

# Turner's Edinburgh on show in the city

**With its dark storm clouds and sheets of rain pounding the city of Edinburgh, it could almost have been painted today.**

A landscape painting of the capital by the artist JMW Turner has gone on display in the city for the first time since it was painted over 200 years ago.

Turner, the most famous British artist of the 19th century, painted "Edinburgh from below Arthur's Seat" during his first visit to the city in 1801.

From his viewpoint , he captured the dark storm clouds looming over Edinburgh Castle and rain pouring down on the Old Town while cows drink peacefully in the foreground.

The moody watercolour was one of over 200 pictures by Turner owned by art collector Henry Vaughan, which he divided in his will between galleries in Edinburgh, Dublin and London in 1900.

Some 38 watercolours were given to the people of Scotland and are displayed each year in the month of January when light levels are at their lowest.

The remarkable view of Edinburgh, however, was one of 31 pictures given to Ireland.

As a result, it has never been seen in the city it depicts.

Now, for the first time, the National Galleries of Scotland

and the National Gallery of Ireland have swapped collections as part of special celebrations to mark Turner's 250th birthday.

Turner in January: Ireland's Vaughan Bequest, has opened at the Royal Scottish Academy building on the Mound. Thousands are expected to see the free exhibition, which runs until the end of this month.

Curator Charlotte Topsfield said: "Henry Vaughan, the London art collector, bequeathed 38 Turner watercolours to the gallery in 1900 with the condition that they can only be exhibited all at once, free of charge and in the month of January and no longer.

"Our Turner in January exhibition has become a much loved tradition, but Vaughan also bequeathed a parallel set to the National Gallery of Ireland.

"Vaughan did not specify where the pictures should be shown but 2025 is the 250th anniversary of Turner's birth so it seemed like a good year to do an exchange."

Vaughan specified which pictures would go to each gallery and the collections complement each other.

Both span Turner's career from the 1790s to the 1840s, and represent key areas of the artist's work, such as paintings of Venice and the Swiss Alps.

It is thought Turner may have sketched the Edinburgh landscape on the spot and then completed the watercolour back at his lodgings.

Ms Topsfield said: "Edinburgh from below Arthur's Seat is a fantastic watercolour. It is a very recognisable view, from a point between the end of Salisbury Crags and Sampson's Ribs, using the flank of Arthur's Seat as a framing device.

"The tower of St Giles (Cathedral) is silhouetted against the

light and there is a fantastic view of Edinburgh Castle in the background and rooftops in the foreground.

“The weather is what makes it so special. It is almost a character in the painting, as the rain storm sweeps across the picture.

“But you know there is better weather ahead because the light is catching the castle and the horizon is clear.”

She added: “We don’t know why Vaughan chose to send it to Dublin. However, we do have two watercolours from the same tour in the summer of 1801, showing the Falls of Clyde and a view of Durham that he did on the way to Scotland.”

Turner toured Britain extensively in his younger years, as war made travel to Europe impossible.

He first travelled abroad in 1802 and from 1819 he undertook sketching tours abroad almost every year, visiting France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Austria and Switzerland.

Ireland’s Vaughan Bequest includes outstanding examples of watercolours created to be engraved and published as a print series.

Highlights include *A Ship against the Mewstone*, at the Entrance to Plymouth Sound (c.1814) and *A Shipwreck off Hastings* (c.1825).

The exchange means a simultaneous exhibition will see Scotland’s Vaughan Bequest go on display at the National Gallery of Ireland.

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 runs until the end of this month and is free to visit.



Sarah Sia (National Galleries of Scotland) enjoying some of Turner’s treasurers. PHOTO Neil Hanna