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**THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM PRESENTS
J.M.W. TURNER: PAINTING SET FREE**

*First major West Coast international loan exhibition focuses on Turner's late work;
Famed 19th-century master created many of his most renowned pieces after age 60*

**February 24, 2015 – May 24, 2015
At the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center**



Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth, exhibited 1842. Joseph Mallord William Turner (British, 1775 - 1851). Oil on canvas. 36 x 48 in. EX.2015.3.18. Tate: Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856. Photo © Tate, London 2014

LOS ANGELES— One of the most influential painters of nature who ever lived, Joseph Mallord William Turner (English, 1775–1851) was especially creative and inventive in the latter years of his life, producing many of his most famous and important paintings after the age of 60. On view at the J. Paul Getty Museum February 24, 2015, through May 24, 2015, *J.M.W. Turner: Painting Set Free* brings together more than 60 key oil paintings and watercolors from this culminating period of his career, and is the West Coast's first major exhibition of Turner's work.

"J.M.W. Turner is the towering figure of British 19th century art, a ground-breaking innovator in his own day whose relevance and status as a seeming harbinger of 20th century 'modernism' has made him an inspiration to generations of later artists up to the present day. A successful and well-known public figure in his own day, Turner produced some of his most innovative and challenging work during the last 16 years of his life," explains Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "He was frequently mocked and misunderstood for his choice of unusual subject matters, his experimentation with different canvas formats, and his pioneering free and spontaneous techniques in both oil and watercolor. While Turner could not knowingly have anticipated future artistic trends, he is seen today by many as a prophet of modernism because of his rough, gestural brushwork and quasi-abstract subject matter. His work captured the natural landscape's atmosphere and color like no other artist before him, and conveyed the awe-inspiring power of the elements as never before. This exhibition celebrates Turner as the most innovative and experimental artist of his time, and I have no doubt that it will be inspiring to a new generation of artists working in California today."

"The exhibition shows an artist at the top of his game, totally at ease with his media, and still keen to push boundaries and challenge assumptions. We see how Turner was modern in his own time, but the results are astonishing even for us today," said Julian Brooks, one of the exhibition curators.

The Sea

In his later years, Turner's continuing fascination with the sea reached a zenith. Although he respected existing conventions of marine painting, particularly its 17th-century Dutch roots, he consistently moved beyond them, turning the water into a theater for drama and effect. At the Royal Academy exhibitions, he confounded viewers with his bold portrayals of modern maritime action—whales and their hunters battling for survival—while striving to capture the mysterious depths and forces of the elements. Never having witnessed a whale hunt himself, he included a reference to "Beale's Voyage" in the catalogues, acknowledging that his source of inspiration was Thomas Beale's *Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (1839). (Herman Melville consulted the same book when writing *Moby-Dick*, published in 1851.)

The London press at the time greeted Turner's whaling pictures, such as *Hurrah! for the Whaler Erebus! Another Fish!*, 1846, with scathing attacks, lambasting their yellow palette and lack of finish. The *Almanack of the Month* printed a cartoon of a Turner painting with a large mop and a bucket labeled "yellow," and opined that his pictures resembled a lobster salad.

Travel

In addition to the sea, Turner's insatiable appetite for history, different cultures, and sublime natural scenery drew him time and again to Continental Europe, where he observed not only spectacular sites such as ancient ruins, medieval castles, jagged mountain peaks, and meandering rivers, but also local customs and dress. On such travels he made numerous watercolor sketches, which effectively captured fleeting effects of nature on paper. These works display a complex layering of color animated through the pulsing energy of turbulent handling. They demonstrate



The Blue Rigi, Sunrise, 1842. Joseph Mallord William Turner (British, 1775 - 1851). Watercolor on paper. 11 11/16 x 17 11/16 in. EX.2015.3.46. Photo © Tate. London 2014

both Turner's commitment to observed natural effects and his unwavering obsession with the vagaries and delights of watercolor, a medium he had indisputably made his own. Some of the finished watercolors he made for sale after his trips, such as *The Blue Rigi, Sunrise*, 1842, represent pinnacles in the use of watercolor technique.

Turner was especially captivated by the particular combination of light and color he found in Venice, and revisited the city several times. He traveled lightly, usually alone, making few concessions to his age or failing strength, and drew constantly in his sketchbooks. Turner's many images of Venice were among his most potent late works, influencing later artists such as James Abbott McNeill Whistler (American, 1834-1903) and Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926).

For Turner, watercolor was the perfect medium to capture Venice's aqueous and luminous effects. While based on on-the-spot sketches done there in 1840, Turner's later paintings of Venice drew out the city's essence and spirit rather than its exact topography. His Venice was often touched with a melancholy that echoed the romantic fatalism popularized by writers such as Lord Byron, offering a warning from history to Britain's rise as a commercial empire.

Poetry

Turner was deeply interested in poetry and often paired his paintings with lines of text in order to elucidate their themes. In some cases he authored the poems himself but often he quoted celebrated 18th- and 19th-century British poets such as Thomas Gray and, most especially, Lord Byron. Throughout the Getty exhibition, many of the lines of poetry or prose that he chose or wrote are reunited with his pictures on the gallery walls. For example, the

lines " *The moon is up, and yet it is not night/ The sun as yet disputes the day with her*" from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–18) were chosen, and slightly altered by Turner to accompany two paintings: *Modern Rome- Campo Vaccino*, exhibited 1839, and *Approach to Venice*, exhibited 1844, which both feature the setting sun and a rising moon but also evoke the rise and fall of empires.

Contemporary Events

Much of Turner's later work reflects on contemporary events including the modern state of Italy, the legacy of the Napoleonic Wars, and the spectacular fires that ravaged the Palace of Westminster and the Tower of London in 1834 and 1841, respectively. In addition, Turner was the first major European artist to engage with innovations such as steam power, as seen in *Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, 1842, which shows this much-vaunted new technology at the mercy of the awesome power of the elements.

Technique

Perhaps nothing demonstrates Turner's virtuosity as a painter better than the stories of his performances on "Varnishing Days." The Royal Academy and the British Institution would set aside a short period of time for artists to put final touches on their work before an exhibition opened to the public. Turner revelled in the competitive jostling and repartee that occurred on these occasions. In his later years, he would frequently submit canvases with only the roughest indications of color and form, speedily bringing them to completion on-site. Eyewitnesses record that Turner painted most of *The Hero of a Hundred Fights*, 1800–10, reworked and exhibited 1847, and *Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, 16th October 1834*, 1834-1835, on their respective varnishing days.

Pairs and Shapes

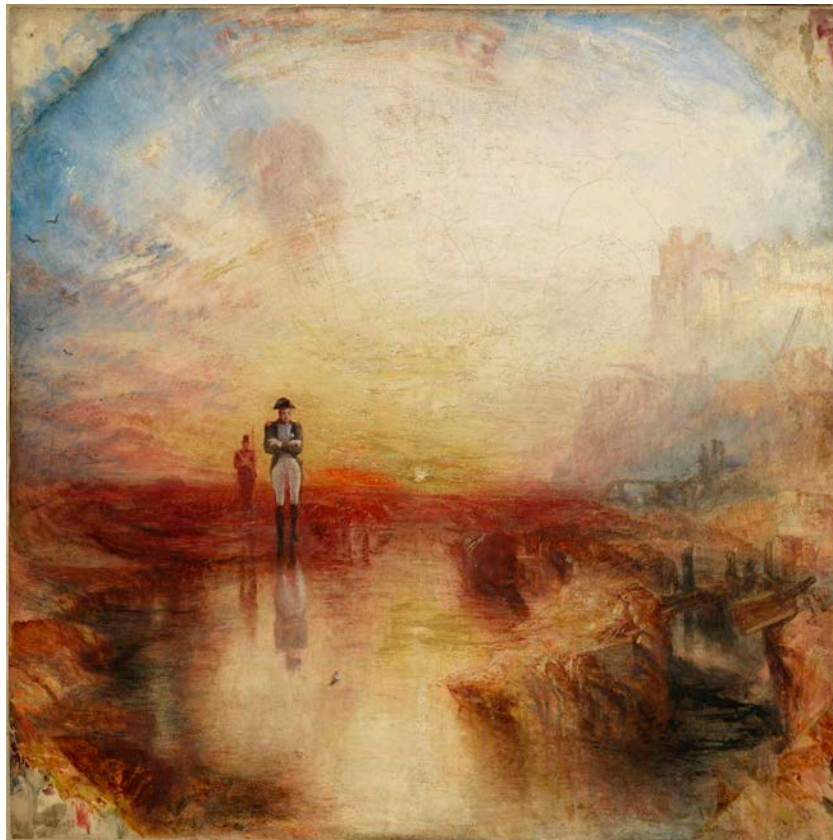
In his later years, Turner was as creative in his approach to media, materials, and techniques as he was in his choice of subject matter. He created works that offer some of his most dazzling displays of color, audacious handling, and complex iconographies. From 1840 to 1846, the artist employed a smaller canvas size for a series of paintings, which were often conceived as pairs expressing opposites, such as two that were exhibited in 1842: *Peace – Burial at Sea* and *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet*. These were principally square but could also be round or octagonal. Exploring states of consciousness, optics, and the emotive power of color, they shocked and mystified his audience, who thought them the products of senility or madness. Painted near the end of his life, these inventive works are a coda to Turner's career, representing a synthesis of his innovations in technique, composition and theme.

Turner died in 1851 at age 76, leaving the majority of his work to the English nation along with an intended bequest to support impoverished artists. In the years since, while popular and scholarly ideas about his work have changed, he inarguably emerges as one of the most beloved figures and popular painters in the history of the United Kingdom.

This exhibition was organized by Tate Britain in association with the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. The Getty Museum curators of the exhibition are Julian Brooks, curator of drawings, and Peter Björn Kerber, assistant curator of paintings.

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication *J.M.W. Turner: Painting Set Free*. Edited by David Blayney Brown, Amy Concannon, and Sam Smiles, this 250-page volume is richly illustrated.

The exhibition premiered at the Tate Britain in September 2014, and, after its run at the Getty, will travel to the de Young Museum, San Francisco from June 20, 2015, to September 20, 2015.



The Exile and the Rock Limpet, exhibited 1842. Joseph Mallord William Turner (British, 1775 - 1851). Oil on canvas. 31 1/4 x 31 1/4. EX.2015.3.49. Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856. Photo © Tate, London 2014

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The J. Paul Getty Museum collects in seven distinct areas, including Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts, and photographs gathered internationally. The Museum's mission is to make the collection meaningful and attractive to a broad audience by presenting and interpreting the works of art through educational programs, special exhibitions, publications, conservation, and research.

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