

Text by Nick Bodimeade

Idyll – an extremely happy, peaceful, or picturesque period or situation, typically an idealized or unsustainable one.

An exhibition in a Sussex barn: What happens if you put on an exhibition of contemporary landscape painting in a redundant but charming agricultural building set in iconic Sussex countryside?

As the exhibition visitor walks, cycles or drives to the barn at South Stoke from Arundel, they travel from the town dominated by its castle, the seat of the Dukes of Norfolk, the Roman Catholic Cathedral and the River Arun, down the lime tree lined avenue to the mill stream painted by Constable, past Swanbourne boating lake and Arundel Park. On the right, the Wet Lands Centre, founded by naturalist and artist Peter Scott, with its car and coach parks built on what used to be spring-fed watercress beds. Next, on past the chalk pit and the Black Rabbit Inn, and from there up the hollow way to Offham village with its dairy farm, left toward South Stoke past the park gates and the Gamekeepers' sentry-like cottage (avoiding pheasants on the road), past fields of barley grown for animal feed and fields of sheep grown for Waitrose grazing the flood plain drained by POW's from the Napoleonic war, down the sunken lane and in to the village of South Stoke with imposing Farmhouse, Church and Rectory, and huddle of what were once 'Norfolk Estate Red' painted labourers cottages.

A wonderfully rich interactive mix of nature, environment, history, leisure, economics, politics, religion, class, race and cultural identity. So, when we finally look at the paintings in this context, how do they interact with the view through the barn door? How can framing the view contribute to framing the debate?