

## **Title** Punch or May Day 1829

**Artist** Benjamin Robert Haydon 1786–1846

**Date** 1829

**Medium** Oil paint on canvas

**Dimensions** Support: 1505 x 1851 mm, frame: 2010 x 2270 x 165 mm

**Acquisition** Bequeathed by George Darling, 1862

**Reference** N00682

**Collection** Tate Britain

**Theme** BP Walk through British Art

**Room** 1810

"It's character is Hogarthian - a humorous satire on life. The scene is near Marylebone Church. In the left hand corner of the picture is Mr. Punch's theatre, with the performance in progress; in front of it a simple old farmer, hat in hand and dog at heel, is gazing with delight at that admirable tragi-comedy, unconscious that a pickpocket's hand is upon his pocket-book, while a flashily dressed confederate holds the victim in talk; near the farmer, a soldier and sailor, a nursemaid with a child, and a street sweeper are looking on in delight; a revel of May Day sweeps with Jack in the Green and his lady, is in full caper in the right hand corner of the composition, while behind the knot of spectators, a Bow-Street officer, truncheon in hand is stealing ferret-like upon the pickpocket. The extreme left of the composition is occupied by a charming figure - an apple girl sleeping by her stall. A carriage with a newly married pair, and a black servant in full grin behind, is driving past the show; in the middle distance a hearse issues out of a cross-street. Just beyond Mr. Punch's theatre, two horsemen in the fashionable dress of the day, are riding along, and in the background is an Italian image boy, with casts of the Theseus and Illisus on his board, neglected for the more potent attractions of Punch." *Memoirs of BRH*, ed. Tom Taylor 1926 p. 465/6

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"As in the Mock Election, the characterisation shows anything but a subtle mind, it is forceful but crude and sometimes vulgar. But a true painter's hand and eye are at work in the broad atmospheric unity of the whole, the sense of open air and masterly handling and feeling for surface in many parts." **Eric George, *The Life and Death of BRH*, Cumberlege 1948 p.187**

The idea of the picture came to him suddenly on the sickbed of his son Frank "and he composed it quite lost to everything else... Haydon hopes were raised by receiving an order to send *Punch* to Windsor, but disappointment followed, for though his majesty admired parts of the picture, he thought it crowded, and the chimney sweeper like an opera dancer." **Eric George, *op.cit* p.189**