

J.M.W Turner (1775-1851): From Covent Garden to Rome - Out of the Shadows and into the Light

Ahead of a forthcoming presentation by myself on Turner in the BBC programme 'Art on the BBC', this lecture will pick up on and expand in greater detail the main topics that will be mentioned in the television programme, include many areas and topics that were not mentioned, presenting an expanded visual history of the life of J.M.W Turner. But for now, here is a brief introduction to the contents of this new lecture.

Turner was born and grew up in the then shadowy backstreet Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London. The son of a Covent Garden barber, it was an unlikely beginning for an artist that would become obsessed with the emulation of light in his canvases. Born in 1775, exactly three centuries after the birth of Michelangelo, Joseph Mallord William Turner was every bit as determined and hungry for fame and fortune, and like Michelangelo, he would also be written about within his lifetime and find fame within his lifetime.

This lecture will trace the life of boy genius from his early beginnings selling works in his dad's barber shop to his early entry into the Royal Academy and early tutelage under the founding president, Sir Joshua Reynolds. In this early stage of Turner's life this lecture will explore from his inspirational sources, such as his large canvas, *'Rome, from the Vatican. Raffaello, Accompanied by La Fornarina, Preparing his Pictures for the Decoration of the Loggia'* to his early works, through to his large-scale mythological works. This lecture will look at those who wrote about Turner, his critics, both detractors, who accused him of having *"an affectation of carelessness"* with his application of paint on the canvas, and those who praised him as *"The only landscape painter of Genius in Europe"*.

Turner's relationship and obsession either work of Claude Gellée Lorrain (1604/5?-1682) will also be explored in this lecture, and finally, as we move into Turner's late life and works, we will experience his metamorphosis into a painter of the sublime and the romantic as his paintings slowly, but surely begin to melt into abstraction. Throughout the course of this fascinating exploration of this giant of British art I will, of course be alighting on, and exploring some of Turner's most iconic works, from early works such as *'Fishermen at Sea'*, to *'Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps'*, *'The Shipwreck'*, and the great late works such as, *'Snow Storm – Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth'*, *'The Fighting Temeraire'*, and *'Rain, Steam and Speed'*. The lecture will end with Turner's legacy, the vast body of work he left behind, what he wished for, in terms of what should become of it all, what happened next, and how we got to our current appreciation of his great genius.

Short reading list:

Blayney Brown, David, Concannon, Amy, Smiles, Sam – **Late Turner: Painting Set Free**, (Tate Publishing, 2014) The EY exhibition catalogue

Solkin, David – ed, **Turner and the Masters**, (Tate Publishing, 2009)

Warrell, Ian – **J.M.W. Turner**, (Tate Publishing, 2008) exhibition catalogue