Carmontelle’s Transparency

Representing an imaginary landscape reminiscent of the garden of Monceau in Paris, this transparent moving panorama was unique for its time. Housed in a viewing box with rollers concealed at the sides, the device would have been placed in front of a window with the ambient light blocked out.

Carmontelle presented these dynamic paintings with a running narrative to entertain his patron, Louis-Philippe, duc d’Orléans, and the duke’s family and friends. When viewed in a darkened room, the warm, luminous images must have seductively transported the audience—at least, momentarily—into this utopian landscape, just as modern films have the capacity to engulf us and make us forget our everyday concerns.

Viewing Box for Carmontelle’s Transparency
American, 2000
Wood, metal, and paper (modern reproduction)
Box: 32 ¾ x 35 x 12 ¼ in.
The J. Paul Getty Museum

Figures Walking in a Parkland
About 1783–1800
Louis Carrogis, called Carmontelle
French, 1717–1806
Watercolor and gouache with traces of black chalk underdrawing on translucent Whatman paper
18 5/8 x 148 3/8 in.
The J. Paul Getty Museum
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