

# Samuel Palmer vision and landscape

21 October 2005 – 22 January 2006 Room 35

Admission £5, concessionary rates available

*'The lonely light that Samuel Palmer engraved, An image of mysterious wisdom won by toil'*  
W.B. Yeats, 'The Phases of the Moon', 1919

From John Ruskin to Lucian Freud Samuel Palmer has captivated artists, writers and philosophers for nearly two hundred years. His vision to reclaim the spiritual element in English landscape represents the intuitive, pastoral and nostalgic aspects of the Romantic period at their most intense. *Vision and landscape* traces the deliberate 'primitivism' of his early work, inspired by William Blake, Milton and Dürer, through his public career in the 1840s, to the bold revival of his 'inner sympathies' in the 1860s. In partnership with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, this is the first major retrospective of his work for nearly a century and coincides with the bicentenary of Palmer's birth.

This exhibition aims to celebrate both the quality and the range of Palmer's art. He is widely recognised as one of the most original and appealing of British landscape painters of the Romantic era. His rich and sensual images of the countryside combine a vivid sense of vision with intimacy and tenderness. There is also an undertow of mystery, even tragedy, in much of his work. His best known works are the intense paintings and drawings he produced at the beginning of his career, particularly those created when he was living at Shoreham in Kent. It was these pictures, which seemed so modern in their experimentation, that made him a powerful influence on artists in the twentieth century. In addition to works in the Museum's own collection such as *Cornfield by Moonlight* this section of the exhibition will also feature major loans from other institutions such as *The Magic Apple Tree* (Fitzwilliam Museum), *A Hilly Scene* (Tate) and *In a Shoreham Garden* (V&A).

At Shoreham, Palmer was a person of independent means who could operate with a freedom that was rare among professional painters. By 1835 however, his personal wishes had to be balanced against the need to earn a living, hence the move to embrace landscape. This change of circumstance did not alter his artistic ideals but it did severely affect his mode of operation. During this time he exhibited regularly, produced etchings, which were growing in popularity at that time, and taught. He never enjoyed more than modest success for the muted form of lyrical landscapes that he practised, yet he did continue to produce work of high quality, including views of known places such as *Tintagel Castle*, and idealised scenes such as *A View of Ancient Rome*.

Finally, the exhibition will examine the revival in Palmer of a more powerful poetic mood towards the end of his life. This was the time when he returned to the world of Milton and Virgil and produced a series of watercolours and etchings for Milton's '*L'Allegro*' and '*Il Penseroso*' of which *The Lonely Tower* is the most striking. At the time of his death he was working on a series of engravings to accompany his own translation of Virgil's *Eclogues*, these are now recognised to be amongst his finest works. They preserved Palmer's reputation prior to the rediscovery of the Shoreham work in the 1920s.

**Supported by the American Friends of the British Museum. Organised by the British Museum and The Metropolitan Museum of Art**

**For further information or accompanying images please contact Hannah Boulton on 020 7323 8522 or [hboulton@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](mailto:hboulton@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)**

**Notes to Editors:**

- A fully illustrated catalogue 'Samuel Palmer: vision and landscape' edited by William Vaughan will be published by British Museum Press priced £25
- An accompanying public programme will include gallery talks, lectures, seminars, practical sessions and a film season. For more information please contact the press office.
- The exhibition will travel to the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 7 March – 29 May 2006