

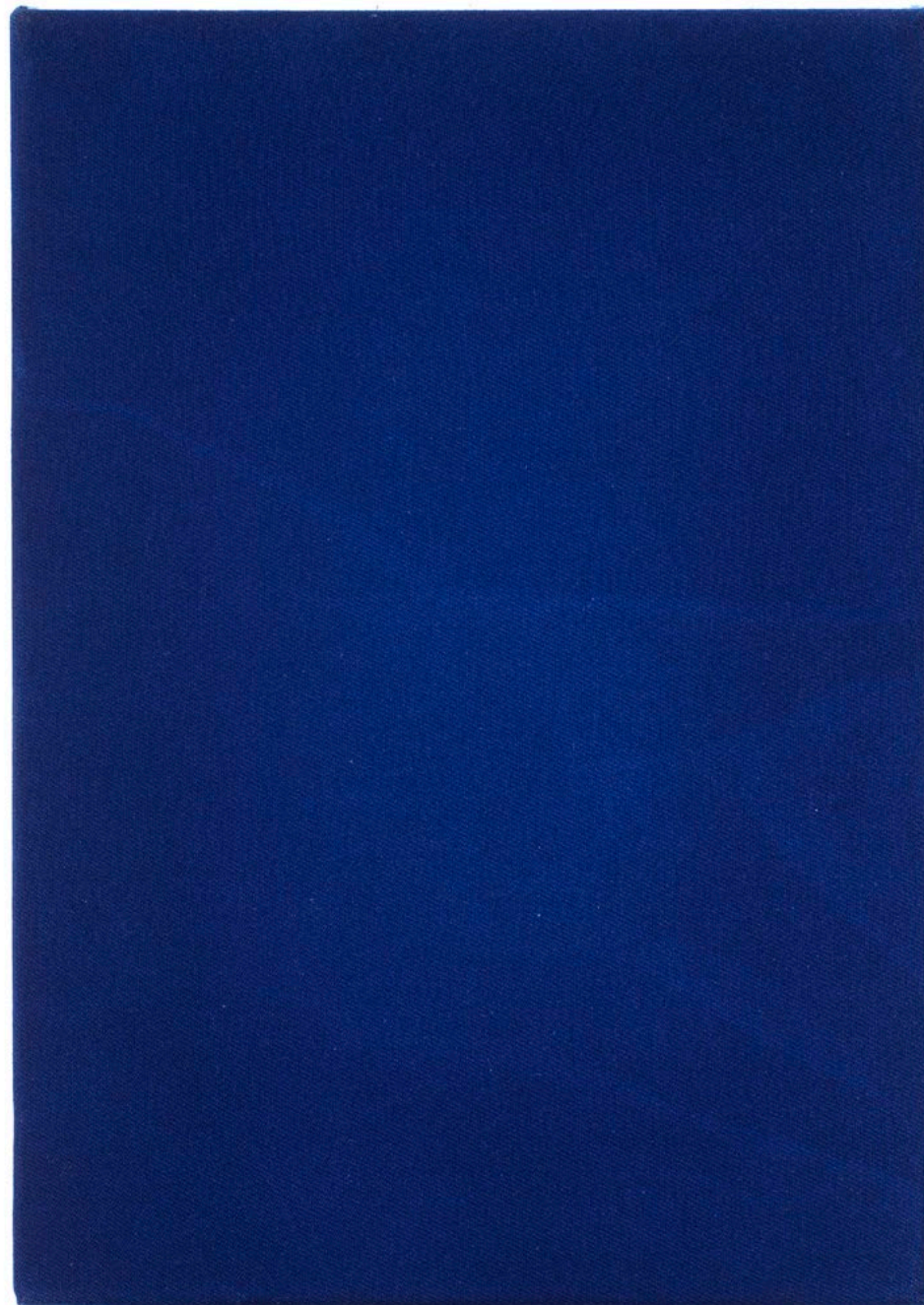
# Hampstead Heath

Damian Taylor

Hampstead Heath, 14th July 2016, 6–7pm,  
broken cloud, warm

30×21 cm

*Hampstead July 14 1821 6 to 7 p.m. N.W. breeze  
strong*



Hampstead Heath, 19th July 2016, 5.30–  
6.30am bright hot dawn, cloudless, colours  
beautiful  
69×48 cm

*1/2p 5 am 19th July looking East.  
The day beautiful at noon plain blue sky*

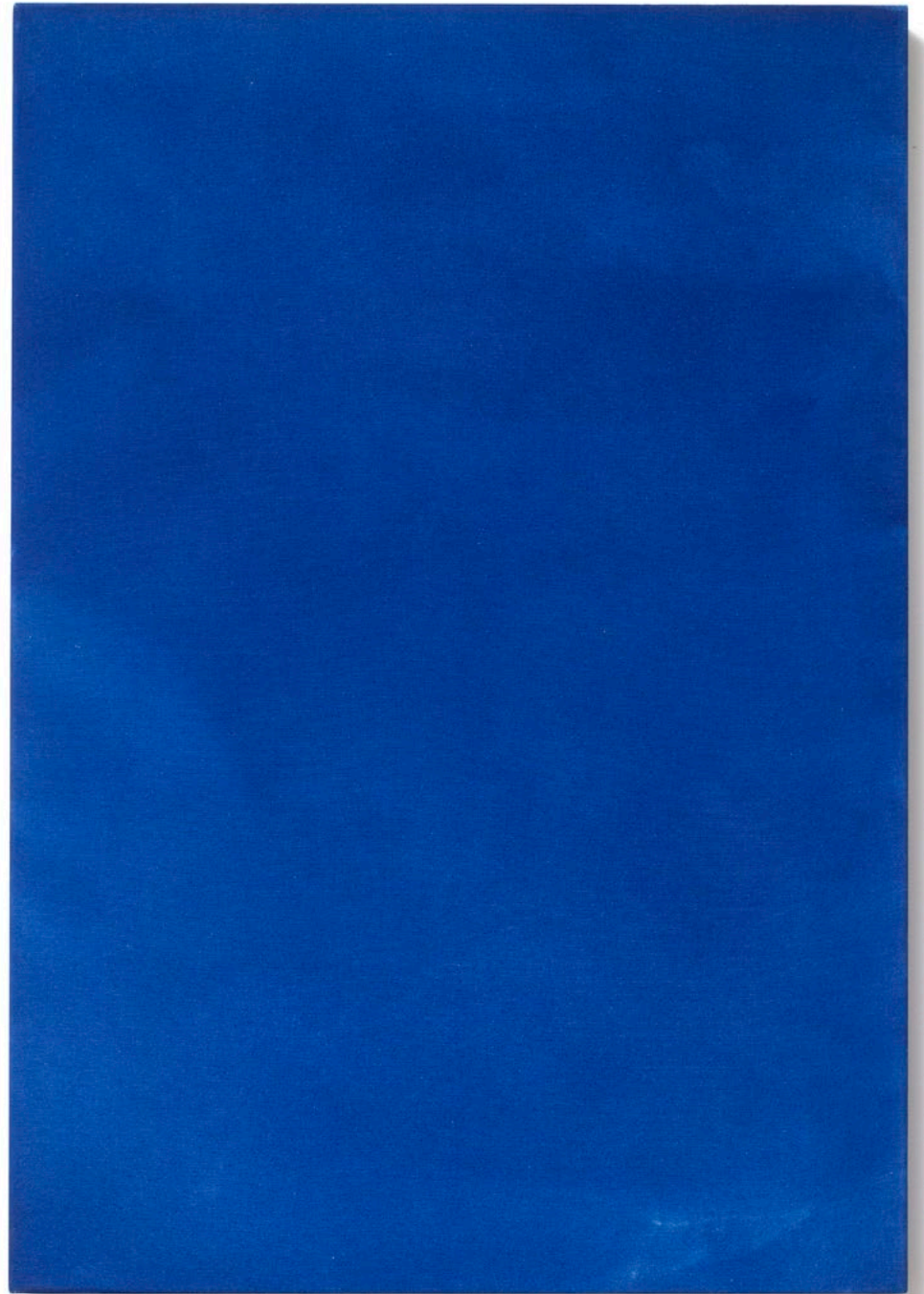




Each work is a photographic record of an hour's sunlight. Some are also traces of rainfall, resting insects, and blown grass. They were exposed on Hampstead Heath, with the time and date of exposure determined by the oil sketches that John Constable painted on the Heath in the summer of 1821. For each dated sketch from 1821 there is a corresponding work from 2016.

Hampstead Heath, 19th July 2016, 7.30–  
8.30pm, still, hottest day of the year so far  
69×48 cm

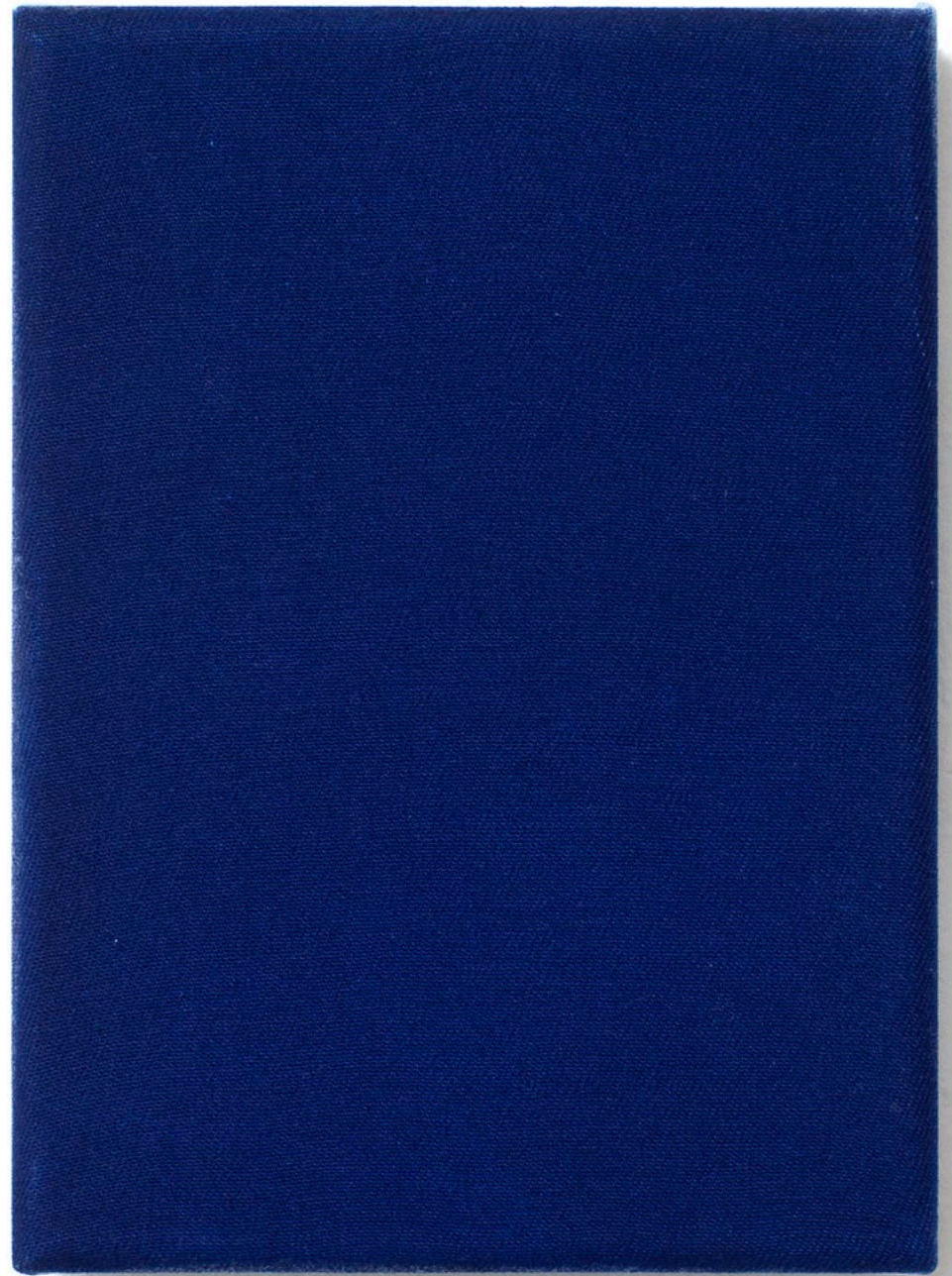
*Evening of Coronation July 19. 1821. Westward by  
North—cloudy and tempestuous looking but did not  
turn out so*



Hampstead Heath, 25th July 2016, 5–6pm,  
details written in a book, book lent, not  
returned

18×13 cm

*July 25, 1821, looking due West Wind to W 5  
afternoon sun behind a shower*







Hampstead Heath, August 21 2016, 5–6pm,  
some initial sun, then cloud. raindrops 5.52

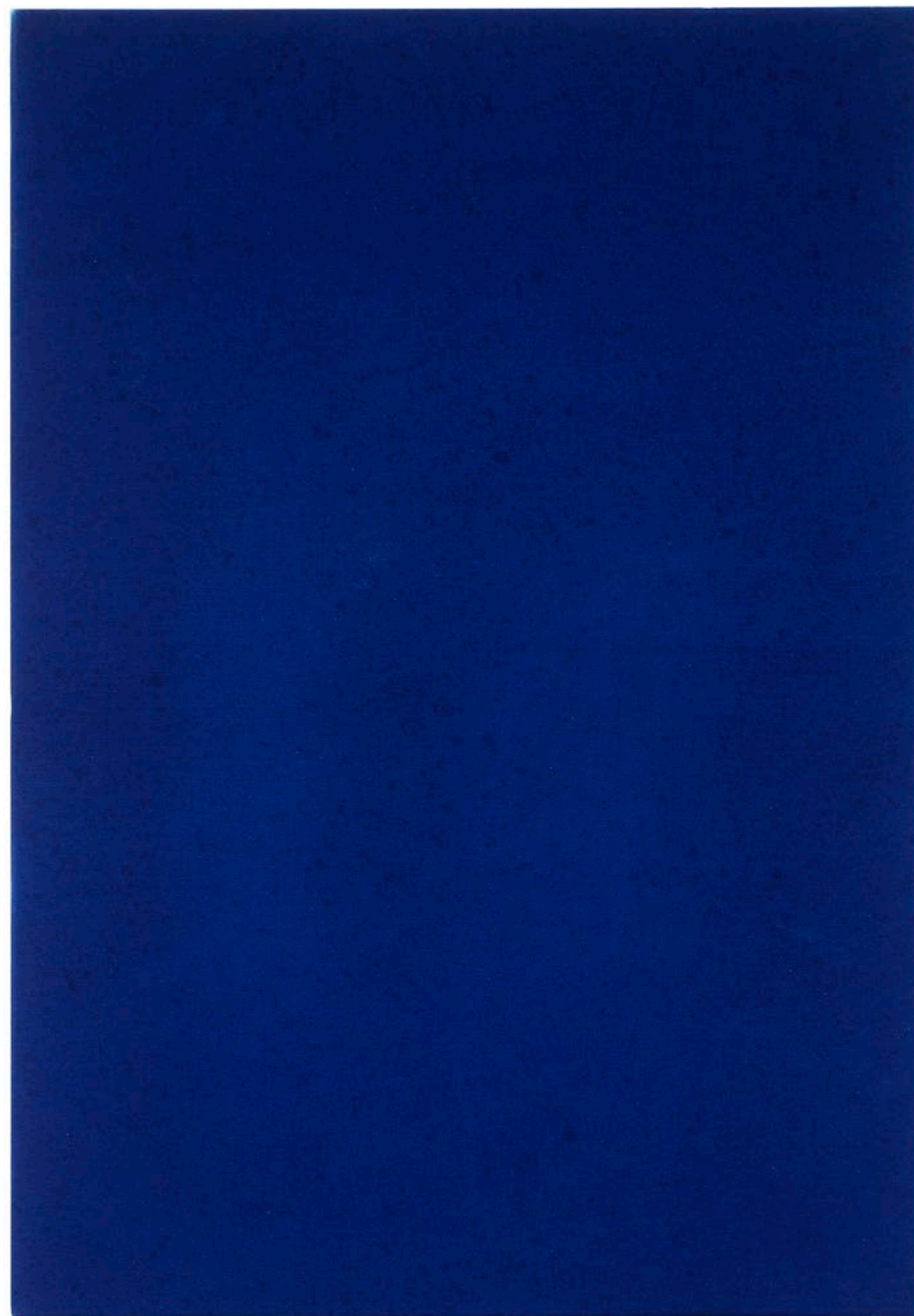
120×100 cm

*5 Oclock afternoon: August 1821 very fine bright &  
wind after rain slightly in the morning*



Hampstead Heath, 3rd September 2016, 12–  
1pm, bright start, fifteen minute light shower  
69×48 cm

*September 3d. Noon. very sultry: with large drops of  
Rain falling on my palate light air from S.W.*







Hampstead Heath, 10th September 2016,  
11–12am overcast, almost immediate drizzle  
with occasional breaks

120×80 cm

*Sepr. 10 1821 Eleven o'clock Sultry with warm rain  
falling large heavy clouds [...] a heavy downpour  
and thunder*



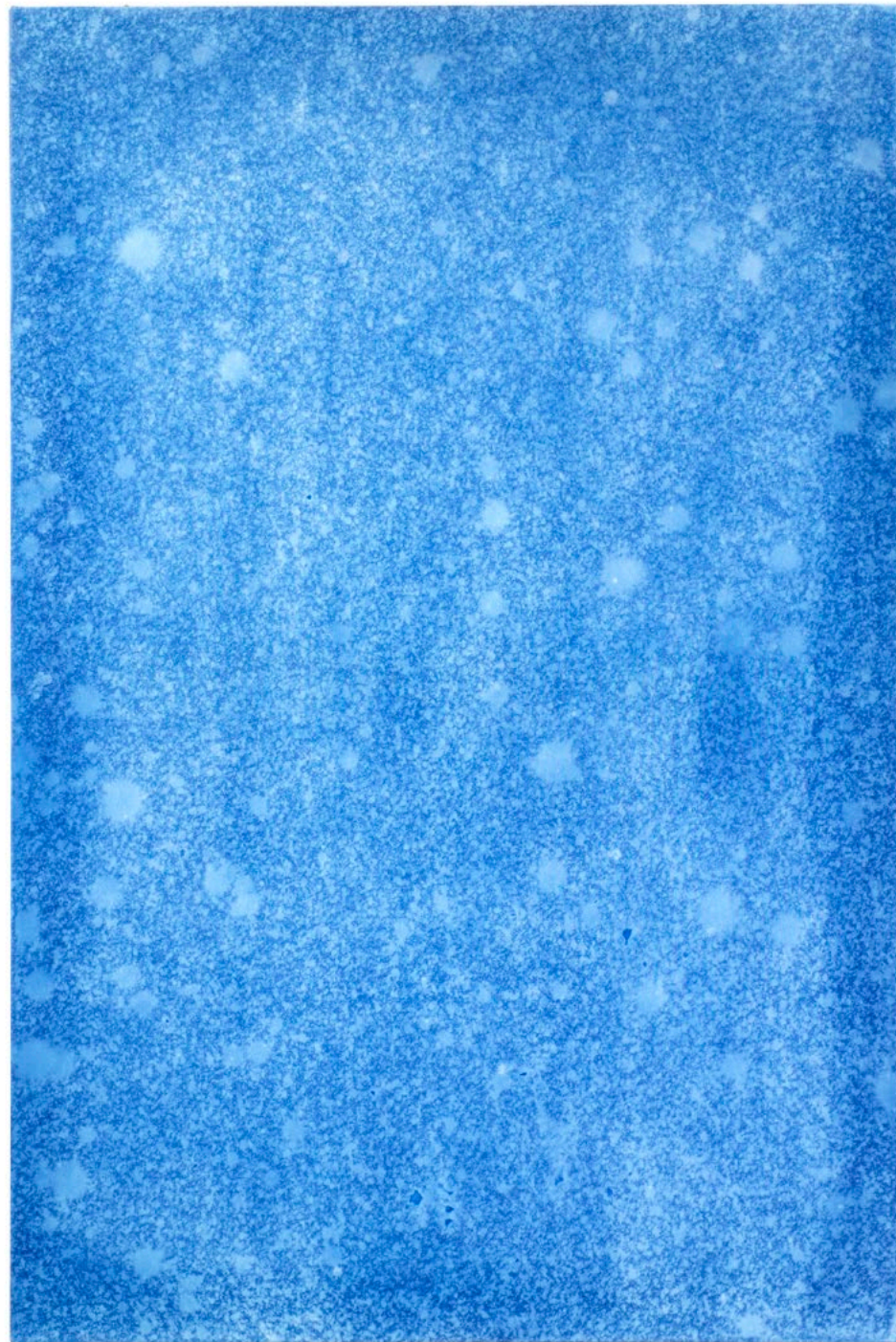




Hampstead Heath, 10th September 2016,  
noon–1pm, drizzle turning to rain, occasional  
breaks and a very brief heavy shower

120×80 cm

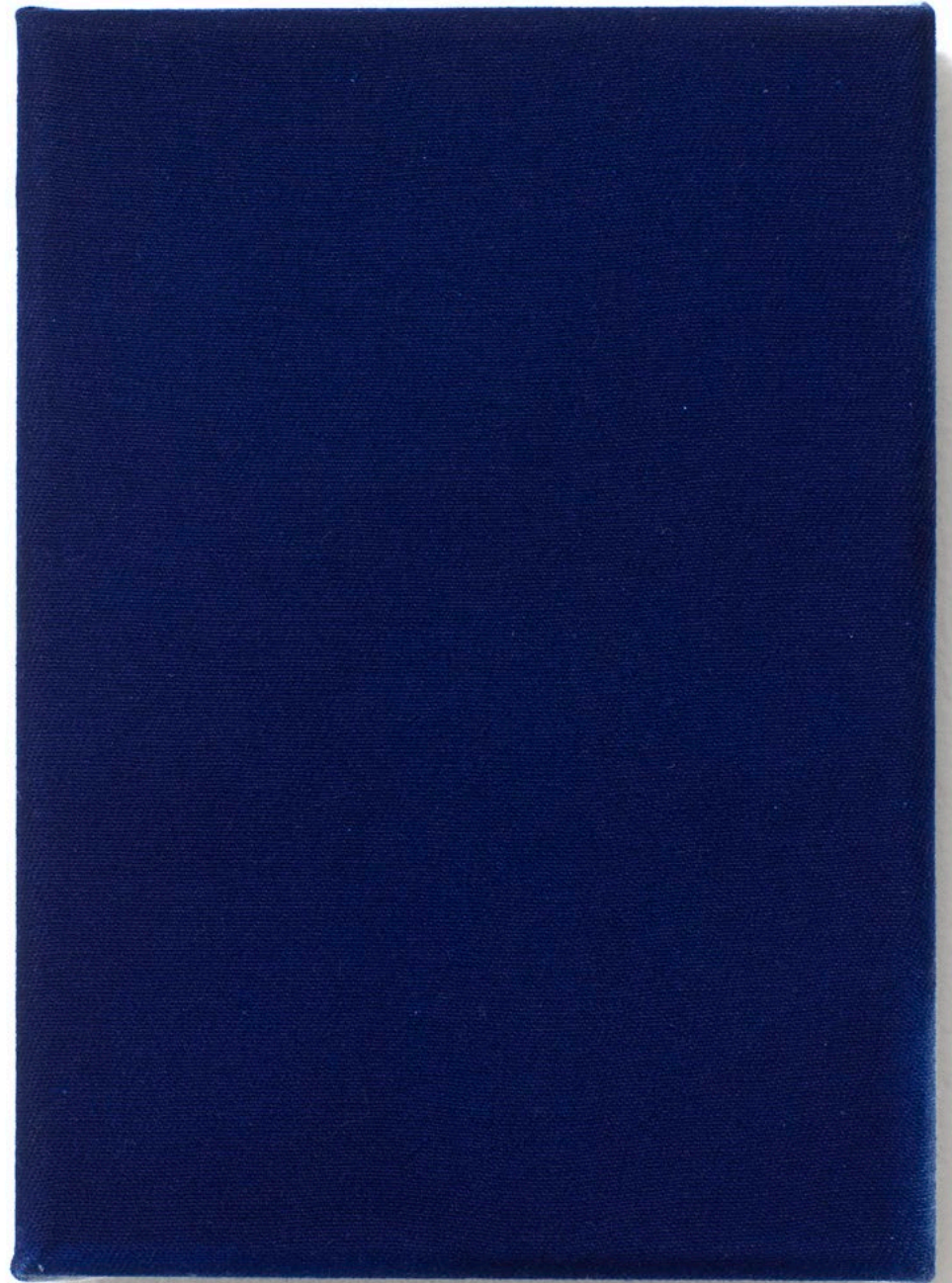
*Sepr. 10. 1821, Noon. gentle Wind at West.  
very sultry after a heavy shower with thunder,  
accumulated thunder clouds passing slowly away  
to the south East. very bright & hot, all the foliage  
sparkling and wet*





Hampstead Heath, 11th September 2016,  
10–11am, bright and clear and glorious  
18×13 cm

*Hampstead Sept 11, 1821. 10. to 11. Morning under  
the sun—Clouds silvery grey on warm ground  
Sultry: Light wind to the S.W. fine all day—but  
rain in the night following*





Hampstead Heath, 12th September 2016,  
noon–1pm. some cloud but bright and very  
warm. late and improbable specks of rain  
69×48 cm

*Sepr. 12 1821. Noon. Wind fresh at West. Sun very  
Hot. looking southward exceedingly bright vivid &  
Glowing, very heavy showers in the Afternoon but a  
fine evening. High wind in the night*

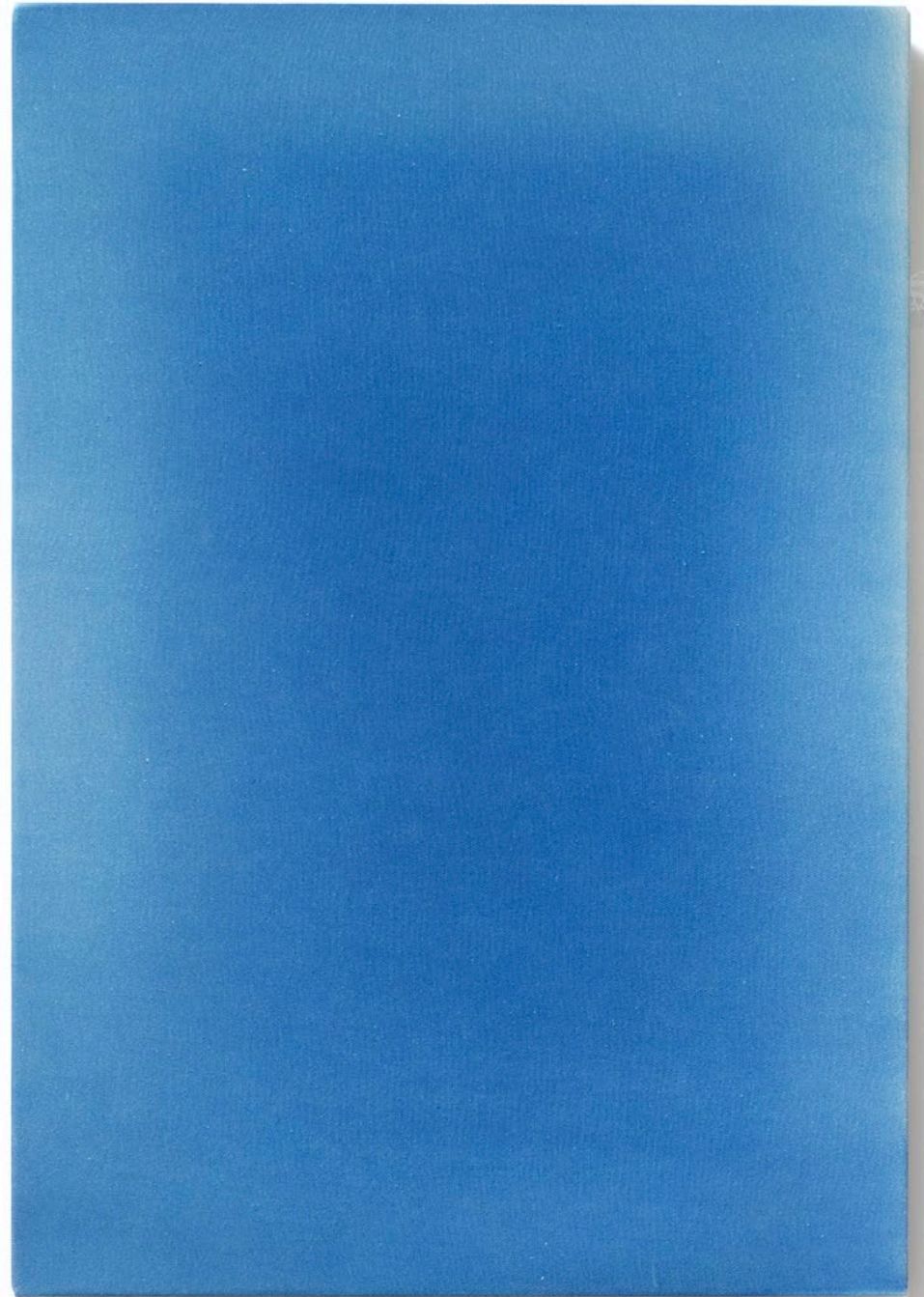




Hampstead Heath, 12th September 2016, 6.35–  
7.35pm. Sun setting over Harrow. Overcast with  
brief moments of sun

50×35 cm

*Sepr. 12. 1821. Sun setting over Harrow This  
appearance of the Evening was just after a very  
heavy rain more rain in the night and a very [light?]  
wind which continued all the day following—while  
making this sketch observed the Moon rising very  
beautifully due east over the heavy clouds from the  
late showers had fallen, and Wind Gentle increasing  
from the North west. Rather...*

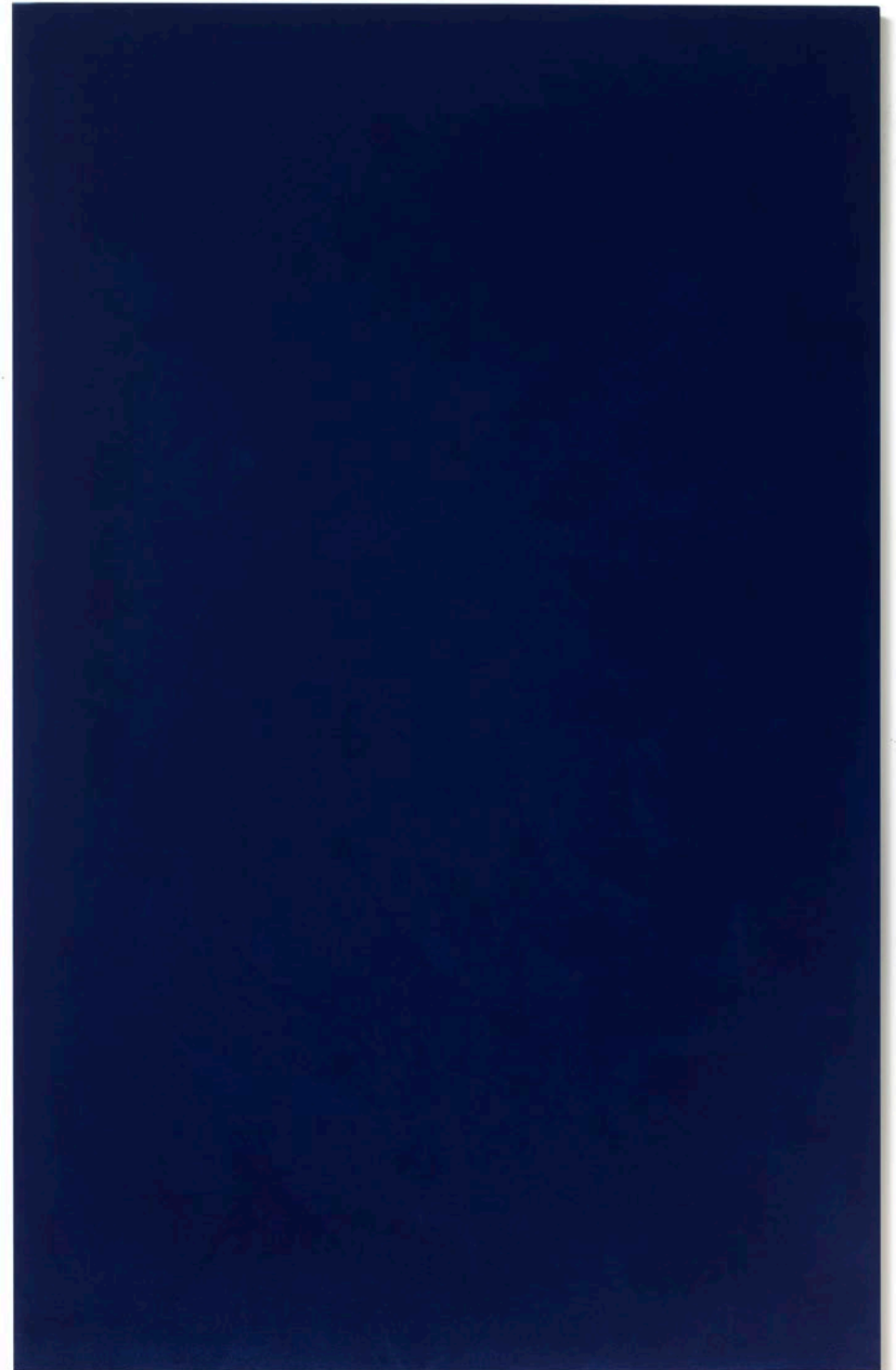


Constable's oil sketches from September 1821 progressively integrated the structure of the trees into the teeming complexity of the clouds above, creating painterly surfaces that were characterised by an intense all-over animation. This was taken to its logical conclusion on the 13th September, when he produced his first oil sketch devoted exclusively to the sky. By developing an approach to painting in which every element in the scene was driven by a sense of movement, Constable offered a pictorial logic that was both at odds with the dominant conventions for representing the world and wholly in accordance with contemporary developments in how it was understood.

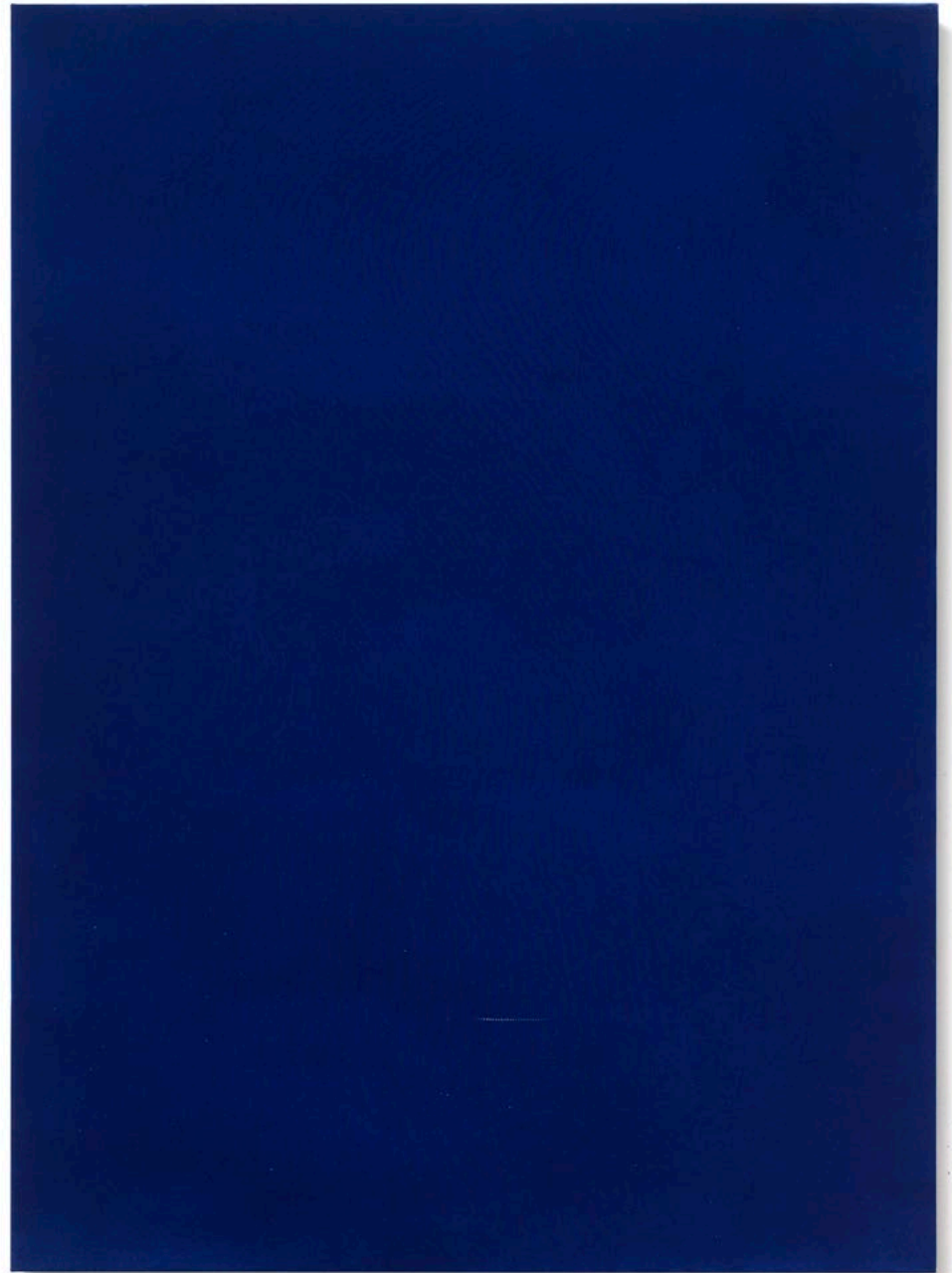
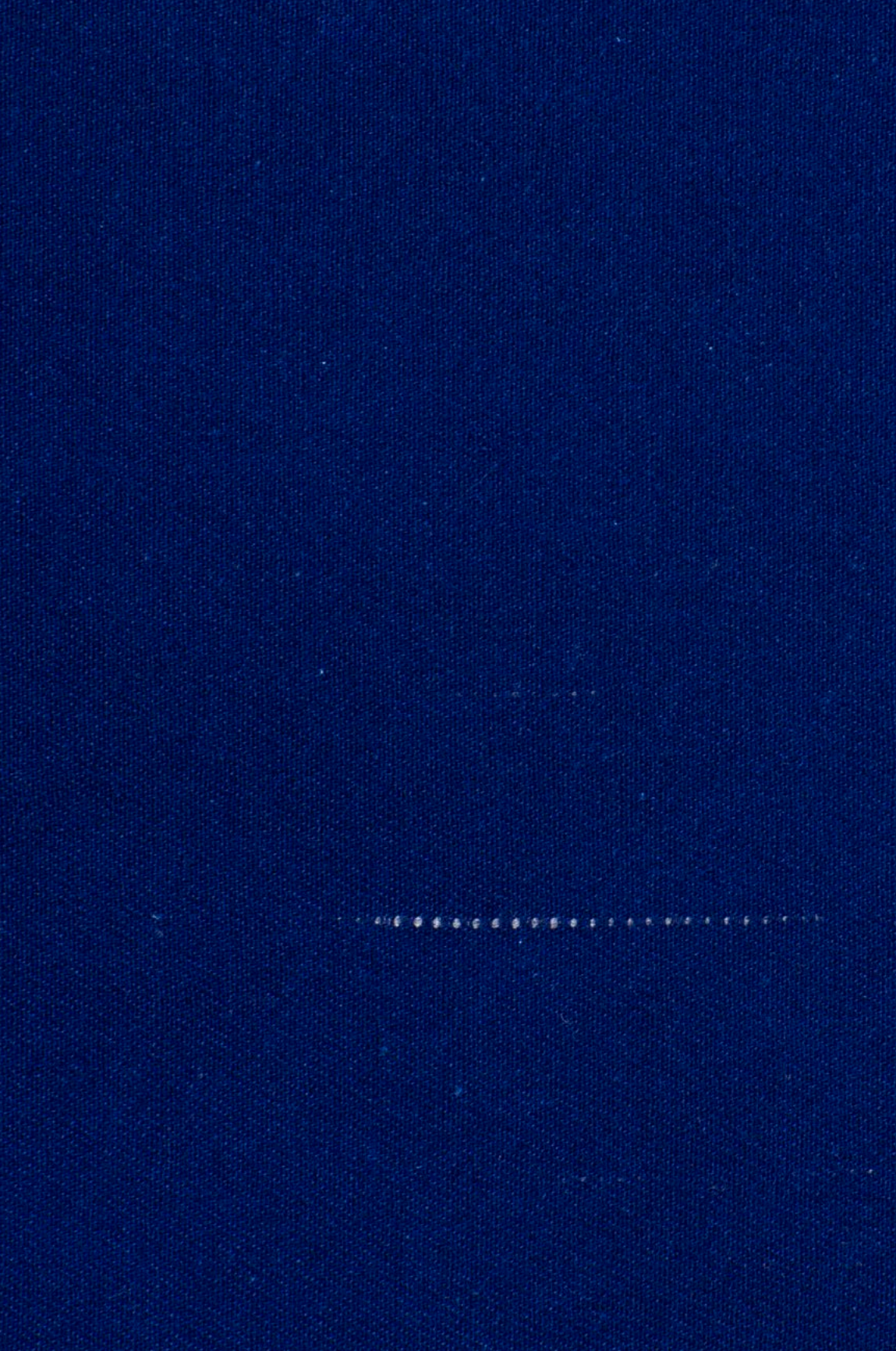
At the close of the eighteenth century, for example, the geologist James Hutton stressed that the earth's surface was continually evolving; that 'matter itself must be in motion' over unfathomably great spans of time. This emphasis on pervasive movement was further developed at the start of the nineteenth century when the meteorologist Luke Howard highlighted the role played in the transformation of clouds by 'the constant operation of electricity.' As Howard's follower Thomas Forster argued—in a book that Constable owned and annotated—not only did electricity determine the flux of the clouds, the 'discoveries made by Sir H. Davy ... incline one to regard it as the universal agent in all the changes of form which matter undergoes.'

Hampstead Heath, 13th September 2016,  
1–2pm, hottest September day since 1911  
195×120 cm

*Sepr 13th. one o'clock. Slight wind at North West,  
which became tempestuous in the afternoon, With  
Rain all the night following*







Hampstead Heath, 24th September 2016,  
10–11am, clear and warm  
95×70 cm

*Sepr. 24th [...] 10 o'clock morning wind S.W.  
warm & fine till afternoon, when it rained and  
wind got more to the north*





Hampstead Heath, 25th September 2016,  
2–3pm, caught the end of light drizzle. broken  
clouds looking similar to those of 195 years ago  
240×135 cm

*25th. Septr 1821 around from 2 to 3 afternoon  
looking to the north—Strong Wind at west, bright  
light coming through the Clouds which were lying  
one on another*





Constable's desire to give lasting life to the most transient of phenomena was not undertaken in isolation from the wider intellectual climate of his age. For instance, at the start of the century Humphry Davy—who was two years Constable's junior and whose research into electricity would transform understandings of the physical stuff of the earth—published an account of his and Thomas Wedgwood's attempts to make permanent the fleeting images of the camera obscura. Failing to find an adequate long-term fix for the images, these experiments offered something of a false dawn—a glimmer that only dimly anticipated the public announcement of photography in January 1839. In the months following the unveiling many would explore the possibilities opened by this novel form of image making. Extending his father's attempts to fix shadows, as early as the spring of 1839 Constable's eldest son claimed that he had 'found out a new and capital way of fixing the photogenic drawings'.

These early photographic processes were all but superseded by the end of the nineteenth century. One exception was the cyanotype or blueprint, which remained in wide use into the twentieth century. A cheap and simple iron-based process, the cyanotype forms an image in Prussian blue, the earliest modern synthetic pigment, a colour that offered artists an affordable alternative to mineral blues. It was the blue that Constable predominantly used in the sky sketches he painted on the Heath. The works in this book are cyanotypes, bluer and darker the lighter the day.

Hampstead Heath, 27 September 2016,  
10–11am, mainly overcast  
69×48 cm

*Sepr 27th 1821—10 morning, fine morning after  
rainey night*

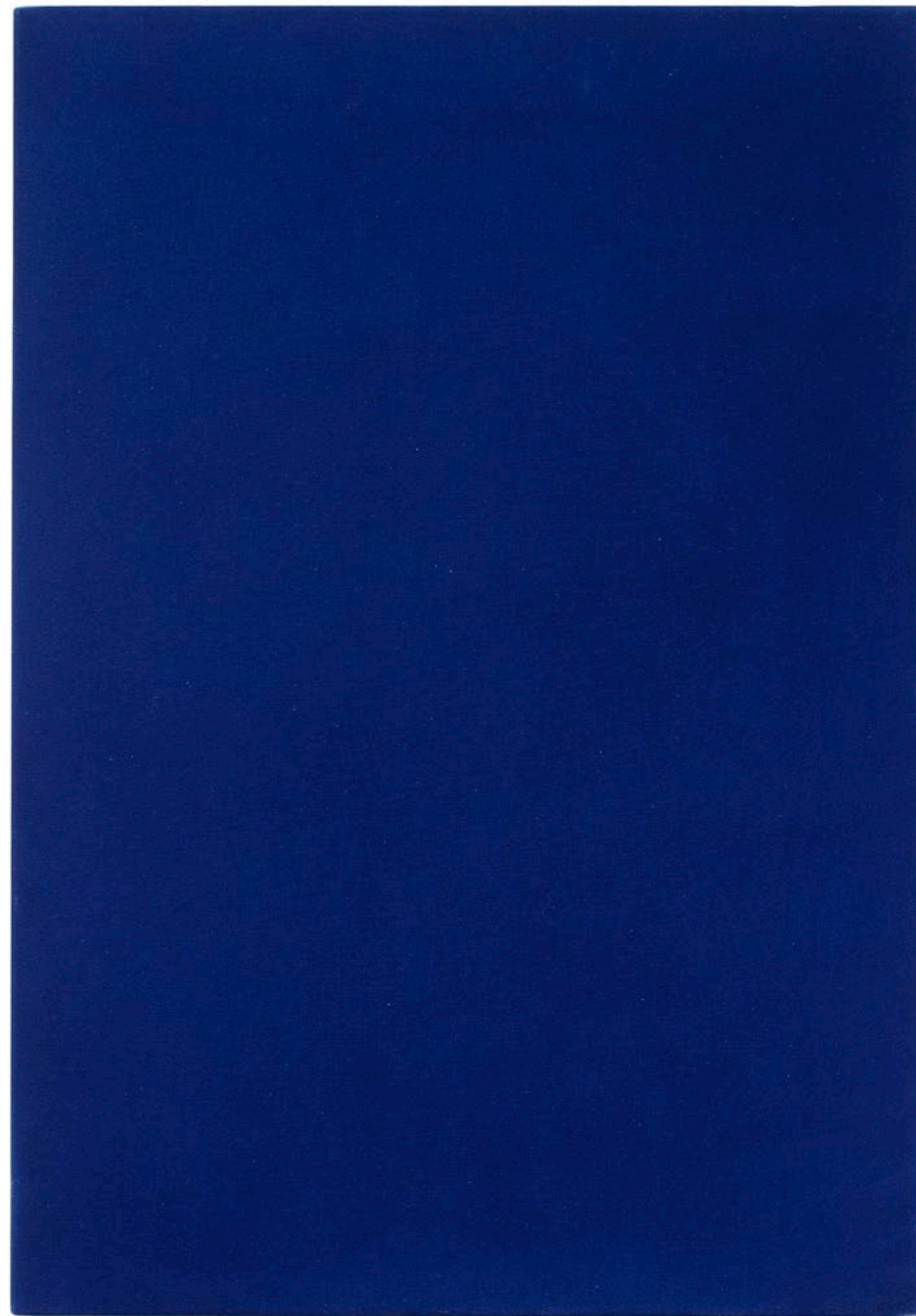


It is perhaps easy to imagine that Constable turned to the sky with such enthusiasm because of his unwillingness to confront earthbound problems, yet his studies date from a period in which the clouds were increasingly understood as far more than emblems of the mercurial or the other. To gaze at the clouds wasn't necessarily escapism. In the year that Davy outlined his attempts to give the transience of light enduring form through what we would now term photography, Luke Howard gave the clouds conceptual stability when he introduced the terms by which they remain known to this day—cirrus, stratus, cumulus, nimbus, and their modifications. And although he didn't suggest that climate change was a global concern, in the years immediately preceding 1821 Howard's meticulous attention to the weather led him to suggest that the burning of fossil fuels would affect the climate on a scale that stretched well beyond the local.

For those who attended to the clouds, it was becoming apparent that not only did the weather dramatically affect humans, humans were beginning to affect the weather.

Hampstead Heath, 27 September 2016, noon,  
very slight drizzle early on, gusty  
69×48 cm

*Noon 27 Sept very bright after rain wind West*

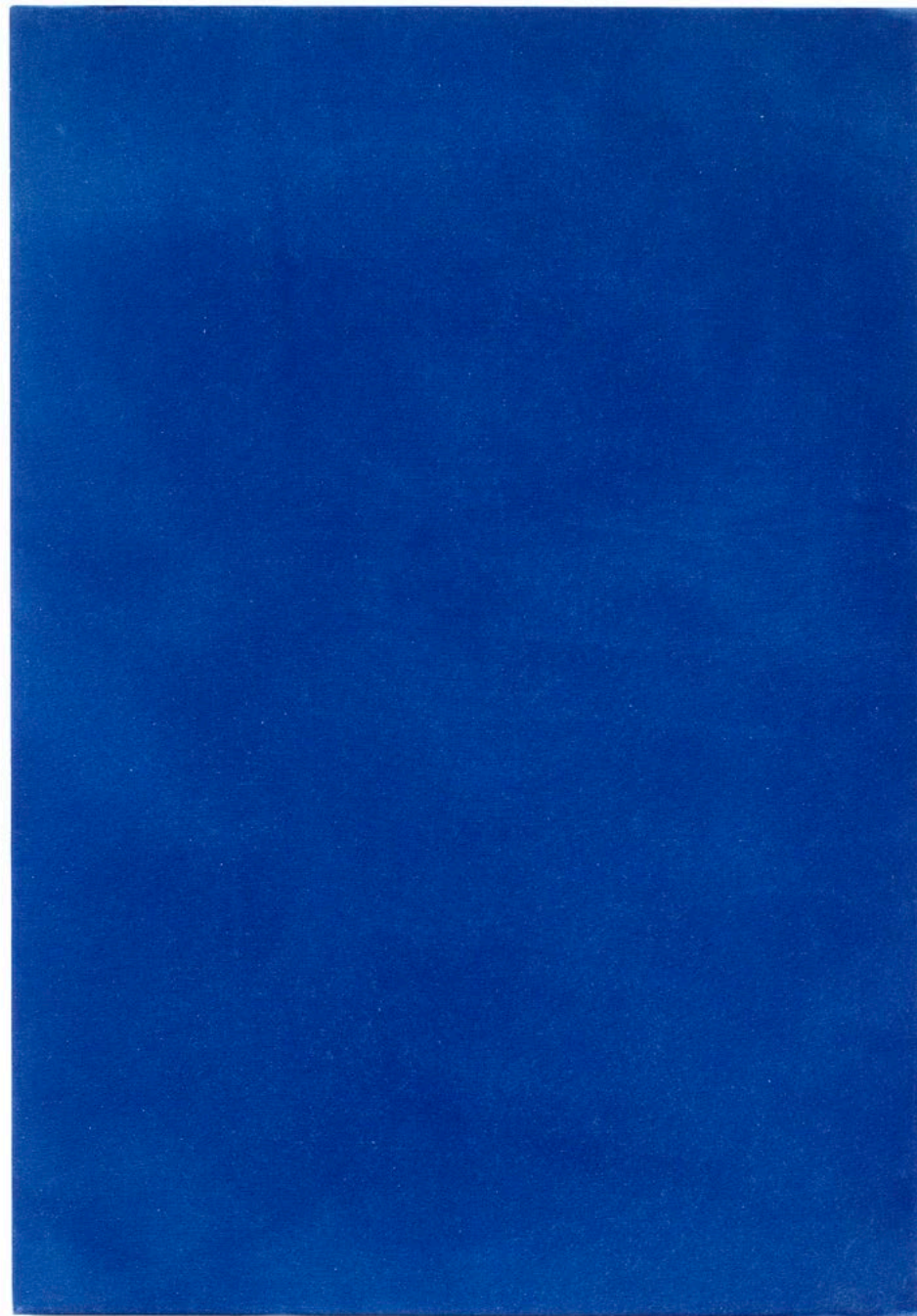




Hampstead Heath, 27 September 2016, slight  
drizzle for first 15 mins. wind abated. glum  
throughout

69×48 cm

*4 afternoon 27 Sept 1821 wood bank of Vale very  
[warm?] & bright after rain*





Constable's sketches are a meditation on time and transience that offer a remarkable record of an artist's struggle to give visual life to radically new understandings of the world. They attempt to make sense of a vastly expanded system in which change replaced stability and in which the local and visible became necessarily implicated with that which stretched beyond sight and comprehension.

Stalking the artist's ghost today, the significance of the heightened attention to the weather that informed his art is palpable. This was not least the case when sitting on the Heath in mid-September, in temperatures in the mid-thirties, exactly 195 years to the day and hour after Constable painted his first pure cloud study.

Hampstead Heath, September 28, 2016, warm,  
some sun, typically overcast, light breeze  
120×80 cm

*Sep. 28 1821 Noon—looking North West windy from  
the S.W. large bright clouds flying rather fast very  
stormy night followed.*







This book was first published in a limited edition of ten in September 2021, coinciding with the 200th anniversary of Constable's earliest pure cloud studies.

The inscriptions from Constable's sketches are based on those transcribed in Graham Reynolds, *The Later Paintings and Drawings of John Constable*.

It is set in Linotype Didot, a modern reworking of the typefaces developed by Firmin Didot and used by his brother, the printer Pierre Didot. It is unclear which of the two commissioned the three new paintings that Constable reported he was working on in the mid-1820s.



