

National Gallery – open on New Year's Day

The Gallery is open on 1 January from 12 noon until 5 pm; from 2 January opening hours revert to normal: Monday to Sunday 10 am – 5 pm, Thursday 10 am – 7 pm *Admission is free*

In keeping with a century-old tradition, New Year's Day at the National Gallery Complex in Edinburgh will be marked by the opening of the annual exhibition of watercolours by J M W Turner (1775–1851). The 38 works on display were bequeathed in 1900 by Henry Vaughan, a London art collector who amassed an outstanding group of watercolours by the British painter. A perennial favourite in the Gallery's exhibition calendar, the display runs throughout January, providing a thoughtful counterpoint to the more energetic celebrations of Edinburgh's Hogmanay, and a welcome injection of light and colour during the darkest month of the year.

Recognised as perhaps the greatest of all British artists, Turner was a master of watercolour painting, using the medium to create stunning land and seascapes, topographical views and designs for book illustrations. Vaughan acquired examples from every period of the artist's career, and chose each with a connoisseur's eye for quality. The exquisite works in his bequest range from early wash drawings of the 1790s, to colourful and atmospheric watercolour sketches of Continental Europe, executed in the 1830s and 1840s.

For Turner, as for many artists and writers at the end of the eighteenth century, the vastness and violence of nature inspired a sense of awe, or even a terror, which was described as an experience of the 'Sublime'. It was the opportunity to express these emotions through landscape painting which attracted Turner repeatedly to the mountains of Britain and the Continent, and to paint the savage elemental forces seen

in avalanches, storms and mountainous seas. These experiences can be seen in works such as *Loch Coruisk, Skye* which was painted after one of the artist's trips to the Scottish Highlands, in 1831, and *Sion, Capital of the Canton Valais*, which was created following one of his many journeys to the Swiss Alps.

Turner also visited Venice on three occasions, in 1819, 1833 and 1840, and the Vaughan Bequest features six of the artist's stunning views of the city.



Credit: The National Gallery of Scotland

In *The Piazzetta, Venice*, one of Turner's most spectacular Venetian studies, a bolt of lightening dramatically illuminates the Doge's Palace and St. Mark's Basilica. Turner created such effects by scratching away to reveal the paper once he had painted on it: he sometimes used his thumbnail, which he is reputed to have grown like an 'eagle-claw', for such a purpose.

Other works, such as *The Grand Canal by the Salute, Venice*, and *The Sun of Venice*, which were made in the city in 1840, demonstrate Turner's consummate mastery of atmospheric lighting effects. In these watercolours, light itself seems to have become the main subject.

For much of his career, Turner was engaged in commissions to provide illustrations for books, and many of his trips were undertaken with a specific publishing project in mind. The artist's prolific activities as an illustrator are represented here by a number of images, including scenes painted for Robert Cadell's collected editions of the *Poetical and Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*.

In his will Henry Vaughan stipulated that the Turner watercolours must not be subjected to permanent display, since

continual exposure to light would result in their fading. He specified that the collection could only be shown in January, when daylight is at its weakest, and as a result the annual exhibition has become a much-loved tradition at the National Gallery of Scotland.



TURNER IN JANUARY: THE VAUGHAN BEQUEST

1 – 31 January 2011

THE NATIONAL GALLERY COMPLEX, The Mound, Edinburgh

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www.nationalgalleries.org

Exhibition sponsored by Artemis Investment Management Ltd