

## Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

The son of a London barber, Turner rapidly attained prominence as an artist, becoming a Royal Academician in 1802 and Professor of Perspective at the Academy from 1807-1837. His great achievement was to elevate landscape painting in England from a topographical record to a vehicle for imaginative expression of the highest order, informing his work with a wealth of references to literature, classical mythology and the art of the past. Although his career was focused on London, he was an indefatigable traveller throughout Britain in the 1790s, then on the Continent between 1802 and 1845, where he was particularly drawn to the sublimity of mountain scenery and to the human bustle and historical associations of rivers and ports.



Above: J.M.W. Turner, *Messieurs les voyageurs on their return from Italy (par la diligence) in a snow drift upon Mount Tarrar - 22nd of January 1829*, watercolour with bodycolour, 1829

codicils; a microfilm of the entire Bequest is also available for consultation.

Turner sketched constantly, mainly in pencil, but occasionally using watercolour, either on the spot or as a later addition. While most of these sketches are now in Tate Britain, the British Museum's watercolours are largely finished works, made for exhibition at the Royal Academy, as the basis for engravings, or commissioned by individual patrons. They came to the Department through four main bequests - Salting, Henderson, Sale and Lloyd. The last contains sixty-one of the freshest examples, carefully preserved by their donor from exposure to harmful natural light, which by the terms of the Lloyd bequest can never be lent.

The British Museum owns a virtually complete collection of prints after Turner, nearly nine hundred compositions. He exploited printmaking as a means of self-advertisement in his *Liber Studiorum*, a series of seventy-one prints in etched outline and mezzotint. They were based on monochrome drawings inspired by Claude Lorrain's *Liber Veritatis* (1635-82), and were intended not only as a record of Turner's work, but also as a kind of visual treatise on landscape art.



Right: J.M.W. Turner, *Vale of Ashburnham*, watercolour, 1816

In the late 1820s Turner conceived a plan to leave the contents of his studio to the nation with the intention that a special gallery should be built for the purpose of their display by the Trustees of the National Gallery. This did not happen until the Clore Gallery was opened as an adjunct to the Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain) in 1986, when the nineteen thousand drawings, watercolours and sketchbooks which had been housed in The British Museum since 1931, were united with the oil paintings from the Turner Bequest. The library of the Department of Prints and Drawings contains a photocopy of Turner's will with its four

## Works in Other Collections

<b>London</b>	British Library Tate Britain Victoria and Albert Museum
<b>UK</b>	Ashmolean Museum, Oxford Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge Manchester City Art Gallery National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester
<b>Ireland</b>	National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin
<b>USA</b>	Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

## Further Reading

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