

4. Validating the accuracy of Artworks

4.1. Introduction

Landscape painters generally create images that we can understand easily and appreciate. In addition, those more detailed artworks may be able to assist us in understanding how landscapes have changed over the centuries. Exmoor has been a significant source of inspiration for artists, particularly since the late eighteenth century, providing a wealth of artworks that can be examined and appraised in terms of improving our understanding of how this part of North Devon and Somerset has been altered by natural physical processes and human intervention over time. Such works of art are of immediate interest to both those living within the National Park and to visitors because they allow an immediate visual comparison to be made with the present-day situation.

Artworks do not just describe physical impacts of change or lack of it but they also illustrate both environmental change and the progression of coastal development particularly through the Victorian and Edwardian periods. In fact, works of art extending back to the late eighteenth century, long before the days of photography, may provide the only record of our changes over time, depending on the accuracy of the work concerned. Art can, therefore, form a useful benchmark when assessing the nature, scale and rate of landscape evolution.

“The arts have sometimes been perceived as having little practical application but, in fact, they can form valuable components of the wider study and comprehension of the complexities of landscapes if they are brought together rather than being considered as separate entities” (Koff, 1999¹). For example, in geography the visual arts can aid environmental problem solving because they integrate physical and human aspects of the discipline by offering interpretation of the human-landscape interaction. *“Art can be used to reinvigorate interpretation of landscapes because art has generally been under-used by scientists compared with other art forms such as photography and cartography”* (Koff, 1999¹).

In order to test the validity of the concept of using art to inform us about landscape change the author has developed a ranking system for the various types of artworks, which would allow the development of a list of those artists whose works prove to be consistently accurate in terms of their depictions. The objective of this was to develop a readily available tool for use by those professionals interested in increasing their knowledge of landscape issues, which would also support existing scientific approaches available for measuring environmental change. In order to achieve this, landscape art was considered against three criteria.

1. First, the accuracy and usefulness of the *artistic style of painting*; for example, caricaturist or genre works, picturesque *Grand Tour style* views, topographical paintings, drawings and prints.
2. The second category considered the *most advantageous medium* in terms of achieving detailed depictions of the landscape. Categories appraised included copper plate engravings, oil paintings, steel engravings and aquatints, lithographs, and watercolour drawings.
3. The third category considered the *value of the subject matter* depicted by the artists, and included, first, general countryside or coastal views, second, more detailed views of coasts, cliffs and the hinterland, and, third, a very detailed appreciation of the landscape aiding understanding of physical processes and the resulting features, vegetation, cultural heritage and development patterns.

After a coarse screening, works of art were considered against these ranking criteria and scores were assigned enabling a short-list to be prepared of those artists whose artworks can be considered to be useful in supporting understanding of change within the National Park.

4.2.1. Accuracy of Artistic Style

Varying artistic styles contribute to the level of detail that they can provide in terms of their portrayal of Exmoor National Park. Four style sub-categories were considered; namely, *Caricaturist and Genre works*, *Picturesque Scenery*, *Topographical Paintings*, and, finally, *Topographical Works with a Pre-Raphaelite influence*.

1. For the *Caricaturist/Genre* category, including works by artists such as James Gillray (1757-1815), George Cruickshank (1797-1878) and Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827), and for the *Genre artists* such as Myles Birket Foster (1825-1899) their interest often focused more on human and social subjects although sometimes located within fine landscape settings. Informative as they are as social records, often these works do not contain enough detail to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the state of the landscape prevailing at that time; in view of this, such works score **one point** out of a maximum of four points.



Figures 4.1: *Valley of the Stones* by Thomas Rowlandson RA. c.1890. Watercolour. Courtesy: © Trustees of the British Museum.

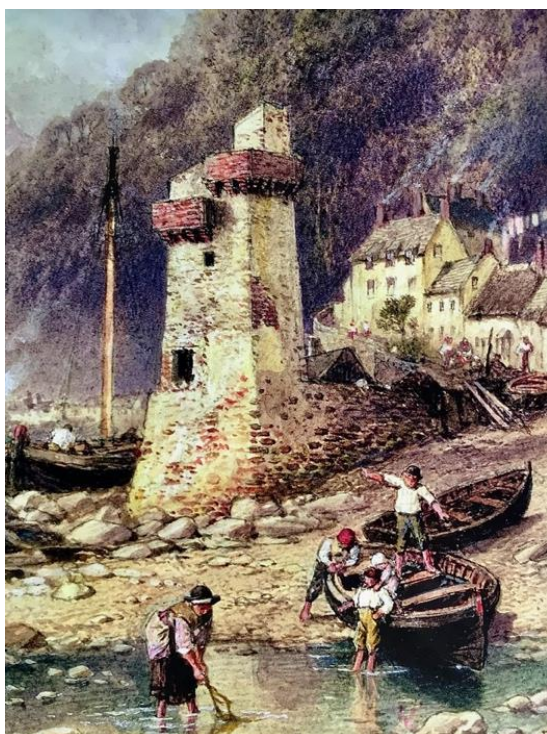


Figure 4.2: *Lynmouth* by Myles Birket Foster. c.1875. watercolour. Marshall Spink London/Bridgeman Images.

Although often painting genre subjects, such as this view with his children, Foster also painted exceptionally detailed landscapes and these are ranked more highly.

2. The second category relates to views of *Picturesque Scenery* depicting Exmoor in the manner of the Italian landscapes observed by artists on the Grand Tour. Often picturesque views, such as those promoted by William Gilpin and produced by Francis Towne (1740-1816), John White Abbott (1763-1851) were aesthetically pleasing, but the artists tended to exaggerate or otherwise adjust the landscapes, with hillsides and cliffs appearing more 'Alpine' and precipitous; the desire of the artist was to depict the local scenery in the manner of a classical landscape to satisfy the tastes of their patrons. Whilst the *Picturesque* style is less concerned with topographical accuracy, it can provide at least some indicators of the general nature of the landscape at the time. For example, early development, the nature of the topography, and the presence of features such as watercourses. These artworks can, therefore, inform landscape study in a broad sense. For this reason, the *Picturesque* works scored **two points** out of the maximum of five points.



Figure 4.3:
Lynmouth by
John White
Abbott.
1811.
Watercolour.
Courtesy:
The Potteries
Museum and
Art Gallery.

3. The third and by far the largest category, *Topographical Art*, comprises landscape paintings, watercolour drawings and prints. This is a rich resource and most of the Exmoor National Park is well illustrated in this respect. There are, therefore, many works in this category that can inform us of what the scenery was like at the time they were painted. Therefore, such works were awarded **three points** out of a maximum score of four points.



Figure 4.4 (Above): *Combe Martin* by George Wolfe. 1855. Watercolour. Courtesy: Crown Copyright. UK Government Art Collection.

Figure 4.5 (Below): *Dunster*. c.1845. Lithograph. Day & Haigh. Courtesy: Grosvenor Prints.



4. The final ‘Artistic Style’ category comprises *Topographical Paintings, Drawings and Prints, which exhibit Pre-Raphaelite detail*. Artists such as Edward William Cooke RA (1811-1880), Henry Moore RA RWS (1831-1895), Albert Goodwin RWS (1845-1932), William Henry Millais (1828-1899) and Charles Napier Hemy RA RWS (1841-1917) provided us with some precise images of Exmoor scenery in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. On account of the detail and accuracy of the subjects, with artists seeking to depict nature in a very exact manner, these works form a particularly valuable resource, and were, therefore, awarded the maximum score of **four points**.



Figure 4.6: *Porlock Weir* by E. W. Cooke RA. 1862. Oil. Image courtesy: Martyn Gregory Gallery.



Figure 4.7: *Mother Meldrum's Cave, Valley of the Rocks* by James T. Linnell. Oil. c.1885. Courtesy: Maas Gallery/Bridgeman Images.



Figure 4.8: *Valley of the Rocks* by William H. Millais. 1857. Watercolour. Courtesy: Maas Gallery.

4.2.2. Most Advantageous Medium

The **second ranking category** considers the most advantageous medium used for illustrating topography. Four categories were identified – first, *Copper Plate Engravings*; second, *Oil Paintings*; third, *Oil Paintings exhibiting a Pre-Raphaelite Influence* together with *Aquatints and Steel Engravings*, and, finally, *Lithographs, fine Pencil and Watercolour Drawings*. By their nature each of these artistic techniques allow differing levels of detail to be achieved in the completed artwork.

1. Copper Plate Engravings

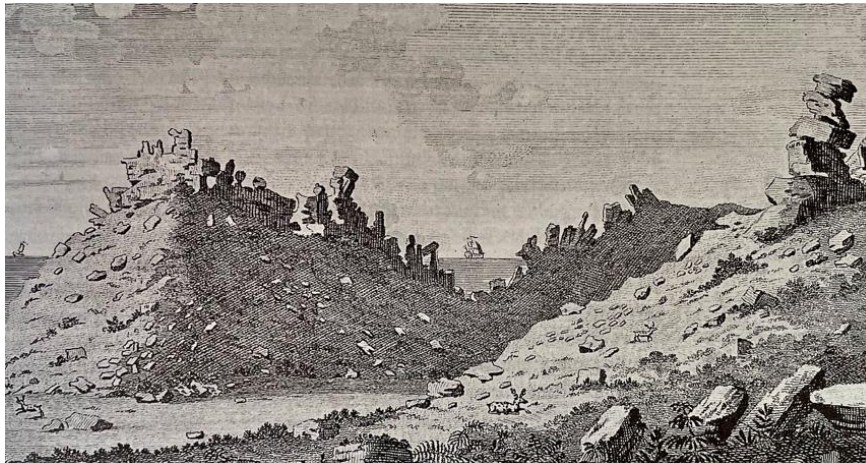


Figure 4.9: *Valley of the Rocks*, English School. c.1790s.

Although some publishers and artists achieved remarkable success with copper plate engravings, generally the softness of the copper plates meant that this technique was less suitable for recording fine detail. As a result, **copper plate engravings** were awarded a ranking score of **one point**. Some early engravers with an architectural training were able to successfully produce more detailed views of buildings and street scenes – these examples are awarded **two points**.

2. Oil Paintings



Figure 4.10: *On the East Lyn* by William Mellor. c.1895. Oil on Canvas.

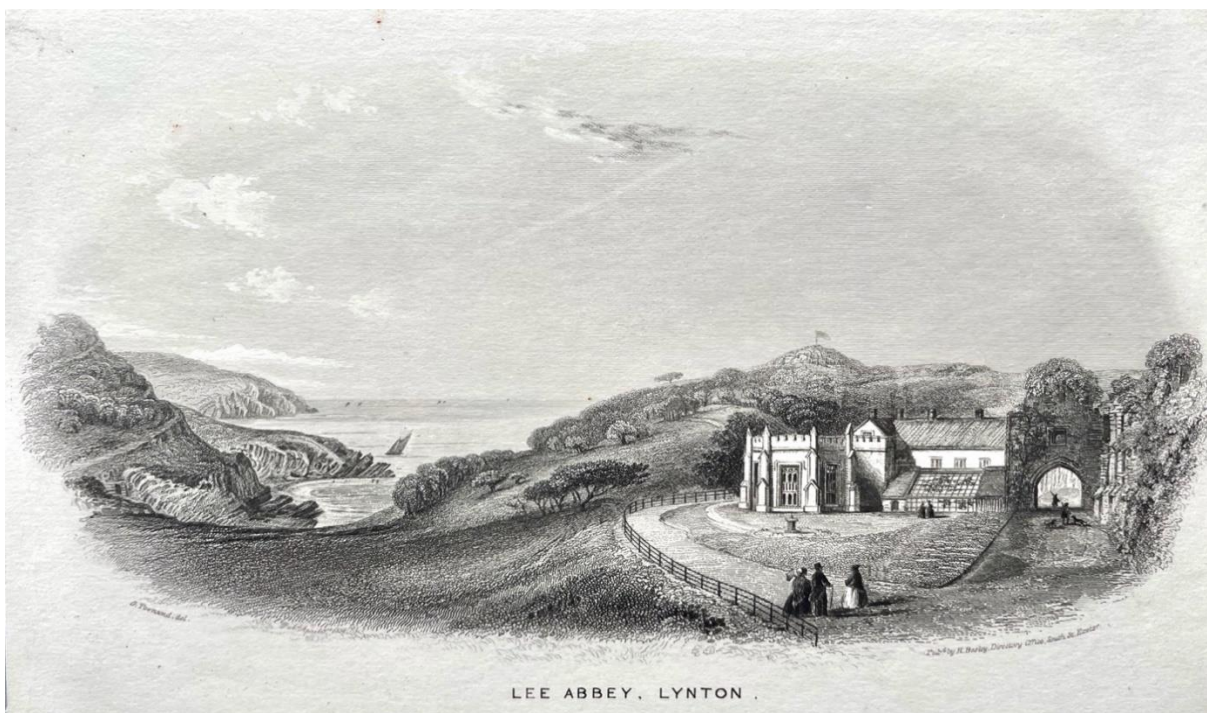
Oil paintings were considered to be more helpful as they could provide a greater level of detail and were ranked with a **score of two points**. Oil paintings by Pre-Raphaelite artists and their Followers were ranked more highly scoring **four points** on account of their level of detail.

3. Steel plate and aquatint engravings were often published individually or as sets; others were contained in topographical books in the pre- Victorian period in particular. The British coast benefits from a wealth of such works, for example the aquatint views by William Daniell RA (Daniell & Ayton, 1814²) and Thomas Allom and William H. Bartlett (Britton & Brayley, 1832³). In view of the richness of this resource and the fine detail that could be achieved **three points** were awarded for this category.



Figure 4.11 (Above): *Lynmouth* by William Daniell RA. 1814. Aquatint.

Figure 4.12 (Below): *Lee Abbey, Lynton*. c.1850. Steel plate engraving.



4. Lithography was a technique capable of achieving extremely fine detail. There are excellent examples produced by prolific Devon artists including George Rowe (1797-1864) and William Spreat of Exeter in the 1840s. The quality of some of the hand-coloured lithographs is comparable with that of watercolour drawings; as a result, lithographs achieve a ranking **score of five points, the same score as for watercolour drawings**.



Figures 4.13 & 4.14: Two examples of finely detailed lithographs of *Lynton and Lynmouth* (above) and *Lynmouth below* by George Rowe and William Spreat. c.1840s.



5. Watercolour Drawings. There is an extensive resource of fine *watercolour drawings* covering most parts of Exmoor National Park. The detail that may be achieved using this technique can provide a wealth of information on the changing forms of the landscapes, vegetation, land use and cultural heritage. **They, therefore, qualify for a ranking score of five points.** Those watercolours by Pre-Raphaelite artists and their Followers score a maximum ranking of **six points** on account of their often even more detailed contents.



Figure 4.15 (Above): *Allerford* by Alfred Robert Quinton. c.1920. Watercolour. Courtesy Salmon's. **Figure 4.16 (Below):** *Corner of Dulverton* by Stanley R. Badmin. Watercolour. 1974. Courtesy: Chris Beetles Gallery, London.



4.2.3. The Value of the Subject Matter

This third art ranking category is of prime importance to those interested in studying all aspects of the landscape change. As a result, a **Weighting Factor of x2** was applied over three categories. First, *General Landscape Views*, which contribute to an overall appreciation of the physical geography, environment and character of the case study site scored **one point**. Second, *More detailed works* providing additional information on the physical features, vegetation, land management and heritage score **two points**. Finally, the highest scoring category was for those *Works Providing a Detailed Appreciation* of many aspects of the case study site including the geology, geomorphology, environment and cultural aspects, which scored **three points**. As a result of the weighting in this category, a maximum of **six points could be achieved**.

1. General topographical artworks



Figure 4.17: *Lynmouth* by William Payne. c.1820. Watercolour.

With kind permission of Devon Archives & Local Studies.



Figure 4.18: *View of Exmoor with Stream* by Sir Alfred Munnings RA. c.1940s.

Image courtesy of The Munnings Museum.

2. More detailed artworks



Figure 4.19 (Above): *Watersmeet near Lynmouth* by William Spreat. c.1840s. Lithograph.

Figure 4.20 (Below): *Lynton, The Valley of the Rocks and the Foreland from the North Walk* by W. Spreat. c.1840s.



3. Highly detailed artworks



Figure 4.21: *Dunster Castle, Somerset* by William Callow RWS. c.1860s. Watercolour. Courtesy: Guy Peppiatt Fine Art, London.

Figure 4.22 (Below): *Dunster Castle* by Rev. John Swete. 1796. Image with kind permission of Devon Archives & Local Studies (DHC 564M/F/10).



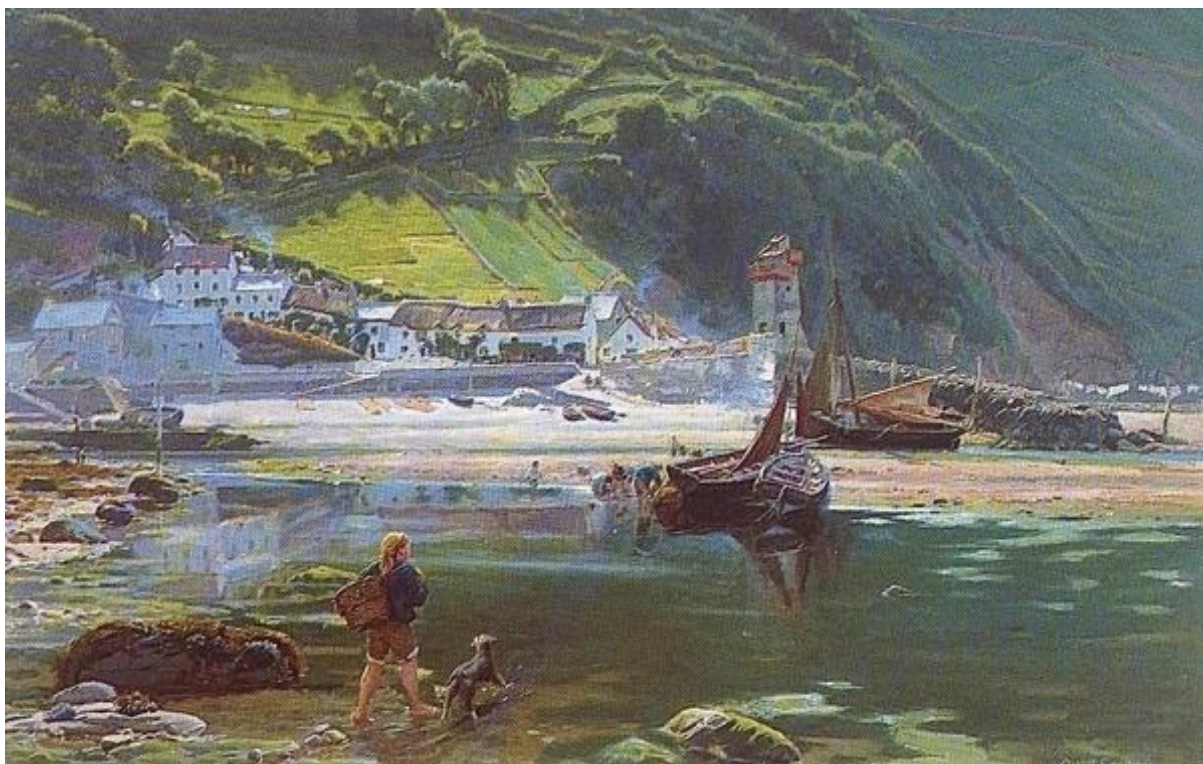


Figure 4.23: *Lynmouth* by Albert Goodwin. 1877. Image courtesy: Chris Beetles Gallery.

Figure 4.24: *Cow Castle, Simonsbath* by George Cumberland. c.1800. Watercolour. Courtesy: Bristol Culture (Bristol Museum & Art Gallery).





Figure 4.25: *Doone Valley* by Alfred Robert Quinton. c.1920. Watercolour. Courtesy: Salmon's.

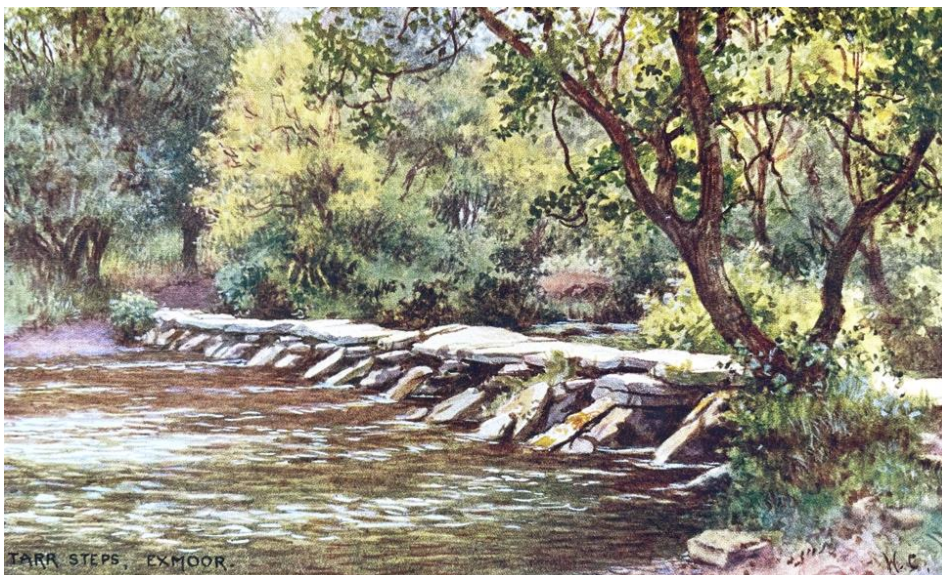


Figure 4.26: *Tarr Steps, Exmoor* by William Curruthers (W. Affleck). 1910. Watercolour.



Figure 4.27: *Woody Bay from Martinhoe Common* by A.R. Quinton. c.1923. Courtesy: Salmon's.

4.2.4. Summary of Art Ranking

1. Accuracy of Artistic Style (Maximum 4 Points)

- 1.1. Caricaturist/Genre subjects 1 point
- 1.2. Picturesque landscapes 2 points
- 1.3. Topographical/beach and coastal scenery 3 points
- 1.4. Topographical/beach and coastal scenery with Pre-Raphaelite influence 4 points

2. Most advantageous medium for illustrating coastal change (Maximum 6 points)

- 2.1. Copper plate engravings 1 point
- 2.2. Oil paintings; architectural copper plate engravings 2 points
- 2.3. Steel plate engravings/Aquatints 3 points
- 2.4. Oil paintings by Pre-Raphaelites and Followers 4 points
- 2.5. Lithographs, Fine pencil and watercolour drawings 5 points
- 2.6. Watercolours by Pre-Raphaelites and their Followers 6 points

3. Value of the subject matter in supporting understanding of long-term coastal change (weighting x2 and Maximum score of 6 points)

- 3.1. General landscape views which assist overall appreciation of the geomorphology and landscape character 1 point
- 3.2. More detailed views of the coastal zone, hinterland and uplands of the National Park including appreciation of the natural environment and cultural heritage 2 points
- 3.3. Detailed appreciation of the coastal zone and processes, geology/geomorphology, natural environment and/or cultural heritage 3 points

Compiling the scores for ranking artists and their works in terms of their accuracy

- 1. Accuracy of artistic style Maximum of 4 points
- 2. Most advantageous medium Maximum of 6 points
- 3. Value of subject matter Maximum of 6 points
- 4. Total maximum score 16 points

Notes:

- 1. Where an artist paints in more than one medium the score is based on the most commonly used medium for coastal art.

It is hoped that readers will have found this explanation of the ranking system for assessing the accuracy of artworks to support our understanding of environmental change of practical value. The objectives are to save time-consuming research in the future and to improve confidence in the use of fine art as a tool to assist problem-solving when studying long-term environmental change.

ARTISTS RANKING TABLE

Artist	Dates	Accuracy of Artistic Style	Most Advantageous Medium	Value of Subject	Total Score
Frederick Jones	Fl. 1867-1885	4	6	6	16
George Wolfe	1834-1890	4	6	6	16
James T. Linnell	1820-1905	3	6	6	15
William H. Millais	1828-1899	4	5	6	15
James B. Pyne	1800-1870	3	5	4	15
John Buckler	1770-1851	3	5	6	14
A. Heaton Cooper	1864-1929	3	5	6	14
George Cumberland	Fl. c.1800	3	5	6	14
Henry Gastineau	1891-1876	3	5	6	14
Charles N. Hemy	1841-1917	4	4	6	14
Harold S. Palmer	1854-1933	3	5	6	14
Alfred Robert Quinton	1853-1934	3	5	6	14
George Rowe	1799-1864	3	5	6	14
William Spreat	Fl. 1820-1850	3	5	6	14
Rev. J. Swete	Fl. 1790s	3	5	6	14
Albert Goodwin	1845-1932	3	4	6	13
John White Abbott	1763-1857	3	5	4	12
Charles Edward Brittan	1837-1888	3	5	4	12
William Callow	1812-1908	3	5	4	12
William Collins	1788-1847	3	5	4	12
David Cox	1783-1859	3	5	4	12
Joshua Cristall	1767-1847	3	5	4	12
Peter De Wint	1784-1849	3	5	4	12
Ernest W. Haslehust	1866-1949	3	5	4	12
James Holland	1800-1870	3	5	4	12
Fred R. Lee	1794-1879	3	5	4	12
William J. Muller	1812-1845	3	5	4	12
John W. North	1842-1924	3	5	4	12
Nicholas Pocock	1740-1821	3	5	4	12
Paul Sandby	1725-1809	3	5	4	12
John W. Schofield	Fl. 1899-1934	3	5	4	12
H. B. Scougall	Fl. 1850s	3	5	4	12
John 'Warwick' Smith	1749-1781	3	5	4	12

Artist	Dates	Accuracy of Artistic Style	Most Advantageous Medium	Value of Subject	Total Score
Walter H. Sweet	1889-1943	3	5	4	12
Francis Towne	1740-1816	3	5	4	12
Walter F. Tyndale	1855-1843	3	5	4	12
Henry B. Wimbush	1861-1910	3	5	4	12
James C. Hook	1819-1907	3	2	6	11
William Mellor	1851-1932	3	2	6	11
George Samuel	Fl. 1785-1823	3	2	6	11
William Daniell	1749-1840	3	3	4	10
Alfred Dawson	Fl. 1860-1893	3	3	4	10
Frederick C. Lewis	Fl. 1820s	3	3	4	10
Sir Alfred Munnings	1878-1959	3	5	2	10
Thomas Rowlandson	1756-1827	3	5	2	10
Frederick Hall	1860-1948	2	2	5	9
Edward H. Holden	Fl 1899-1944	3	2	4	9
William H. Pike	1846-1908	3	2	4	9
William Payne	c.1760-1830	3	3	2	8

References

1. Koff, S. R. 1999. *The Role of Arts in Undergraduate Education*. Journal of General Education 48:9-16.
2. Daniell, W. & Ayton, R. 1814. *A Voyage Round Great Britain*. Private Press. London.
3. Britton, J. & Brayley, E. W. 1832. *Devonshire and Cornwall Illustrated*. Fisher et al. London

