

# Turner on tour at the National Galleries

From New Year's Day National Galleries of Scotland celebrates the 250th birthday of artist, Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), with a special exhibition.

Visitors to the Turner in January exhibition will have the opportunity to see a new selection of over 30 watercolours that have never been seen before in Scotland, in an exchange with the National Gallery of Ireland.

Turner in January: Ireland's Vaughan Bequest, opens at the Royal Scottish Academy building in Edinburgh at midday on 1 January 2025. The free exhibition includes a watercolour of Edinburgh from 1801 that has never been displayed in the city before.

This once in a lifetime exhibition is a celebratory take on a keenly awaited and much-loved annual tradition that has been taking place since 1901.

Renowned art collector Henry Vaughan owned over 200 drawings, watercolours and prints by Turner, which he divided in his will between galleries in Edinburgh, Dublin and London. And 38 of these watercolours were given to the people of Scotland, on the condition that they are only displayed in the month of January, when light levels are at their lowest.

This means that these works still possess a freshness and an intensity of colour, almost 200 years since they were created.

Now, in an exciting exchange, simultaneous exhibitions will see Ireland's Vaughan Bequest make a special trip to the National Galleries of Scotland, while Scotland's Vaughan Bequest will go on display at the National Gallery of Ireland. Those familiar with Turner in January are sure to notice how both collections complement each other.

Visitors will be able to marvel in sweeping seascapes, dramatic landscapes and spectacular cities.

The most famous British artist of the 19th Century, Turner's career spanned over 50 years.

He experimented constantly with technique and colour, creating landscapes that still astonish today. In his younger years Turner toured Britain extensively, as war made travel to Europe impossible. He first travelled abroad in 1802 and from 1819 onwards he undertook sketching tours abroad almost every year, visiting France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Austria and Switzerland.

The panoramic Edinburgh from below Arthur's Seat (1801) will be on display in the city it depicts for the first time. A moody view of Auld Reekie captured on Turner's first visit to Edinburgh in the summer of 1801, dark storm clouds loom over Edinburgh Castle, rain pouring on the horizon as cows drink peacefully in the foreground.

When Turner first visited the Alps in 1802, the trip transformed his understanding of landscape, which was reflected in his boundary-pushing

depiction of the mountains, rocks and glaciers. In *The Great Fall of the Reichenbach*, Switzerland (1802), Turner emphasises the sublime drama and majestic height of the 200-hundred-foot waterfall by including a tiny, ant-like figure on a rocky outcrop to indicate scale.

Both the Scottish and Irish Vaughan Bequests include expressive watercolours painted on Turner's visit to the Aosta valley in the Alps in 1836, where the artist uses a great variety of watercolour techniques – scratching out, sponging out and working freely in wet watercolour – to depict his beloved mountains.

Venice, city of light and water, held a special fascination for Turner. His third and final visit was in August 1840, when the stormy summer weather inspired a series of tempestuous watercolours recording dramatic atmospheric effects around the city. *Storm at the Mouth of the Grand Canal* (1840) comes to Edinburgh from Ireland's Vaughan Bequest. Also on exhibition will be *The Doge's Palace and Piazzetta, Venice* (1840), a golden evening view of gondolas and fishing boats clustered against the backdrop of Venice's most celebrated buildings.

Ireland's Vaughan Bequest includes outstanding examples of watercolours created to be engraved and published as a print series. A highlight of the exhibition will be *A Ship against the Mewstone, at the Entrance to Plymouth Sound* (c.1814), from *Picturesque Views on the Southern Coast of England*.

A Royal Navy ship is shown labouring in heavy swell at a notorious danger point on the Devon coast. In this series, Turner aimed to record the landscape and working lives of places and people living along the south coast. In Clovelly Bay, North Devon (c.1822), another jewel-like watercolour from the same series, he shows in great detail the work of quarrying limestone. Also on show will be A Shipwreck off Hastings (c.1825), which was probably produced for Turner's Ports of England print series.

Turner in January: Ireland's Vaughan Bequest truly is a first for Scotland, with most displayed in their original frames and even Henry Vaughan's original display cabinet.

Charlotte Topsfield, exhibition curator at the National Galleries of Scotland, said: "Exchanging Vaughan Bequest Turners is an idea that Edinburgh and Dublin have been discussing for a long time. We are so excited to be working together on this historic swap in Turner's anniversary year. It will be such a marvelous celebration for the people of Scotland to enjoy – a real once in a lifetime opportunity to commemorate a very special painter."

Anne Hodge, exhibition curator at the National Gallery of Ireland said: "I am delighted that in January 2025 visitors to the National Galleries Scotland will be able to see Turner's wonderfully expressive vision of a rainy Edinburgh along with all 31 watercolours that Henry Vaughan decided to leave to Dublin. It is a great privilege for

me to have worked so closely with colleagues in Edinburgh to make this project a reality.”

Turner in January: Ireland’s Vaughan Bequest opens at the Royal Scottish Academy building at 12pm on 1 January and is free to visit.

This exhibition has been created in partnership with the National Gallery of Ireland. It is supported thanks to players of People’s Postcode Lottery and Sir Ewan and Lady Christine Brown.



Pic caption Charlotte Topsfield print and drawings curator at National Galleries of Scotland.

Pic Neil Hanna



Pic caption Sarah Sia (National Galleries of Scotland)  
enjoying some of Turner's treasurers.  
Pic Neil Hanna



Pic caption Sarah Sia (National Galleries of Scotland)

enjoying some of Turner's treasurers.  
Pic Neil Hanna