., gift of Mrs. John Jay Ide in memory of Mr. and Mrs. William Henry Donner, inv. 1994.52.1



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10. **Janus La Cour** (Thimagard, near Ringkøbing 1837 – 1909 Odder, Denmark)

*Olive Trees near Tivoli, 1869*

Oil on canvas. – 37.4 × 60.5 cm

Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, inv. 2012-S.7



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12. **Johan Carl Neumann** (Copenhagen 1833 – 1891 Copenhagen)

*Sand Dunes at Skagen Beach*

Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 25.2 × 37.9 cm

Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, inv. 2015-S.4



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13. **Vilhelm Kyhn** (Copenhagen 1819 – 1903 Copenhagen)

*Rocks in Low Water, 1860*

Oil on canvas. – 26.4 × 40.8 cm

Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, inv. 2012-S.17





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**14. John Constable** (East Bergholt 1776 – 1837 London)  
*Cloud Study: Stormy Sunset*, 1821-22  
Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 20.3 × 27.3 cm  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., gift of Louise Mellon in honour of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, inv. 1998.20.1

**15. André Giroux** (Paris 1801 – 1879 Paris)  
*Santa Trinità dei Monti in the Snow*, 1829 or 1830  
Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 22 × 30 cm  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Chester Dale Fund, inv. 1997.65.1

**16. Théodore Caruelle d'Aligny** (Chaumes 1798 – 1871 Lyon)  
*View of Olevano*, 1827  
Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 33.3 × 49.7 cm  
Private collection



**17. Anonymous French**, 19th century  
*A Terrace on the Isle of Capri*  
Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 32.7 × 30.8 cm  
Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, inv. 2014-S.10





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**18. Edgar Degas** (Paris 1834 – 1917 Paris)  
*Castel Sant'Elmo, from Capodimonte*, c. 1856  
 Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. – 20 × 27 cm  
 The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, purchased with the assistance of the Gow, Cunliffe and Perceval Funds, with contributions from the National Art-Collections Fund and the Museums and Galleries Commission / Victoria and Albert Purchase Grant Fund, inv. PD.18-2000

**19. Frederik Rohde** (Copenhagen 1816 – 1886 Copenhagen)  
*Rooftops*  
 Oil on canvas. – 25.4 × 22.2 cm  
 Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, inv. 2014-S.41



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**20. Bartholomeus Breenbergh** (Deventer 1598 – 1657 Amsterdam)  
*In the Park of Castello Bomarzo*, 1625  
 Pen and brown ink, brown and grey wash. – 407 × 565 mm  
 Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, inv. 4478



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**21. Paulus van Vianen** (Utrecht c. 1560/80 – c. 1613/14 Prague)  
*Artist Drawing in a Wood*, c. 1600-10  
 Oiled charcoal and some traces in black chalk, heightened with white and yellow chalk on brownish paper. – 313 × 187 mm  
 Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, inv. 5953A



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