

Blue Gallery, Brantwood

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The Skies are for All: Ruskin and Climate Change



22
April
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26
June
2022

THE RUSKIN
MUSEUM & RESEARCH CENTRE

Storm Cloud



In 1884, in his lecture 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century', John Ruskin (1819 – 1900) described a veil of pollution that was darkening the skies over Europe.

Ruskin knew that naturally occurring phenomena such as volcanoes discoloured the skies, but he distinguished their effects from those of industry.

150 years ago, a lifetime of close observation of the natural world led Ruskin to declare that human activities were damaging the health of both people and planet.

The sky fascinated Ruskin from childhood.

He often painted it using a cyanometer, a device for measuring the colour blue.

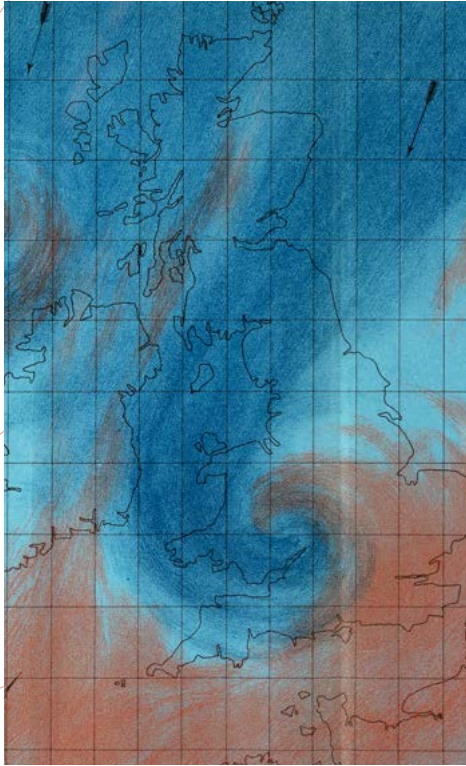
Symbolic of the unpolluted heavens,

In the last 28 years of his life spent at Coniston,

Ruskin drew the skies over Brantwood nearly every day.

He wore a cornflower blue necktie to match his eyes.

Weather Patterns



In the nineteenth century scientists were beginning to understand and map patterns of air currents. Captain FitzRoy's charts captured thermodynamic forces over the ocean; while Ruskin's studies of clouds conformed closely to scientifically observed phenomena.

Ruskin lived in an era when science and art were more closely intertwined. He was involved in establishing the Meteorological Society, the learned society for weather and climate. For Ruskin, meteorology was 'a science of the pure air, and the bright heaven'.

Cloud Studies



Like the painters John Constable and J.M.W Turner, Ruskin knew the classifications of cloud types by Luke Howard. Ruskin's linear perspective studies developed a new visual model for representing clouds. He said, 'attention to the real form of clouds, becomes a subject of science with us; ... under the name of aerial perspective'.

For Ruskin, these cloud studies not only represented scientific fact, they were also a catalyst to contemplate a new phenomenon. In 'Storm-Cloud', Ruskin describes a new type of cloud, associated with pollution: the 'plague wind' of an industrial revolution.

John Ruskin in the Age of Science

A series of exhibitions in London and the Lakes showcasing works from the collections of the Royal Society, London and Lancaster University's Ruskin Whitehouse Collection.

Curated by Sandra Kemp (The Ruskin), with Keith Moore (the Royal Society) and Howard Hull (Brantwood), these exhibitions place Ruskin alongside his nineteenth-century scientific contemporaries, exploring his influence on science and society, in his time and our own.

The Ruskin Whitehouse Collection was purchased by Lancaster University in 2019, with generous support from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and others. The Collection is on permanent display at both The Ruskin and Brantwood, John Ruskin's former house, garden and estate on the shore of Coniston Water.

While The Ruskin is closed for major refurbishment, this series of exhibitions displays the Ruskin Whitehouse Collection in London and the Lake District. The Ruskin will reopen in 2024.

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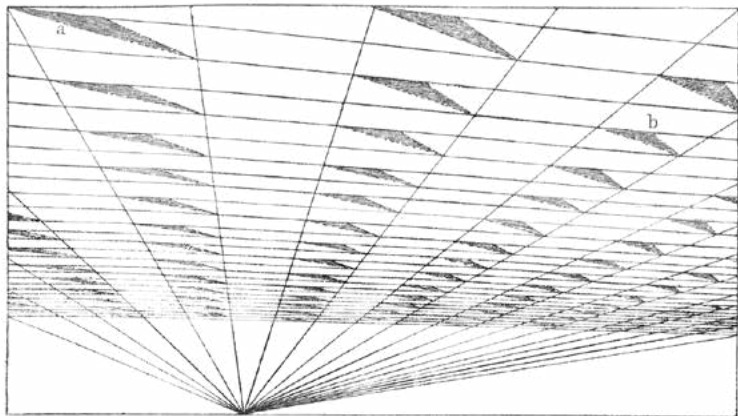
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Lancaster
University

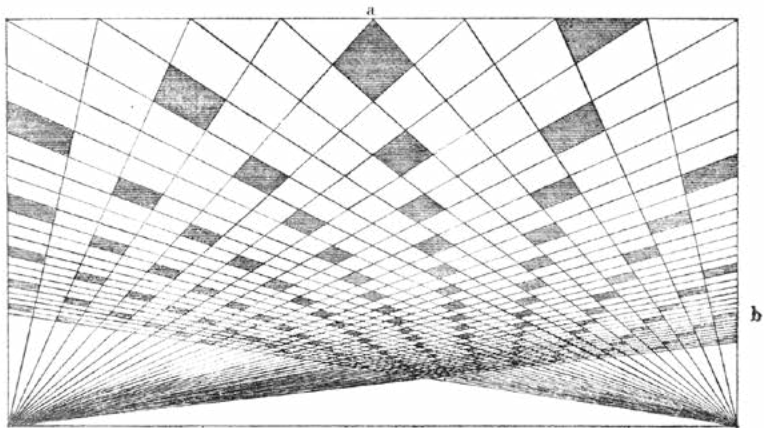


THE
ROYAL
SOCIETY

John Ruskin's home
Brantwood

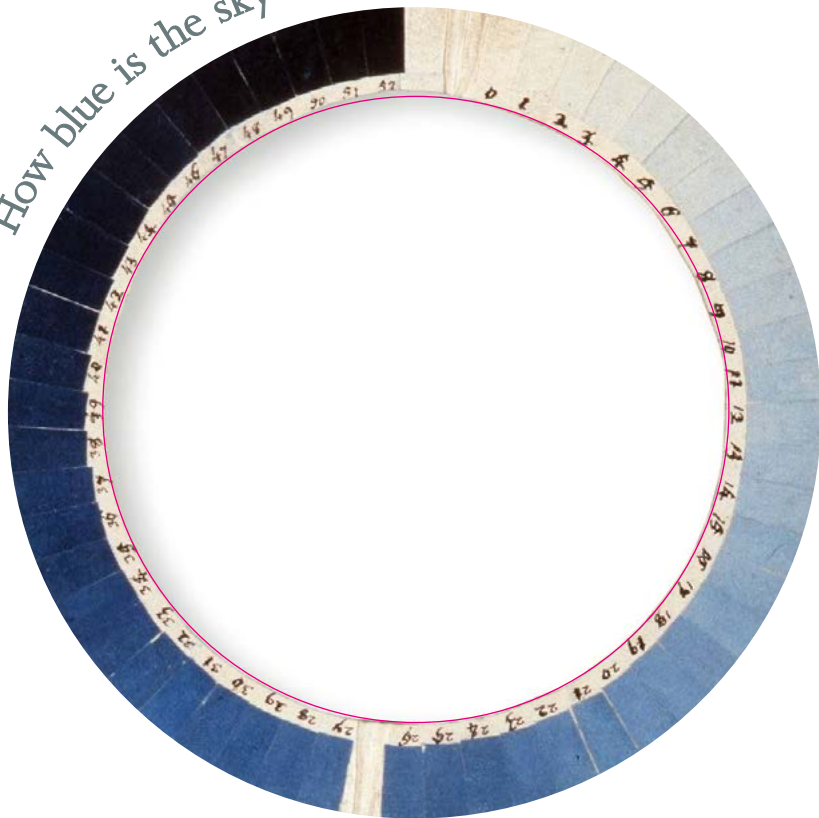


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How blue is the sky today?

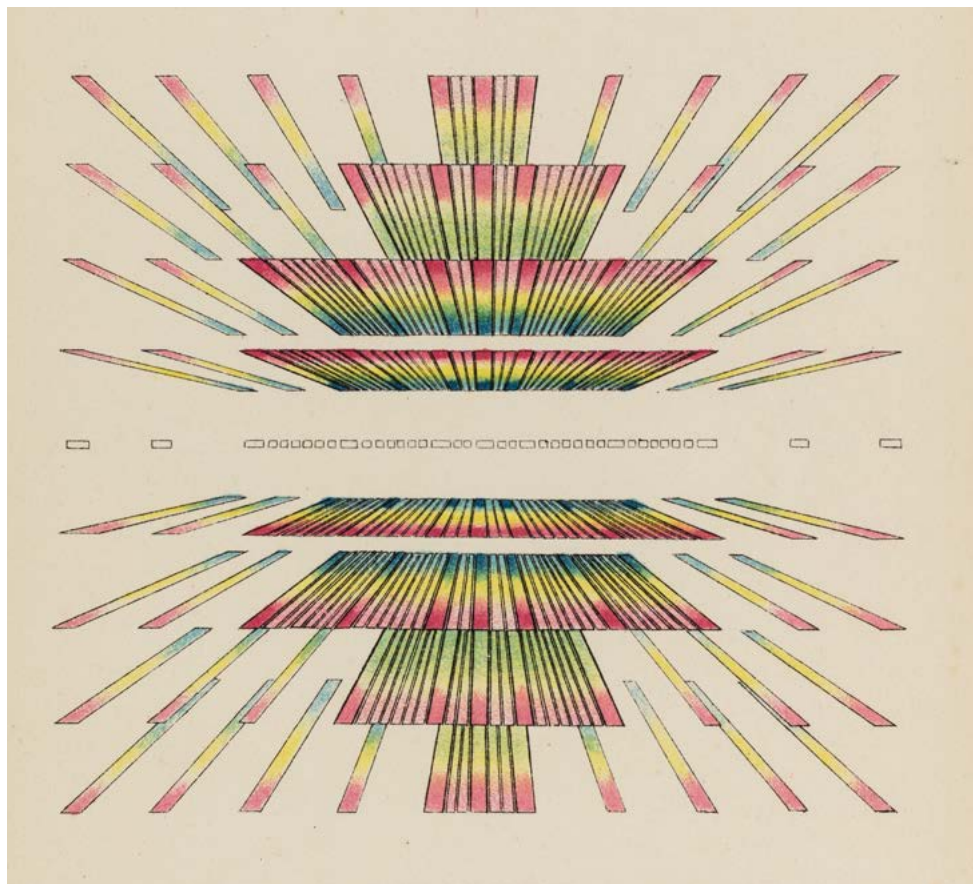


Measuring the Sky

Scientist and mountaineer Horace Bénédict de Saussure is credited with inventing the cyanometer, a device to measure the colour blue. In 1787, Saussure measured the sky at the summit of Mont Blanc: 39 degrees blue.

‘... the sky is for all; ...
And yet we never attend
to it, we never make it a
subject of thought ...’

John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, I



John Tyndall, '*Interference spectra produced by diffraction*' 1860 (detail) © The Royal Society