

## PICTURESQUE

The term picturesque originates from the Italian *pittresco*, which translates as painterly or like a painting. The term encompasses the influence of artistic interests and the aesthetic ideals of fine art upon landscape gardening. At the turn of the eighteenth century the picturesque was a quality which appealed to individuals with a trained and educated eye, who could appreciate the stimulating visual variety which the picturesque could offer to the viewer. The term picturesque was used in relation to both landscape painting and gardening. Picturesque painters included Nicholas Poussain (1594-1665), Gaspard Dughet, known as Gaspard Poussin (1615-1675).



Claude Lorrain, *Ascanius Shooting the Stag of Sylvia*

Landscape gardeners were encouraged to think like artists, designing ornamental walks and viewpoints, rolling lawns and water features. The style pursued interesting textures, dramatic wild scenery, curious details and the full spectrum of dark to light to the delight of the viewer.

The picturesque is often confused with the other terms used to describe landscapes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the sublime and the beautiful, the latter being exemplified in the landscapes designed by Capability Brown. The Reverend William Gilpin in his *Essay on Prints* (1768) defined picturesque as a '*peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture*'<sup>1</sup>. Gilpin claimed that unlike the smoothness and neatness of beauty, the picturesque inferred '*roughness in texture and ruggedness in delineation*',<sup>2</sup> mimicking the irregularity found in nature.

Ruins became a fashionable feature of eighteenth century landscape paintings and gardens. The unevenness of stone ruins were often covered in climbing ivy or patches of moss, which broke the fluidity, provided variety and enhanced the picturesque aesthetic.

Elements of the picturesque can be seen in garden designs by William Kent who abandoned all formality in garden design; he used mass plantings of trees to create areas of darkness to contrast with open areas of light; and, ensured that landscapes incorporated features to draw the eye to near, middle and far distances. At Rousham House in Oxfordshire, he '*made use of picturesque Gothic for distant buildings, such as the eye catcher, the mill and remodelled house*'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gilpin, W., *An Essay on Prints* (J. Robson, London, 1768)

<sup>2</sup> Jellicoe, G., et al. *Oxford Companion to Gardens* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 431

<sup>3</sup> Jellicoe, G., et al. *Oxford Companion to Gardens* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 486