

TURNER WHISTLER MONET

SPONSORED BY ERNST & YOUNG

TATE BRITAIN, 10 FEBRUARY – 15 MAY 2005



JAMES ABBOTT MCNEILL WHISTLER *NOCTURNE PALACES* 1879-80

TEACHER AND STUDENT NOTES WITH KEY WORK CARDS

12 A4 CARDS WITH INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION, FULL COLOUR IMAGES, DISCUSSION POINTS, LINKS AND ACTIVITIES. FOR USE IN THE GALLERY OR CLASSROOM. SUITABLE FOR TEACHERS OF ALL LEVELS AND STUDENTS OF KEY STAGES 4 AND 5. BY MIQUETTE ROBERTS.

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

When Joseph Mallord William Turner died in London in 1851 the young American James McNeill Whistler was seventeen years old and Claude Monet, born in Paris, was a boy of eleven. The argument of this exhibition is that the two younger artists took aspects of Turner's painting which they developed in their own work, each transforming this influence into something very much his own. While many people have connected the names of Turner and Monet because Turner can be seen as a precursor of French Impressionism, the association between Whistler and the other two artists is much less well established. This exhibition contains 100 paintings, watercolours, prints and pastels by these three world famous artists and focusses on the watery spaces of the capital cities, London, Paris and Venice. It is a joint venture by curators in Canada, Paris and London. Shown previously in Ottawa and in Paris, it will run at Tate Britain from 10 February to 15 May 2005.

THE EXHIBITION LAYOUT

The exhibition is divided into seven sections each with its own theme. It starts with a room showing oil paintings and watercolours by Turner which were on display in London when Whistler and Monet visited the city. The next section shows Whistler and Monet's early paintings of London which record their move from a realistic to a more atmospheric approach to landscape. One entire room is devoted to Whistler's Thames Nocturnes. Monet's series of mornings on the Seine are displayed with Turner's varied views of Lake Lucerne in Switzerland. A small room focusses on Turner's paintings of the burning of the House of Parliament. The next room contains the younger artists' views of London dating from their return visits to the city in the 1880s and 1890s. The last room in the exhibition contains all three artists' paintings of Venice.

VISITING THE EXHIBITION

Exhibition tickets for school groups of more than ten students are available **in advance only** from Education Bookings on 020 7887 3959 at a cost of £4 per student and teacher so long as payment is received two weeks before the visit. As the available tickets are limited it is essential to book well in advance. All groups with more than 30 students will be split and asked to enter the exhibition at thirty minute intervals. If you would like to use the Schools Area to have lunch or to use locker spaces please book these when you book your tickets (there is limited space available).

As all exhibitions at Tate can be busy, you cannot lecture, but discuss works in a conversational manner to groups of no more than six students at a time. If possible, brief your students before they enter the exhibition, and if you have a large group, we suggest that you divide into smaller groups and follow the suggestions in the pack.

HOW TO USE THIS PACK AND STRUCTURE YOUR VISIT

The aims of this pack are to provide an introduction to the exhibition and to the themes highlighted by its curators, to offer information about key works on display, and to suggest themes and issues to discuss. It also offers links to work outside the exhibition. Call 020 7887 8734 to check which works are on

display. The key work cards can be used to help focus work in small groups in the exhibition, and for preparation or follow up work in the classroom.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE GALLERY

There are free teachers' packs on *The Unknown Turner* and *Turner and Venice*, available at the Activities and Groups desk in the Rotunda or by calling Education Bookings on 020 7887 3959. *Your Brain on the Page*, a student sketchbook resource, includes a sketching exercise based on a painting by Turner. This is available from Tate shops or by calling 020 7887 8876. Price £2.50.

There is a **free exhibition guide** available to all visitors, and an **audioguide** price: £3.50 adults and £3 concessions.

The **Tate Britain shops** have a selection of books, journals, catalogues, postcards and related materials.

WEBSITES

Relevant websites are suggested in the text. They include:

Tate Online www.tate.org.uk

Tate Learning www.tate.org.uk/learning

This site includes a dedicated area for teachers and group leaders, and teacher resource notes for all major Tate exhibitions including past Turner exhibitions

You can find articles about the exhibition at its previous showings:

www.wsws.org/articles/2004/aug2004/twmo-a31.shtml

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A38873-2004Aug27.html

www.thebluehammer.com/articles2/turner.html

www.thecatseyes.com/show.asp?show_id=2424

There is a French language Mallarmé site:

www.mallarme.net/article89.html

FURTHER READING

General

Katharine Lochnan and others, *Turner Whistler Monet* (the exhibition catalogue) 2004, Tate Publishing in association with the Art Gallery of Ontario

The three artists and Mallarmé

David Blayney Brown, *Turner in the Tate Collection*, 2002, Tate Publishing

Ian Warrell, *Turner and Venice*, 2003, Tate Publishing

Anne Koval, *Whistler in his Time*, 1994, Tate Publishing

Richard Dormant and Margaret MacDonald, *Whistler* (exhibition catalogue) 1994, Tate Publishing

Sylvie Patin, (translation) *Monet: The Ultimate Impressionist*, 1993, Harry N Abrams

Nicholas Reed, *Monet and the Thames: Paintings and Modern Views of Monet's London*, 1998, Liburne Press

Yves Peyré, *Mallarmé: Un destin d'Écriture*, 1998 Gallimard/Réunion des Musées Nationaux

INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTISTS' LIVES AND WORK

At the time in the early 1870s when Monet was in London for the first of many visits, and Whistler was painting his first Nocturnes, England was widely seen as the country that had produced the greatest landscapes, with Turner its finest painter. After he had returned to France, Monet painted *Impression, Sunrise* in 1872, which would give Impressionism its name. As the movement grew in fame the centre for great landscape painting shifted from Britain to France.

This part of the pack provides some background information about the lives of the artists to give you a framework for the paintings you will see in the exhibition. The sections on Turner and Monet are organised around works on display in London galleries to encourage you to take your students to see them during and beyond the duration of the exhibition. The best British collection outside the Tate of the work of Whistler is at the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow University. As you may not be able to visit there, a short summary of his career is provided.

JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER (1775–1851): ON DISPLAY IN THE CLORE GALLERY AT TATE BRITAIN

Turner's long career as an artist can be summarised as a move from darkness into light. You can follow that trajectory in the Clore Gallery at Tate Britain. It was his fascination with light and colour that made Turner's work so important to Whistler and Monet. When he painted his *Self-Portrait* c1799 (room 35 in the Clore Gallery) as a young man of twenty-four, Turner showed himself gazing out from a dark background towards the light. Although this composition is not original, as Rembrandt used it, it is tempting to interpret it symbolically. After a childhood in Covent Garden darkened by his mother's descent into madness, Turner could see a sunny career stretching before him as his work was beginning to sell well. As his fortunes improved so many of his canvases lightened, culminating in works like *Sun setting over a Lake* c1840–5, which is in the exhibition, and *Norham Castle, Sunrise* c1845, which you can see in room 35 of the Clore Gallery.

To follow the steps leading the artist towards light, you could show your students the near darkness of *Buttermere Lake, with part of Cromackwater, Cumberland, a Shower* exh 1798 (room 37), in which even the rainbow has no colour, being merely a paler shade of dark. Why are early paintings like this and *Snowstorm: Hannibal and his Army crossing the Alps* exh 1812 (room 37), so dark? The clue lies in the fact that Turner chose Hannibal, a hero of ancient history, as his subject matter. As the son of a barber with no private fortune, Turner could only become an artist if he were able to sell his paintings. This meant that he had to understand the taste of his patrons. These were wealthy, often aristocratic men for whom the study of the classics was the cornerstone of education. By painting the kind of subject matter familiar only to this cultural élite Turner flattered them. He used dark tones found in old master paintings whose true colours were often concealed by brown discoloured varnish. It was only once his reputation was established that he allowed himself to discover the full brilliance of the sun, as in *The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire*, exh 1817 (room 35).

An important step in lightening his palette came about through his first visit to Italy, the destination for his patrons when they made the Grand Tour. Here he found warm colours under the heat of the sun. The results can be seen in *The Bay of Baiae, with Apollo and the Sibyl* exh 1823 (room 39). Notice that Turner still retains the classical subject matter but what a difference in colour from Hannibal! After that, sunshine reigns in an increasing number of works such as *The Dogano, San Giorgio, Citella, from the Steps of the Europa*, 1842, in the exhibition, painted after his final trip to Venice. Of course where the subject matter demanded, he would use darker shades, as in *Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, exh 1842 (room 43), the painting derided by a critic as having been painted in 'soapsuds and whitewash'. About the time he died Turner is reputed to have claimed that 'The Sun is God'. It had certainly dominated his work as it did the work of another painter of light, Claude Monet.

**CLAUDE MONET (1840–1926):
ON DISPLAY AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY**

Although born in Paris, Claude Monet was brought up in what was then the very important Normandy port of Le Havre. It was there that he changed course from caricaturist to landscape painter, encouraged by local painter Eugène Boudin. His first landscapes such as *La Pointe de la Hève, Sainte Adresse* 1864 (room 43 in the National Gallery) were of the coastal scenery surrounding the industrial town. Although landscape was then considered to be an inferior branch of art, this painting was unprovocative compared with the notorious *Impression, Sunrise* 1872–3, Musée Marmottan, Paris, which unfortunately will not follow the exhibition to London. When that picture was first shown in 1874, a critic scornfully called it and all the works displayed with it, 'Impressionist' and the name stuck. It caused a furore because it went against all the conventions of 'finish' whereby an exhibited painting was expected to have a smooth surface and to be a detailed representation of reality. The rough finish and hasty brushstrokes of *Impression, Sunrise* came about because Monet had to work very quickly to record exact atmospheric conditions in the short time that they lasted. Thereafter the Impressionist label was applied to any painting that appeared unfinished or rapidly painted. In fact, Monet's intent observation of light effects was typical of a period during which interest in the discipline and methods of science was spreading.

Of the paintings by Monet in room 43, which looks most quickly painted and unfinished to you? Is it *Bathers at La Grenouillère* 1869 or *The Beach at Trouville* 1870, or something completely different? It is difficult for a viewer today to decide because we no longer judge a painting by its degree of finish. Or do we?

When he painted *The Gare St-Lazare* (room 43) in 1877, Monet was living at Argenteuil in the outskirts of Paris, nowadays a thirty minute train journey from that station. He had come back from his first visit to London six years earlier. There he had admired the work of Turner, including *Rain, Steam and Speed* (which you can see in the Sackler Room), painted before 1844, one of the first ever paintings to show the recently constructed railway network. Monet is famous for working in series such as the seven canvases of the Gare St-Lazare that he showed at the fourth Impressionist exhibition. In 1883 he moved to the house at Giverny, now world famous for its beautiful garden, and lived there until his death. In the garden and its neighbourhood he painted many other series including twenty-three versions of *Poplars on the Epte* (there are currently two on show in room 43) of 1891. Towards the end of his life he created mammoth canvases of waterlilies intended to be shown together inside a gallery, thereby transforming it into a virtual garden. *The Water Lilies*, painted after 1916, and on loan to Tate Modern, is one of that series.

**JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER (1834–1903):
ON DISPLAY AT TATE BRITAIN**

Apart from his Nocturnes, James McNeill Whistler is best known as a portraitist. You can see an example in *Harmony in Grey and Green: Miss Cicely Alexander* 1872 on display in room 17 at Tate Britain. Notice that, as in the Nocturnes, Whistler makes it plain that the appearance and personality of the little girl is subordinate to the way the artist has arranged colours and shapes – it is like a musical composition.

Whistler, born in Lowell, Massachusetts, spent his early years in St Petersburg where his father was a railway engineer. Having abandoned his studies at West Point Military Academy he studied art in Paris in 1856 where, influenced by Courbet, he worked in a realist manner. In 1859, after moving to London, his *Thames Set* of etchings continued this trend. They were described as 'wonderful tangles of rigging, yardarms and rope' by the poet Charles Baudelaire when they were exhibited in Paris in 1862. The dramatic change in Whistler's style from realism to aestheticism can be seen in room 15 of Tate Britain in a portrait of the artist's mistress Joanna Hiffernan called *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*, 1864. The painting is a composition in which the girl's dress and the mantelpiece on which she leans are variations on a theme of white. These are offset by touches of colour in the vase, the fan and the spray of azalea in the foreground. His interest in aesthetics had been stimulated by his love of Japanese prints and his collection of oriental porcelain. From that time on Whistler was primarily motivated by aesthetics, making paintings in which subject matter was, as he acknowledged, merely a pretext for an arrangement of line and colour. He developed the ability to see beauty in ugliness, painting harmonious Nocturnes of the stinking fog-bound Thames and explaining his ideas on beauty in *The Ten O'Clock lecture* of 1885 which Stéphane Mallarmé later translated into French. Such a lover of beauty could not have lived in ordinary surroundings. He supervised the interior decoration, both of the White House where he lived briefly until bankrupted by his lawsuit with Ruskin, and of the home of his patron, the Liverpool shipping magnate Frederick Leyland, who had suggested the term Nocturne to him. Far outstripping his instructions, Whistler created the 'Peacock Room' in 1876–77 in Leyland's dining room at Princes Gate, London, painting peacocks on the leather panels covering the walls. The room, which contained Chinese porcelain as well as Whistler's painting *La Princesse du Pays de Porcelaine*, is now housed in the Freer Gallery in Washington.

KEY THEMES IN THE EXHIBITION

LINKS AND INFLUENCES CONNECTING THE THREE ARTISTS

Whistler's connection with London came through his half-sister Deborah who was married to surgeon and amateur etcher Francis Seymour Haden. It was through his brother-in-law that Whistler became interested in art and particularly in the work of Turner. Around 1849 when Whistler declared his intention of becoming an artist, his mother described him as one of Turner's admirers. During the three weeks he spent in London on the way to Paris to start his career, Whistler went to see Turner's work in a display at the National Gallery arranged by Turner's admirer and promoter, the critic John Ruskin. In spring 1863 Whistler moved to 7 Lindsey Row, Chelsea, close to the house where Turner had spent his last years. He used the sons of Turner's boatman to ferry him along the river. Katharine Lochnan, lead curator of the exhibition, believes that it was jealousy that made Ruskin so angry about Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* 1875, which he scornfully described as a pot of paint flung in the public's face. As Ruskin had become famous through his defence of Turner he was wary of others poaching on what he saw as his territory. The irony is that, bankrupted by the ensuing court case, Whistler was rescued by a commission from the Fine Arts Society to produce etchings of Venice, a city associated with some of Turner's greatest paintings. While he was there he adopted Turner's method of using coloured paper as a base for his work. As a result, pastels like *Salute: Sundown*, 1880, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, are very Turnerian.

Monet saw Turner's work for the first time when he came to London in 1870 and, according to Camille Pissarro who was there at the same time, they were both very much impressed by it. Monet said admiringly of Turner's *Frosty Morning*, exh 1813, on display in room 35 at Tate Britain, that he had painted it with his eyes wide open. In his own paintings of Charing Cross railway bridge he may have had Turner's famous *Rain, Steam and Speed*, exh 1844, in mind, and the intense colouring of his Houses of Parliament paintings of 1904, with the sun shining through fog, could remind one of Turner's record of the burning down of the old parliamentary buildings in 1834. Was Monet's decision to paint in Venice in 1908 inspired by the example of Turner?

When this exhibition was shown in Canada some reviewers were not convinced by the argument that Turner lies behind many of Whistler and Monet's innovations. Do you agree with them?

POLLUTION

Had you ever wished to be alive in the nineteenth century, what follows should speedily reconcile you to life in contemporary London. Fact one: the capital city's sewage flowed into the Thames through underground rivers. Fact two: the capital's water supply came from the Thames. It was not realised at the time that cholera was waterborne so Londoners continued to drink water from the Thames. In the first epidemic of 1831/2, 6,535 people died in London and Turner was terrified that he would become a victim. In the next epidemic of 1848/9 more than twice that number died. The Great Stink of 1858, which was caused by an exceptionally hot summer, forced prime minister Benjamin Disraeli to authorise and fund a drainage system for London. But it was not until 1887 that the discharge into the Thames ceased and by 1891 the great sanitation hero, Sir Joseph Bazalgette, had organised the system which worryingly for us – don't we need a new one? – still remains in place today, by housing a system of interconnected sewers under the Embankments.

As well as water pollution there was airborne pollution. The dense fog so beloved by Monet and Mallarmé killed people too. And no wonder. By the end of the nineteenth century approximately 18 million tons of coal were being burned in London every year while, in 1892, 200 tons of fine soot entered the air daily. Today's viewers, ignorant of these facts, could easily be deceived into thinking that Whistler's Nocturnes are just pretty pictures. His contemporaries knew better. In 1877 Sydney Colvin, Slade Professor of Art at Cambridge, saw in them 'the indefinable atmosphere above the houses, half duskiess, half glare, which is the effluence of the city's life' while for critic John Ruskin, physical pollution mirrored the nation's low standards of morality.

These are the horrific facts. It is amazing to think that Whistler and Monet produced such beautiful paintings out of them. They were able to see beauty in what most people would have considered extreme ugliness.

WORKING IN SERIES

For Turner and Monet, the impetus to paint repeated views of the same subject sprang from a fascination with the way in which changing light affects the colours in nature. If you think how many times the light can change in one single day altering colours continuously, you can imagine how many canvases would be required by an artist like Claude Monet who wanted to record every change as it happened. For a few years Monet and his fellow Impressionists scrupulously recorded a particular effect of light on colour only while it lasted. They would then start another painting, only allowing themselves to return to the first canvas if an identical light effect occurred. Because of this procedure Monet often had many canvases on the go at the same time. On his later visits to London, however, he changed his method of work. He had now trained his visual memory to such an extent that he felt able to complete his canvases back home at Giverny. By now too he planned his paintings as a series which meant that he intended them to be viewed together and felt able to alter colours to make the paintings a harmonious ensemble. Examples are the 1897 paintings of an arm of the Seine near Giverny and the 1904 paintings of the Houses of Parliament.

Monet was able to record his impressions rapidly out of doors because he had lightweight equipment. Metal tubes had been invented in 1842 containing ready prepared oil colours. The situation was very different for Turner. Such tubes only became available in the very last years of his life: it was not really practical for him to set off to paint out of doors carrying pigments, oils, turpentine, containers for mixing etc. So he had to invent ways of coping with the difficulty of being as accurate as possible even though he was working away from the scene in his studio. One solution was to make pencil outline drawings of buildings on the spot and then, nearby, perhaps in his hotel bedroom, to record his colour impressions in watercolour. These drawings and watercolours served as an aide-mémoire when he came to paint oils for exhibition back in London. It may be because painting on the spot was so difficult for him that there are only a few examples where he works obsessively from the same motif at different times of day, for instance in the watercolours of *Lake Lucerne, the Bay of Uri*.

Perhaps the most ingenious example of a series of works produced from the same subject are Whistler's etchings called *Nocturnes: Palaces*, made in Venice in 1879–80. In these Whistler alters the appearance of the buildings by varying the tone of the ink on his etching plate as well as the way he wiped the ink over it. By these methods he was able to vary the viewer's impression of time of day, weather and atmosphere.

LINKS BETWEEN ART AND POETRY

All three artists had close connections with poetry. Turner would have liked to be considered a poet as well as an artist and composed a lengthy work called *The Fallacies of Hope*, from which he offered quotations to accompany many of his exhibited oils. Unfortunately no-one has ever valued this work very highly. He much admired the poetry of Lord Byron and shared his opinions on, for example, the terrible wastage of life in war and the sad state of Italy in decline.

Stéphane Mallarmé owned some of Monet's paintings and it was Monet who introduced Whistler to the poet in 1888. Both Whistler and Mallarmé also admired and were influenced by the verse and ideas of another poet, Charles Baudelaire. It was Baudelaire who had commended the city and modern life to artists, believing that the seamy side of life, *l'horreur de la vie* should be of as great interest to them as its other extreme, *l'ecstase de la vie*. In his own poetry he showed that it was possible to create beauty out of the most unpromising subject matter, even from a rotting corpse. When Whistler's early etchings of London, *The Thames Set*, were exhibited in Paris in January 1862 Baudelaire praised them for revealing 'the profound and intricate poetry of a vast capital'. These etchings, included in the exhibition, are realistic descriptions of industry and the people working along the river at Wapping. Whistler's later Nocturnes, inspired by the more westerly reaches of the river at Battersea, are as distinct from his early depictions as manual workers from aesthetes but they might still have been influenced by Baudelaire. In *Correspondances* the poet had claimed that sounds, perfumes and colours are all related to one another and Whistler's later work is a case in point. Both his painted Nocturnes and the musical versions that inspired them, by John Field and Frédéric Chopin, are mood creating. Like a composer writing his score or a poet intent on metres and rhymes, Whistler carefully organises the forms on his canvas. What he is doing is to exploit the capacity of nocturnal colours and shapes to create mood, using them as visual melodies.

It is easy to see why such paintings appealed to Mallarmé who had claimed that his aim was 'peindre non la chose mais l'effect qu'elle produit' (to paint not the thing but the effect that it creates). He was also a firm believer in mystery as an essential component of art. In his early work he achieved this sense of mystery by his choice of subject matter. Just as Whistler painted the Thames when its details were concealed by night, Mallarmé wrote about the fog creeping under the casements of his London home and smoked a pipe to erect a smokescreen between himself and the world. Later on his conception of mystery altered: he thought that poetry should be mysterious and resistant to immediate understanding: the reader should have to work hard at it in order to gain understanding. The work of art must, he believed, be multi-layered. In this respect he is possibly closer to Turner than to Whistler.

THE RIVER THAMES: A TOUR OF LONDON SITES

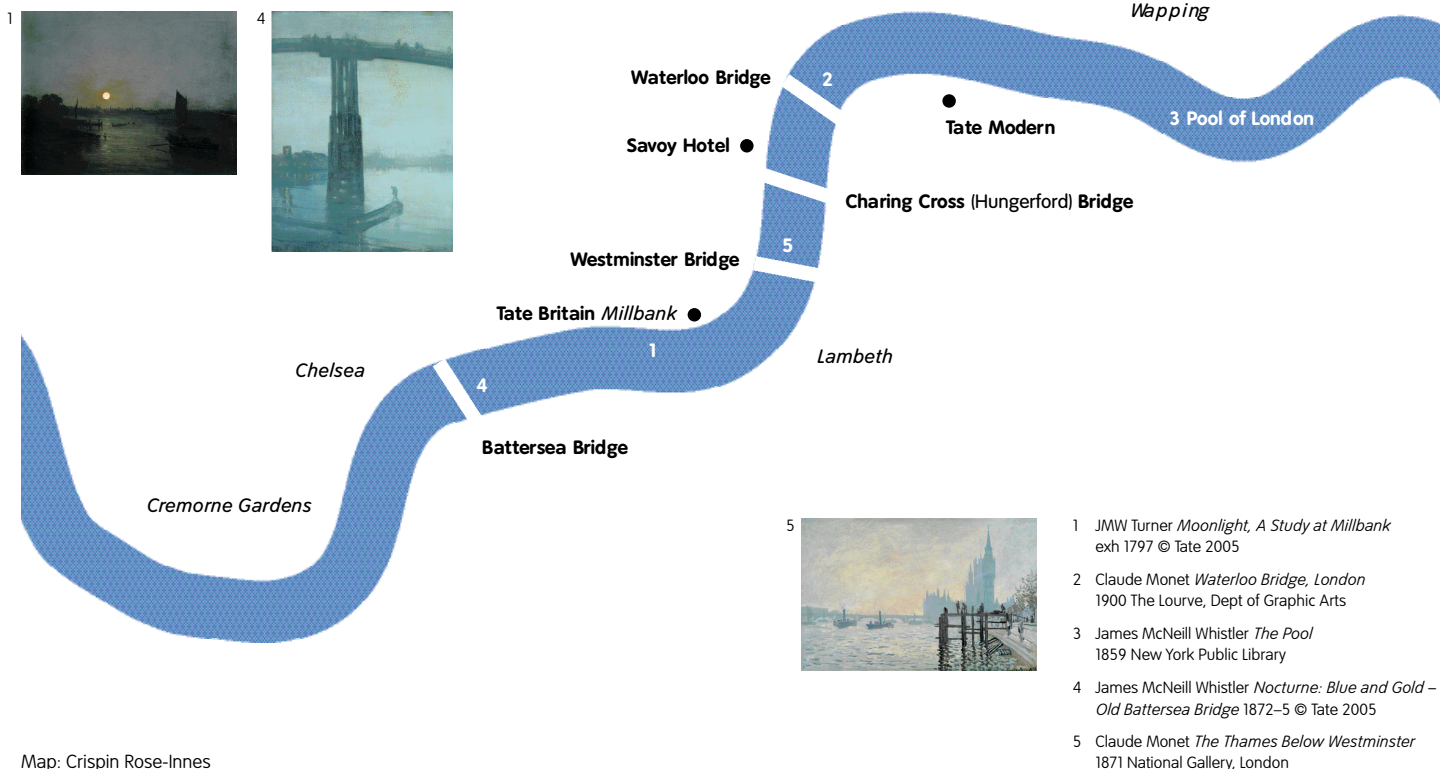
Many of the paintings you will see in the exhibition were inspired by sites along the river Thames. To get a feeling for the geography of London as it relates to this exhibition, we recommend that you take the Tate to Tate boat from Tate Britain to Tate Modern (call 020 7887 8888 for details) and then, more energetically, that you walk along Cheyne Walk in Chelsea (nearest tube station, Sloane Square), continuing west as far as the site of Cremorne Gardens.

1. THE JOURNEY NORTH BY BOAT – POINTS TO LOOK OUT FOR

As you set off from the pier in front of Tate Britain you will be near the site of Turner's *Moonlight, a Study at Millbank* exh 1797. In the boat, if you sit facing downstream, you will see St Thomas's Hospital on your right just before Westminster Bridge. It is from the terrace in front of the hospital that Monet painted the 1904 Houses of Parliament paintings. Turner painted the burning of the old Houses of Parliament from the same side of the river by the old Westminster Bridge. Whistler painted the new one (which opened in 1862) as it was being built. If you look back after you have passed under the bridge you will see Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament from the point of view recorded by Monet in *The Thames below Westminster* of 1871. The next bridge you will come to is the Charing Cross railway bridge (now known as the Hungerford Bridge) painted by Monet between 1899 and 1903. The Savoy Hotel is on your left between this bridge and the next which is Waterloo Bridge. Whistler made lithographs of the view of the Thames seen from the sixth floor of this hotel and Monet painted views upstream of Charing Cross railway bridge and downstream of old Waterloo Bridge.

2. THE WALK – SITES TO LOOK FOR

You could approach Cheyne Walk from Tite St, the site of Whistler's White House (now demolished). He designed the building with EW Godwin and it was completed in 1877. It was a showcase for the artist's skill as interior designer with the colour schemes of the rooms, the decorated furniture, even the design of the menus all supervised by Whistler. Unfortunately his bankruptcy meant that he only lived there for less than a year. On your way westwards along Cheyne Walk you will find Tudor House where DG Rossetti lived with the poet Algernon Swinburne. Whistler met both men in 1862 and became friends with them. He lived not far from them at 7, Lindsey Row, now 101 Cheyne Walk. It is from there, looking west, that he painted *Grey and Silver: Old Battersea Reach* 1863. This in its turn is near where Turner lived from 1846 till his death in 1851. It is a cottage, whose address was then 6 Davis Place, Cremorne New Rd, but is now part of Cheyne Walk. Nearby to the east was the wooden structure of Old Battersea Bridge, recorded by Whistler in *Brown and Silver: Old Battersea Bridge* 1859–65, and to the west were the pleasure gardens at Cremorne whose fireworks were featured in *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* 1875. Turner lived in his Chelsea cottage with Mrs Booth, a widow and his former landlady in the lodgings he frequented at Margate. Although there were no paparazzi in Turner's time, he treasured his privacy and did not want people to know where he lived. In Chelsea he went under the disguise of Admiral or Puggy Booth to remain incognito. His neighbours had no idea that he was a famous painter.



- 1 JMW Turner *Moonlight, A Study at Millbank* exh 1797 © Tate 2005
- 2 Claude Monet *Waterloo Bridge, London* 1900 The Louvre, Dept of Graphic Arts
- 3 James McNeill Whistler *The Pool* 1859 New York Public Library
- 4 James McNeill Whistler *Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge* 1872–5 © Tate 2005
- 5 Claude Monet *The Thames Below Westminster* 1871 National Gallery, London

LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM

Turner Whistler Monet provides the basis for a wide range of curriculum work, offering many cross-curricular links. It is a perfect opportunity for students of music as well as of literature to decide whether they agree with the poet Charles Baudelaire that connections exist between sound, colour and perfume. The exhibition continues to draw our attention to interactions between scientists and artists in the nineteenth century, previously explored in Tate Britain's *Pre-Raphaelite Vision* exhibition. The following suggestions supplement those included on the key work cards.

ENGLISH

Compare the processes of reading and looking at art

French poet Stéphane Mallarmé's friendship with both Claude Monet and James McNeill Whistler provides encouragement for all students to think about the similarities and differences involved in being a writer and a painter.

Primary

Look at a storybook which has an image on one side of a doublespread and text on the other. Ignore the text and 'read' the images for what they can tell you about the content of the story. Be sure to stick only to the information provided by the pictures. (It is easiest to do this with an unfamiliar book). Next read the text. What information does it give that cannot be deduced from the pictures?

Choose a painting in the exhibition, or a painting from a book and reverse the process. Work as a detective unpicking all the information you can find in the image. Now write a description of what you saw. Read your description to someone who has not seen the painting and ask them to paint or draw what they imagined as they listened to your description.

Secondary

Compare the processes of reading and of looking at art. What is better expressed in words, what in painting? What elements in the 'language' of art do not exist in writing? What medium would you choose for telling a story, for experimenting with colour? How comparable are images in art with those that appear in your mind as you read or dream?

For more on this subject, see the section in this pack on *Links between Art and Poetry* on the *Key Themes in the Exhibition* key work card.

FRENCH

Secondary

See *Links between Art and Poetry*, and for suggested comparisons between specific texts and artworks in the exhibition, see the key work cards on Whistler *By the Balcony* of 1896 and Turner *Venice: Looking across the Lagoon at Sunset* 1840.

ART AND DESIGN

Primary

The exhibition could be the focus for a KS1 and 2 investigation of pattern. Specific suggestions are included on key work cards for Whistler's *Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge* and *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*.

Secondary

KS3 students and beyond could consider pattern making and Whistler's aestheticism as a stage in the move to abstract art in the early years of the twentieth century.

Primary and secondary

The exhibition is relevant to students of all ages working on the theme of landscape and considering how to create atmosphere and to convey a sense of place.

SCIENCE

Primary and secondary

Part of the reason that light was so important to the artists featured in this exhibition was that they were working in an innovatory period when gas supplanted candlelight and electricity later took over from both. It was a period of discoveries in science when scientific method began to influence the practice of artists. More specifically it is relevant to KS1 and 2 investigation of light and dark and the environment, and to KS3 study of ecological relationships and light.

HISTORY

Primary and secondary

The exhibition focuses on pollution in London before the Clean Air Act of the 1950s. It is relevant to the KS 1 and 2 themes of Victorian Britain and what it was like to live in the past. At KS3 it relates to industrial changes.

MUSIC

Primary and secondary

Do you, like the painter Wassily Kandinsky, see colours in your mind's eye as you listen to music? Listen to Nocturnes by John Field or music by Chopin and discuss whether they relate to the mood created by Whistler in his paintings. Was Baudelaire right to believe that there are links between sound and colour?

Secondary

Compare Whistler's arrangements of form and colour to form and structure in music.



'THE GROUND WAS CUMBERED WITH RUSTY IRON MONSTERS OF STEAM-BOILERS, WHEELS, CRANKS, PIPES, FURNACES, PADDLES, ANCHORS, DIVING-BELLS, WINDMILL-SAILS, AND I KNOW NOT WHAT STRANGE OBJECTS, ACCUMULATED BY SOME SPECULATOR, AND GROVELLING IN THE DUST.'

Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 1849–50.

JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER (1775–1851) **Moonlight, a Study at Millbank exhibited 1797**

Oil on mahogany panel, 31.4 x 40.3 cm

Tate. Bequeathed by the artist 1856

Room 1 of the exhibition

BACKGROUND

This is a view of what once was a desolate area surrounding what is now Tate Britain. Although Turner painted the picture more than fifty years before the publication of *Great Expectations*, the grimness of the scene described by Dickens around the then prison at Millbank was not new. For a very long time the banks of the Thames had been unhealthy marshland.

Why did Turner choose such unpromising subject matter? Firstly for practical reasons. It was relatively near at hand; he could walk there from his home in Covent Garden. Secondly, by setting the scene in darkness he concealed its unattractive daytime appearance, focussing the spectator's attention on the Romantic atmosphere of moonlight reflected on water. Turner may have been influenced by Dutch seventeenth-century painters in exploiting the atmospheric qualities of nightfall.

Turner was only twenty-two when he exhibited this painting. Up till then he had painted watercolours of town and landscape. Before the invention of photography artists could make a good living in this way but they were considered to be craftsmen not artists. To be taken seriously as an artist it was necessary to paint in oils and exhibit your work at the Royal Academy. Turner approached his new technique cautiously by working in a limited palette of dark colours which set off the brilliance of the moon. Although the critic John Ruskin believed him to have been the greatest British painter ever, he did not think much of this early work, thinking it poorly painted with buildings and boats put together higgledy-piggledy. Yet the very casualness of his approach may help us to believe in the reality of the scene represented.

FOR DISCUSSION

Primary

- Compare this painting with others showing different light effects (sunlight, sunshine seen through fog, fireworks). Discuss how different light effects make you feel. Would you have liked to be there beside Turner on this moonlit night? In which painting would you best like to be?

Secondary

- Are you an admirer or a critic of the painting? In pairs, choose to be disapproving John Ruskin or a Royal Academician who has chosen to exhibit this fine painting on the gallery walls. Debate your case and see which of you can convince the other that the work is good/flawed.
- The focal point in this painting is the light source. Look at other works in the exhibition by all three artists and by Turner in the Clore Gallery. In how many of them is the light the focal point?

ACTIVITIES

Primary and secondary

- Try painting on wood (this painting is on mahogany) to find out how this is different from working on canvas or paper.
- Sketch the view of the Thames from the covered Tate to Tate pier across the road from Tate Britain. You will be working near to where Turner saw this view.

Secondary

- Find a window with as dull or ugly or messy a view through it as possible. Now transform that dullness by painting/drawing it in crayons/charcoal by moonlight. Have you transformed the prospect and made it beautiful? Does it change the way you feel about the view?

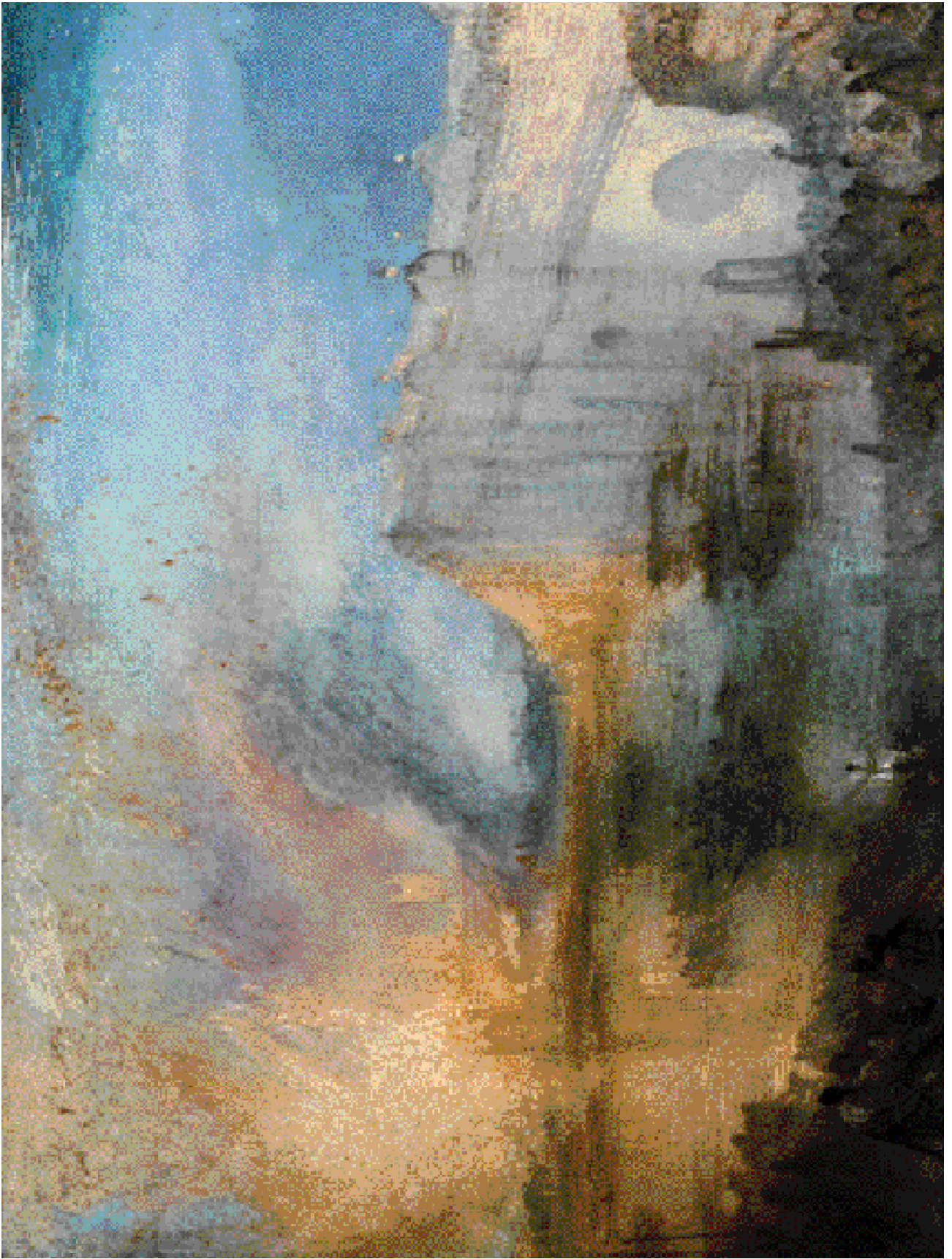
LINKS

There are many reasons why artists may be interested in painting nature at night. Visit www.nationalgallery.co.uk to see an example of the kind of Dutch painting that might have influenced Turner. It is by Aert van der Neer (1603/4–1677) *A River near a Town*, by *Moonlight*, about 1645.

Visit www.tate.org.uk/collections to compare this with *A Moonlight with a Lighthouse, Coast of Tuscany*, exh 1789 by Joseph Wright of Derby. Like Turner, Wright was influenced by seventeenth-century Dutch art. He is concerned with the mystery of the night, how everything changes in the dark, making you question what you see, what you know and what you feel. But can you work out exactly what is happening in this mysterious painting?

In *Fishermen at Sea* 1796, Tate, another night scene by Turner of about the same time as *Moonlight, A Study at Millbank*, the mood is somewhat different. Here the Romantic beauty of moonlight combines with a sense that the fishermen are in danger. They have to work by night despite storms at sea and treacherous rocks.

At other periods painters connected twilight with religious feeling. In JF Millet's *L'Angélu*, 1857–59, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, the tolling of Church bells in the evening announces the end of the day's work for farm workers in the field.



WHEN SENT IN [IT] WAS A MERE DAB OF SEVERAL COLOURS, AND
'WITHOUT FORM AND VOID', LIKE CHAOS BEFORE THE CREATION'.

EV Rippingille speaking about a painting by Turner of the burning of the Houses of Parliament.

JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER (1775–1851)

The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, 16th October 1834 exhibited 1835

Oil on canvas 93 x 123 cm

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Room 5 of the exhibition

BACKGROUND

When a fire broke out in the cellars of the House of Commons it spread rapidly, reducing the buildings overnight to ashes. A large crowd assembled on the river banks to see the spectacle, an amazing conflagration filling the night sky with a blaze of colour which was reflected on the waters of the Thames. Among them was Turner equipped with sketchbooks. He spent the whole night drawing, squeezed among the crowd which you can see in the foreground of his painting, working both from the bank and from a boat on the river. Soon afterwards in his studio he painted watercolours of what he had seen. From those and the drawings he made on the spot he later painted two oils.

Turner's method of work, as recorded by fellow artist Edward Rippingille, was to paint in masses of colour first. From today's standpoint some of the pictures he hung up for exhibition would have seemed like early examples of abstraction which is why they shocked and amazed his contemporaries. But on the varnishing day before the exhibition opened to the public when artists were allowed to put the final touches to their work, Turner would apply a few details using a fine brush which made the scene recognisable. Acting in this like a conjuror, he appears to have enjoyed surprising his fellow artists.

This painting was displayed for sale in 1873 by the art dealer Thomas Agnew in his London gallery and it is very likely that Whistler saw it there. The drama of the painting might well have been in his mind as he painted his night time pictures, especially *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* 1875. Similarly the hot colours of Monet's 1904 sunset paintings of the Houses of Parliament recall those in this painting.

FOR DISCUSSION

Primary and secondary

- Nowadays we would be able to see a dramatic event of this kind almost immediately on our television screens. Imagine living in the nineteenth-century and having to wait at least a year to see a painted image of what had happened. Are you glad you live now or would you rather have lived in the past to be shielded from experiencing such horrific happenings?
- Does this painting look frightening or do you think Turner was so excited by the light and colour that he forgot to be frightened?
- Turner depended on candlelight until the introduction of gas lighting around 1800; Whistler and Monet lived through into the years of electricity which came into use from around 1880. Think about the way light features in all the artists' work in relation to these facts.
- Which of the paintings do you find the most exciting on account of its light effects – one like this in which there is lots of bright colour, or Whistler's paintings of fireworks where there are only little pinpoints of light?

ACTIVITIES

Primary and secondary

- Look for examples of different kinds of lighting in the Collection Displays. Find candlelight in Turner, lanterns in JS Sargent and moonlight in Augustus Egg.

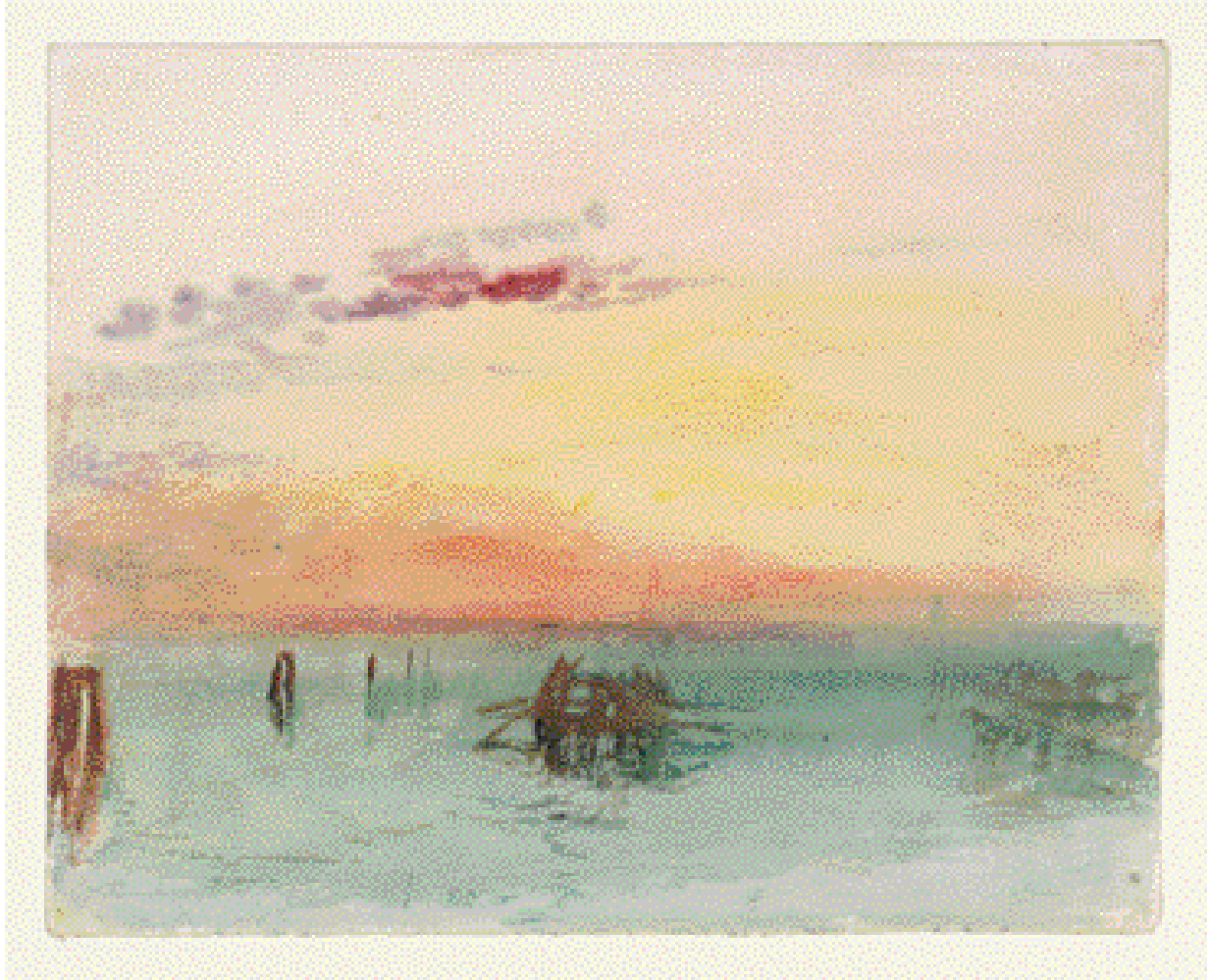
LINKS

Look for paintings in the Tate Britain Collection Displays in which dramatic light is the focal point of the picture like those by Joseph Wright of Derby, who died when Turner was 22. Look at the white hot piece of metal in his *An Iron Forge*, 1772. This is a painting of the early industrial revolution in which Wright expresses his optimism that industry will make people's lives easier.

Experts debate whether Wright ever actually saw Vesuvius in eruption. What do you think? Look at *Vesuvius in Eruption, with a View over the Islands in the Bay of Naples* c1776–8, on display in room 37 of the Clore Gallery. Do you get the feeling that this is a witness report by someone who saw it happening?

Look for other documentary paintings. Decide whether you think that Turner really was, as he said, on board ship in the event he recorded in *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* exh 1842. He claimed to have been tied to the mast for four hours to witness the storm. Which is more dramatic, this storm at sea or the burning of the Houses of Parliament? Which do you think is more likely to have been a true record of the event?

Turner's contemporary, the Bristol painter William James Muller (1812–1845) viewed the alarming events of the Bristol Riots in 1830. His watercolours recording what happened are in Bristol City Art Gallery.



‘CHARACTERISTIC OF TURNER’S ENTIRELY FINAL MANNER WHEN THE LANGUOR OF AGE MADE HIM CARELESS, OR SOMETIMES RELUCTANT IN OUTLINE, WHILE YET HIS HAND HAD LOST NONE OF ITS SUBTLETY, NOR HIS EYE ITS SENSE OF COLOUR’.

John Ruskin

JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER (1775–1851)

Venice: Looking across the Lagoon at Sunset 1840

Watercolour on paper 24.4 x 30.4 cm

Tate. Accepted as part of the Turner Bequest, 1856.

Room 7 of the exhibition

BACKGROUND

Turner was a great traveller. He made his third and last visit to Venice when he was sixty-five, in the summer of 1840. Ruled alternately by France and Austria and neglected by both, the decaying city was both beautiful and melancholy. In the past its riches as a seafaring state had derived from trade with other countries. This made it seem to Turner like a warning to Britain that its own prosperity might not last. Some of Turner’s finest paintings are of Venice but, in his notes on paintings in the Turner Bequest, critic John Ruskin commented that Turner would ‘constantly express an extreme beauty where he meant that there was most threatening and ultimate sorrow’.

Wherever Turner went he made pencil sketches on the spot and painted watercolours which jogged his memory when, back home from his travels, he was ready to create oil paintings intended for exhibition. Like many people, Ruskin liked the spontaneity of Turner’s watercolours which record the immediacy of his impressions. Detail in this watercolour is minimal allowing us to dwell on its intense colouring both for its own sake and for its atmospheric evocation of sunset. In the 4th canto of *Childe Harold* (1818/19) Byron, whose poetry Turner admired, had compared Venice rising from the sea to an eastern goddess bedecked with jewels. Turner creates a parallel sense of richness but achieves it purely through his use of colour. In its near abstraction his watercolour seems very modern which is probably why Ruskin, who first met Turner in the year he painted it, seems to have found it somewhat challenging. But it is easy to see why it would have attracted a later artist like Whistler who sought parallels between art and music, and Monet for whom colour was so important.

Writers as well as painters have responded to Venice as a Romantic city in decline. One of them was Marcel Proust, who knew a great deal about Turner because he admired the writings of Turner’s supporter, John Ruskin. When Proust went to Venice he stayed in the same Hotel Europa as Turner had done in 1840. One of the finest passages in *Remembrance of Times Past* is when the narrator discovers in Venice that our ability to see beauty is dependent on mood. Desolate at the departure of his mother he finds that the canal, the gondolier and the buildings have suddenly lost their charm and he no longer feels connected to them. Reading Proust’s words can make us realise how much Turner must have been engaged in what he saw in order to paint this intensely felt watercolour.

FOR DISCUSSION

Primary

- Take it in turns each to point out something you have noticed in the picture. It could be a colour or what you think something is.
- How does the picture make you feel?

Secondary

- Look at the sunset sky in this watercolour and the oil painted skies in *Sun Rising through Vapour*; *Fishermen cleaning and Selling Fish* exh.1807, *Chichester Canal*; *Sample Study* c1828 or *Sun Setting over a Lake* c1840–5. Compare the effects which each medium can produce. What aspect of these skies seems most true to what you have seen in nature? Which medium is more effective for you?
- Turner acknowledged that indistinctness was his trade mark. Just how indistinct is this view? Can you relate his coloured shapes to objects in nature?
- Has the watercolour got a focal point (centre of interest)? Is it a balanced composition? How does Turner create a sense of distance?

ACTIVITIES

Secondary French students

- Read the passage in Proust’s *Albertine Disparue* described above. Compare the way he uses words to create emotion in the reader with the way Turner uses colour. Are you more moved by the words or the colours?

LINKS

Visit www.tate.org.uk/collections to look at Turner’s many other watercolours of Venice, comparing detailed with sketchy impressions. Look at the work of more recent twentieth-century artists such as Americans Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman who take Turner’s dependence on colour further to carry the full emotional weight of the painting. Rothko bequeathed his Seagram Murals to the Tate Gallery because of his admiration for the work of Turner.



'AND WHEN THE EVENING MIST CLOTHES THE RIVERSIDE WITH POETRY ...TALL CHIMNEYS BECOME CAMPANILI [BELL TOWERS] AND THE WAREHOUSES ARE PALACES IN THE NIGHT, AND THE WHOLE CITY HANGS IN THE HEAVENS, AND FAIRY-LAND IS BEFORE US.'

James McNeill Whistler in his ten o'clock lecture, 1885.

JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER (1834–1903)

Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge about 1872–5

Oil on canvas 68.3 x 51.2 cm

Tate. Presented by the National Art Collections Fund, 1905.

Room 3 of the exhibition

BACKGROUND

Whistler moved to 7 Lindsey Row, Chelsea, in spring 1863. Facing him across the river were factories whose tall chimneys can clearly be seen in an earlier painting in this exhibition, *Grey and Silver, Old Battersea Bridge* 1863. Not only did these factories pollute the air with smoke but from them issued a mingled stink of malt, phosphorous, vinegar, gas and coal. In *Grey and Silver* Whistler recorded the grim effects of the industrial revolution in dull browns and greys. (The word 'silver' is misleading; it suggests a much grander setting). Nine years later when he began painting *Nocturne: Blue and Gold* he had moved away from realism to the cult of the beautiful. Brown warehouses are transformed into shadowy forms silhouetted against the horizon. Whistler was now aiming at 'an arrangement of line, form and colour first' in which factories and the bridge were just so many elements in a perfect composition. He came from a musical background and probably knew that the poet Charles Baudelaire, who had praised his *Thames Set* etchings, had claimed that there is a relationship between sound, colour and perfume. Whistler was impressed by the way that patterns of sound in music are not required to relate to the description of natural phenomena. He wanted to achieve a similar freedom in what at that stage he called his 'moonlights'. For this reason he was delighted by the suggestion made in 1872 by his patron Frederick Leyland that he use the musical term Nocturne to describe his night scenes. By giving this title to his paintings he made clear that they were not intended merely to be descriptive.

One of the figures in the foreground of the earlier picture was a boatman from the Greaves family who acted as ferrymen first to Turner when he lived in Chelsea in old age, and later to Whistler. Whistler's technique for his Nocturnes was to stop the boat whenever he saw a promising view, to memorise what he saw and to paint it back in the studio, using very dilute oil paint on canvas, which he had spread over the floor so that the paint would not run. His thin layers of paint which reveal the colour painted underneath echo the translucent washes in Turner's watercolours. Memorising allowed him to eliminate detail and to produce a simplified design such as those he had admired in the nineteenth-century Japanese prints which he collected. Just as Turner focused on moonlight in his view of Millbank, so Whistler used the light from buildings and fireworks in nearby Cremorne Gardens as a foil for his dark colours. He was developing one of the principal themes of Turner's Millbank painting, the idea that an unusual light effect can transform a very ordinary scene.

FOR DISCUSSION

Primary

- All the Nocturnes hang together in one room. Which is your favourite?

Secondary

- Compare Old Battersea Bridge as it looks in this painting and in *Grey and Silver, Old Battersea Bridge*. What differences are there in Whistler's approach to his subject? Look particularly at the way the bridge is painted in each picture. Do you think it was honest of him to transform a polluted industrial scene into an object of beauty?

ACTIVITIES

Primary and secondary

- Try out Whistler's memory technique for yourself. In pairs, one person looks carefully at a chosen view and tries to memorise it. Turning your back on the view you must describe what is there to your companion who will tell you what you have forgotten. Take it in turns to do this before returning to your 'studio' to paint/draw what you remember. If possible you should try this on the Tate to Tate boat. Of course the movement of the boat will make it much more difficult for you than trying to memorise something when it is still, so try that first.
- Look at the frame of the painting which is an integral part of the work and incorporates Whistler's trade mark, the butterfly. Whistler didn't want to ruin the the perfection of his design with a signature so he devised a pattern which would fit into the concept of the work of art as a whole. Design a trademark or logo for yourself. Why do you think Whistler, born in America, chose the butterfly as his symbol?

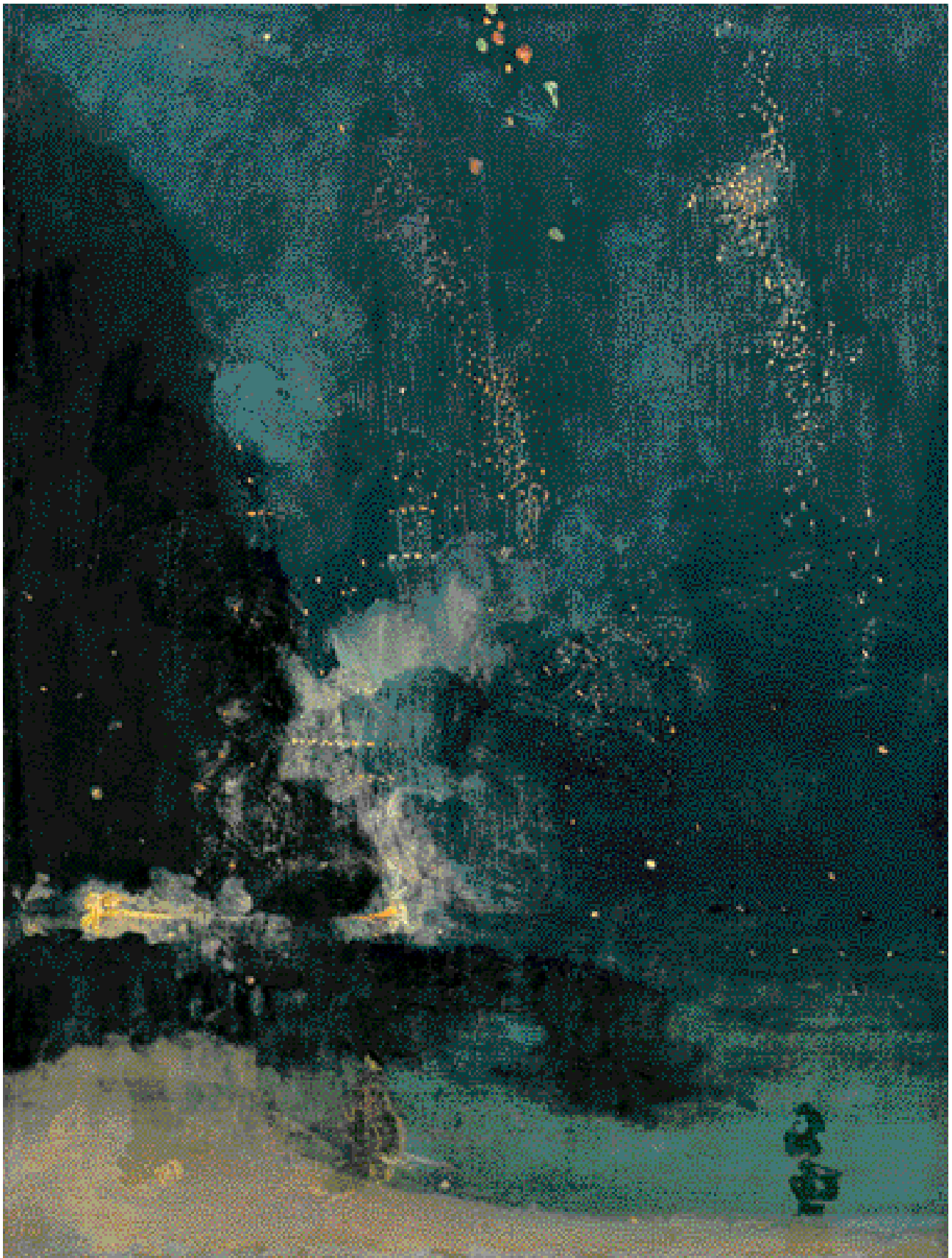
Secondary

- Look at other frames in the exhibition. Which ones do you think work best with the pictures they enclose? Can you find one which does not work well?
- Compare the way Whistler represents the river in his Nocturnes to his 1859 Thames etchings.

LINKS

Think about different ways of presenting an industrial site, either emphasising ugliness or transforming it. Whistler started off looking facts in the face in his *Thames Set* etchings and in *Grey and Silver, Old Battersea Bridge* as did his ferryman pupil Walter Greaves in his *Old Battersea Bridge* 1874, Tate. Visit www.tate.org.uk to see the Greaves and a more recent example of the same kind of attitude in Terry Setch's *Once upon a Time there was Oil*, 1981.

Whistler later used flat patternmaking as a tool to create beauty. The example of nineteenth-century Japanese printmakers helped him in this. Find Hiroshige's *Kyobashi Bridge* c1857 on the internet and compare its design with Whistler's Nocturne.



'I HAVE SEEN, AND HEARD, MUCH OF COCKNEY IMPUDENCE BEFORE NOW; BUT NEVER EXPECTED TO HEAR A COXCOMB ASK TWO HUNDRED GUINEAS FOR FLINGING A POT OF PAINT IN THE PUBLIC'S FACE'.

John Ruskin in *Fors Clavigera*, 1877.

JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER (1834–1903)

Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket 1875

Oil on canvas 60 x 46.6 cm

The Detroit Institute of Arts

Room 3 of the exhibition

BACKGROUND

When Ruskin saw this painting displayed in the Grosvenor Gallery in London he wrote a scathing review which led Whistler to sue him for libel. Whistler won the case in 1878 but was bankrupted by it. He was awarded a farthing's damages (a quarter of an old penny) to show that the court felt its time had been wasted discussing such an unimportant matter as art. It might seem strange that Ruskin, who had been so open minded about Turner's innovations, defending him against the taunt that he had painted with 'soapsuds and whitewash', should be unable to see quality in Whistler's work. It seems likely that he had previously been upset by Whistler's provocative outbursts and the catalogue suggests that he disliked the thought that such an upstart should take up themes initiated by his protégé Turner. Moreover Cremorne Gardens where the fireworks were shown was considered to be an unsavoury spot and, as a strict moralist, Ruskin might have been upset at its being linked by association with Turner who had lived close to the gardens in his final years. Whistler had also lived a few hundred yards away.

The painting shows the platform known as the grotto in Cremorne Gardens, from which the nightly firework shows were set off. Whistler contrives to make us feel like spectators experiencing excitement and wonder at the brief flowering of fireworks. The tiny touches of golden yellow paint used to describe them were not, as you might assume, spattered from a brush but were painted individually. This suggests that Whistler was a quick worker since, at the trial, he claimed to have completed the picture in two days. This led to an exchange with the attorney general who remarked: 'The labour of two days is that for which you ask two hundred guineas?' To which Whistler replied 'No, I ask it for the knowledge I have gained in the work of a lifetime'.

Even today many people still hold the view that art can only come into being as the result of hard labour: think of the outcry over Tracey Emin's *My Bed* exhibited in the Turner Prize of 1999.

FOR DISCUSSION

Primary and secondary

- Can you see anything shocking about the way this picture is painted?

Secondary

- A distinguishing feature of modern abstract art is its flatness, the absence of an illusion of space. How flat is this painting? Is it just a flat pattern of colours or is it a three dimensional landscape?

ACTIVITIES

Primary

- Spatter bright paint from a paintbrush or a straw against dark paper to create your own firework display.
- Do you like fireworks or are you frightened by the noise? Is this a scary painting? Can you make a frightening painting of fireworks?

Secondary

- Test Whistler's method by comparing the effects of spattering light paint against a dark background and painting each touch individually. Which method creates the best fireworks?

LINKS

No painter can make a completely realistic image of fireworks because they are over so quickly and their appearance changes continuously. All that can be done is to paint the experience of seeing them, which is usually about the excitement of a brief burst of light against the dark sky. Turner painted watercolours of fireworks when he was visiting Venice. Visit www.tate.org.uk and go to Search the Collection. Find *Santa Maria della Salute, Night Scene with Rockets* 1840. When it is on the screen, click on the Subjects button to view all other paintings of fireworks in the Tate Collection. Decide which of these you like best.



'JE ME MIRE ET ME VOIS ANGE! ET JE MEURS, ET J'AIME – QUE LA VITRE SOIT L'ART, SOIT LA MYSTICITE' (I LOOK AT MYSELF AND I SEE MYSELF AS AN ANGEL! AND I DIE, AND I LOVE – WHETHER THE GLASS BE ART OR MYSTICISM)

Les Fenêtres, Stéphane Mallarmé

JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER (1834–1903)

By the Balcony 1896

Transfer lithograph in black with stumping and scraping on cream wove roofing paper, 21.7 x 14.2 cm

The Art Institute of Chicago. Mansfield-Wittermore-Crown Collection on deposit at The Art Institute of Chicago

Room 6 of the exhibition

BACKGROUND

When his wife Beatrice fell ill in 1894, Whistler brought her back from Paris, where they had been living, to London where he rented a room overlooking the Thames on the sixth floor of the recently opened Savoy Hotel. As she lay dying, he sat with her, making lithographic drawings of the view of the river below. In this lithograph, however, he focuses on Beatrice herself. Imprisoned in a room she will never leave, she faces the window but is unable to see the view which is much too far beneath. Her hand clutches at the open window frame as if to gain support from its connection with the outside world. Out there is life and freedom; inside illness and confinement. When she died a little while later Whistler was so upset that he tried to retrieve all the copies of this lithograph and, as the stone itself was destroyed by Beatrice's relatives after he died, this copy is extremely rare.

In January 1888 while he was living in Paris, Whistler was introduced to the poet Stéphane Mallarmé by Claude Monet and they became close friends. Mallarmé was so enthusiastic about Whistler's paintings that he translated it into French. It is easy to understand why Whistler, the painter of mood, should have sympathised with a poet who declared that his aim was not to represent things but to evoke the effect they had on the spectator. When he was twenty Mallarmé had spent a year in London. One of his poems written at that time is *Les Fenêtres (The Windows)*, inspired by a Chelsea hospital, in which he evokes an old dying man gazing at a hospital window. Like Beatrice the old man does not see the view (he is entranced by the sunset staining its glass pane). Despite his suffering, he can forget that his decaying body has imprisoned him in a hospital ward as long as he contemplates such beauty.

Whistler and Mallarmé shared a delight in beauty. There is irony in the fact that so keen was Whistler to discover it in his hotel bedroom, that he was able to miss out on the fact that his young wife was dying.

In his image Whistler shows us the woman, the window and the view so that we see them clearly before us. Using words, Mallarmé describes the appearance and smell of the ward. His words create in our minds a continuous succession of images rather than one strong one. He can take us inside the skin of the old man and tell us about his fluctuating feelings. He concludes his poem by expressing his own point of view, telling us that he will choose beauty wherever he has the opportunity. Whistler, on the other hand, creates a strong image of person and place but does not attempt to tell us what the woman is thinking or feeling. He presents the facts so that we can observe and decide for ourselves.

FOR DISCUSSION

Primary

- What can you see through the window? How can you tell that it is far below? Is the woman in bed awake or asleep?

Secondary

- The window frame is a common feature in art, because it allows for a contrast between inner and outer worlds. Look for windows in art and the different moods they suggest both in the Collection Displays and on the internet (see suggestions under *Links*).
- Lithography can imitate the textures of drawing and watercolour. Look for examples of different textures in Whistler's lithographs in the exhibition. If Whistler had painted this subject in oils how would its atmosphere have changed? For suggested oil paintings on a similar theme look at *Links* below.

ACTIVITIES

Primary and Secondary

- Draw the view from your bedroom window. What do you feel about the view? Do you like it? Is it ugly/beautiful?

Secondary

- Does your picture reflect your mood? Can you make it reflect joy or sadness?

Secondary students of French

- Read Mallarmé's poem *Les Fenêtres*. Compare the picture you get from reading the words with the impact created by Whistler's image. What advantages has the poet over the artist in representing an ill person and vice versa?

LINKS

Beatrice Whistler's early death was not unusual for the time. She died of cancer but many nineteenth century children and young adults were blighted by tuberculosis, then known as consumption. Very bravely, artists faced up to these early deaths in children (Edvard Munch *The Sick Child* 1907 Tate; Luke Fildes *The Doctor* exh 1897 Tate) and in women (Edvard Munch *The Chamber of Death*, c1892, National Gallery, Oslo).

Often artists showed women alone in a room. They might have seen the room as a reflection of her personality. Look at Vilhelm Hammershoi's *Interior* 1899, National Gallery (www.nationalgallery.co.uk); Harold Gilman's *French Interior* c1905–7, on display in room 19 at Tate Britain; Edgar Degas's *Woman at a Window* about 1871–2, Courtauld Institute (www.courtauld.ac.uk); W.R. Sickert's *Girl at a Window, Little Rachel*, 1907, on display in room 17 at Tate Britain, and *L'Armoire à Glace* 1924, Tate, and Pierre Bonnard's *The Bowl of Milk* c1919, Tate (www.tate.org.uk). What, if anything, can you tell about the mood of the woman from her surroundings?

In *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris (with Open Window)* 1907–09 National Gallery of Wales (www.nmgw.ac.uk), Gwen John seems to have made a self-portrait by painting her own room. Much more recently Louise Bourgeois created dramatic settings for absent people in *The Red Rooms, (The Parent)* and *(The Child)* 1994.



'MONET AND I WERE VERY ENTHUSIASTIC OVER THE LONDON LANDSCAPES'.

Camille Pissarro about being in London in 1870/71

CLAUDE MONET (1840–1926)

The Thames below Westminster 1871

Oil on canvas, 47 x 73 cm

National Gallery, London

Room 2 of the exhibition

BACKGROUND

Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro both fled France for England to escape being enlisted to fight in the Franco-Prussian war. In London the two young men painted their first truly urban subjects. It is likely that Monet visited Whistler, whom he might already have met in Paris, while he was in London. He certainly saw paintings there by Turner for the first time which were on display at the National Gallery. Somewhat equivocal in his reaction to the British artist, he told a dealer late on in his life that 'At one time I greatly liked Turner, but today I like him much less – he did not draw enough with colour and he used too much of it'. But, he conceded, 'I have studied him closely'. The Houses of Parliament recorded here by Monet are new, erected after the fire that destroyed the old buildings as recorded by Turner. Also brand new is the Embankment, incomplete in Monet's painting, which not only created a walkway along the Thames but housed a drainage system which would eventually cut down water pollution and bring an end to the recurrent epidemics of cholera which had made Turner fear for his life.

If any artist influenced this painting it is more likely to have been Whistler than Turner. Just like the bridge in Whistler's *Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge 1872–5*, the darkest shape in this painting (one of three river scenes painted by Monet during this visit to London) is formed by the wooden jetty against which all the other tones of grey can be measured. As in the Whistler too, the dark foreground shape has the effect of eliminating space making us read the landscape as a flat pattern. Monet, like Whistler, was inspired by the flat designs of Japanese prints. The grey mistiness of this spring day helps the pattern making by unifying the surface of the picture but, in contrast to Whistler's first *Nocturnes*, there is variety of colour in, for instance, the peach of the sky and the green foliage.

FOR DISCUSSION

Primary

- How can you tell that the picture was painted in spring time?
- How are the boats different from those you would see on the river today?
- What colours can you see other than grey?

Secondary

- Compare this painting with those in the room containing Whistler's *Nocturnes*. Do you think that Monet was influenced by them?
- Compare this painting with Monet's *The Pool of London*, 1871, National Museum of Wales. Which painting do you think is more influenced by Japanese prints? (See Links).
- Compare this view of the Houses of Parliament with Monet's later paintings of the same subject. What differences are there in brushstrokes and colour? How do these affect the mood of the paintings? Do you prefer the grey or the colourful versions?

ACTIVITIES

Primary and secondary

- All three artists loved painting water and developed various shorthand methods of recording its movement. Find and sketch small areas of water in different and varied examples.

LINKS

Visit www.tate.org.uk to compare André Derain's *The Pool of London*, 1906 with Monet's painting of the same subject. The colours are very different but what about the weather? How has Derain managed to create the effect of an overcast day using such bright colours? For an aerial view similar to Whistler's look at Oskar Kokoschka's *View of the Thames* 1959 on the same site.

Visit www.ukiyo-e-world.com/ukiyo-e to see examples of nineteenth century Japanese prints and understand the flat patterning that so influenced European artists including Whistler and Monet.



‘WHEN I GOT UP I WAS TERRIFIED TO SEE THERE WAS NO FOG, NOT EVEN THE SHADOW OF A FOG. I WAS DEVASTATED ...BUT LITTLE BY LITTLE THE FIRES WERE LIT, AND THE SMOKE AND FOG RETURNED’.

Claude Monet in a letter to his wife.

CLAUDE MONET (1840–1926)

Houses of Parliament:

Effect of Sunlight on the Fog 1904

Oil on canvas, 81 x 92 cm

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Room 6 of the exhibition

BACKGROUND

In the late nineteenth century the English fog became an unlikely tourist attraction for French visitors who came to admire the ‘big smoke’ of London. It continued to attract visitors right up to and even beyond the clean air act of the fifties that banished recurrent fogs for good. The ‘pea-soupers’ had begun in the 1840s as more and more coal was burnt in homes and factories. Dating from his year-long stay in London in 1862, Monet’s friend the poet Mallarmé had been an admirer of the fog that crept through the casements of his London flat near the Brompton Oratory. He professed to like everything, including the smoke curling up from his pipe, that put a smokescreen between him and the everyday world. ‘Toute chose sacrée s’enveloppe de mystère’, he declared. (Everything sacred is enclosed in mystery). Artists from Turner to Whistler and Monet shared Mallarmé’s love of mystery, manipulating veil-like effects of fog across their canvases.

What is unusual in this painting is that, instead of allowing tones of grey fog to unify the entire surface of the canvas in the manner of Whistler, Monet intensifies the richness of his colours: sun piercing through the darkness of the fog reveals intense oranges, mauves and blues. The brilliant yellows and oranges in particular are reminiscent of the colours used by Turner in his *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, 16th October 1834*. In contrast to the fluid ‘soup’ that Whistler applied to canvas in his *Nocturnes*, Monet uses noticeable Impressionist brushmarks which direct the viewer’s eyes around the canvas and animate its surface, creating a more energetic mood than the dreamy *Nocturnes*.

Monet observed his subject from the terrace of St Thomas’s Hospital. Unlike his earlier Impressionist works which were all painted on the spot so that he could observe the colours created by a specific light effect, these canvases, begun by Monet in London, were completed at home in Giverny. Moreover he treated the twenty he painted as a series in which each painting related to all the others. In 1903 he explained to his dealer Durand-Ruel saying ‘not a single one is definitively finished. I work them out all together or at least a certain number’. This justified his altering some of the colour harmonies to relate them to the group as a whole.

FOR DISCUSSION

Primary

- This is a painting of air, light, water and stone – but does any of it resemble these things? Looking carefully at the picture when you are standing in front of it, play a game of comparisons, for example: the Parliament buildings look like feathers; the sun looks like dozens of lit matches...

Secondary

- The curators of this exhibition believe that Monet’s series paintings might have derived in part from the example of Turner’s obsessive study of the same subject, like *Lake Lucerne: The Bay of Uri from Brunnen*. Look at the six watercolours of this subject in the exhibition to decide whether you think that they are right. What differences are there in Turner’s positioning of the central motif of the mountain in each of his studies and Monet’s portrayal of the Houses of Parliament on his four canvases?

ACTIVITIES

Primary and secondary

- Monet has seen colour in a fog which most observers would simply have called grey. Look out of the window at dusk and, instead of just noticing that it is dark, find out how many colours you can see. Try to record this using chalk pastels.

Secondary

- Find a subject that interests you very much. Make at least four drawings of it. How did the drawings change as you progressed? Which one do you like the best? Do they stand as individual studies or do you consider them as a set? If they are a set, consider altering them so that they harmonise together.
- Think about how different the same thing can look during your daily routine. eg. the sky on your way to school/home.
- Make a diagram of Monet’s painting in which you trace the direction of the brushstrokes to find out the pattern the artist has created to energise his canvas while making you aware of its flatness.

LINKS

It is said that our whole life is a matter of repetition, the same routine from the time we get up in the morning to the time we go to bed. Compare the idea of series in works of art with series in literature, like the series of volumes dealing with the same set of characters in Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Time Past*.

Compare Whistler and Monet’s series paintings with those by Andy Warhol of electric chairs or of Marilyn (www.tate.org.uk). Are Warhol’s repeat images each as different in themselves as Monet’s different versions of the Houses of Parliament or morning on the Seine near Giverny? Think about different reasons related to the time when they lived that might have led these artists to work in series.