

artist Kris Martin (to 7th January). His first solo show in New York presents a diverse range of media encompassing sculpture, photography and works on paper. *Mandi VIII* is a cast of the famous *Laocoön* sculpture from which the serpent has been deleted, rendering the struggle seemingly futile. *Idiot* presented a hand-written copy of the entire text of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* with the name of the central character, Myshkin, changed to Martin's name throughout. Finally, and most succinct of all, was Martin's *End-points* series, for which he extracts the last full stop of a book, such as Anne Franks's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, collaged in isolation with, written beneath it, the title of the book from which it is derived. All of these works were unified by an underlying theme of *vanitas* and executed with a striking economy of means.

¹ See the essay by Lynne Cooke in the accompanying exhibition brochure: *Francis Alys: Fabiola – An Investigation*, 1994 – , unpaginated. (Dia Art Foundation, New York, 2007). A full exhibition catalogue is forthcoming.

² It is to be hoped that the publication of the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Boetti's work will place these late works in their full context.

³ Vezzoli interviewed by Germano Celant in the exh. cat. *Francesco Vezzoli, Trilogia della Morte*, Milan (Fondazione Prada) 2004, p.11.

⁴ The eight selected artists were Vanessa Beecroft, Paolo Canevari, Angelo Filomeno, R&A di Martino, Adrian Paci, Paola Pivi, Pietro Roccasalva and Francesco Vezzoli.

Turner

Washington, Dallas and New York

by ANDREW WILTON

AMERICA HAS WAITED a long time for a comprehensive exhibition of the work of J.M.W. Turner. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, which has done much over the last twenty years to present British art to the American public, has negotiated patiently to bring about this show, and after many vicissitudes has pulled off a triumph. The Tate has lent generously from its holdings of both paintings and watercolours, and other institutions and private collectors have contributed to a total of 165 works, most of which are to be seen in Washington (to 6th January), although there will be modifications to the list when the exhibition travels.¹

The rooms in which the National Gallery mounts its old-master exhibitions, in the main building, are not always quite large enough, but are handsome spaces sporting the Gallery's favourite fuscous grey and grey-blue walls, colours that set off both the sombre palette of Turner's early 'Sublime' style and the luminous 'open window' late works. The hang is balanced and formal, but with a fine sense of pace and scale. The centrepiece is the large room in which Turner's two big Trafalgar pictures hang: the 1808 *Battle of Trafalgar, as Seen from the Mizen Starboard Shrouds of the Victory* ('*The Death of Nelson*') (cat. no.42) and



81. *Fall of the Rhine, Schaffhausen*, by Joseph Mallord William Turner. 1806. Canvas, 148.6 by 239.7 cm. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; exh. National Gallery of Art, Washington).

the huge picture of the *Victory* painted in 1823–24 for George IV (no.59). It is rare indeed for this whopper to be seen outside its usual home (George banished it to the Naval College at Greenwich after his resident admirals pronounced it technically faulty); and one might ask why such a curiosity – it is not one of Turner's indisputable masterpieces – should take part in a display introducing the artist to an essentially new audience. But the sheer size of the canvas, together with its bravura portrait of a great vessel in the thick of battle, carries the spectator away, and the comparison with the earlier work is well worth making.

There were inevitable constraints on the numbers of items to be included, and one might lament the absence of whole aspects of Turner's extraordinarily various output. The prints are altogether absent: a few drawings for the *Liber Studiorum* are grouped along one wall, without the mezzotints for which they were conceived. Turner's own autograph mezzotints known as the 'Little Liber' are particularly missed, as they are some of the greatest of Romantic prints. And there is no hint of his work as a book illustrator – the vignette designs for Byron, Campbell, Rogers and Scott, themselves enough to establish an exceptional artist, are absent. So are the Petworth gouaches, for many people the most engaging of all Turner's drawings. And there is not a single sketchbook.

But of course the task is impossible; the survey of some six hundred works that comprised the 1974–75 bicentenary show at the Royal Academy of Arts in London could not be mounted now, given today's insurance valuations. And the American public have Turner, if not complete, then certainly in the round. The early years are compressed into a single small room, dominated by the nocturne *Fishermen at Sea* (no.3), painted when Turner was twenty; a virtuoso performance that outshines both Wright and Vernet,

as the artist fully intended. This brilliant debut is supported by a rather thin selection of the early watercolours – an example of Turner's equally masterly handling of the sea in watercolour might have made a relevant point; and the superb 1799 *Caernarvon Castle* (no.8), a response in watercolour to Angerstein's Claudes, which had recently reduced Turner to tears of envy as much as pure admiration, is alas now sufficiently faded to be a less than adequate representative of his early revolutionary achievement in the medium.

The second room is devoted to the *Sublime*, but is rather too small to give the 1805 *Shipwreck* (no.21), the *Fall of the Rhine, Schaffhausen* (no.20; Fig.81) and *Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* (no.22) the space they need. The *Schaffhausen*, from Boston, is all too little appreciated – an overwhelming tour de force of free brushwork and inventive narrative incident that includes a sly self-portrait: the artist with his companion and a boy carrying a portfolio are seated immediately under the vast wall of water, whose roar we can almost hear.

In comprehensive exhibitions such as this it is necessary to show Turner chronologically, since his stylistic development creates the central taxonomy of his career; yet the sheer variety of his output demands some thematic segregation. That scheme works well here. As usual, the *Sublime* is followed by the *Pastoral*, with some of the sketches made on small panels or fair-sized canvases from a boat on the Thames or the Wey in about 1805, and a few (though not the best) of the wonderful little Devon oil-studies of 1813. There are Dutch-inspired marines, including *Sheerness from the Nore* (no.35), recently acquired by Houston, brilliantly cleaned but somewhat over-framed; and a Neo-classical pastoral, the *Temple of Jupiter Panellenius, Restored* (no.40), which was exhibited at the Academy in 1816 with its pendant, a view of the temple in ruins. Here it accompanies *The Decline of the*



82. *The Fishmarket on the Sands* – possibly at Hastings, by Joseph Mallord William Turner. 1810. Canvas, 91 by 120.6 cm. (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; exh. National Gallery of Art, Washington).

Carthaginian Empire (1817; no.41), perhaps the grandest of Turner's attempts to exorcise the ghost of Angerstein's Claudes.

In this and subsequent rooms there is a good selection of the watercolours of this period, from the Sussex and Yorkshire series, the *Rivers and Ports of England*, as well as the famous *First-rate Taking in Stores* (no.56), painted in a morning under the amazed eye of a boy at Farnley, where Turner stayed with his great friend Walter Fawkes. The *Picturesque Views in England and Wales* series is represented by five examples, including the unused *Northampton Election* (no.86), recently acquired by the Tate which, while being a vivid record of political life in 1830, is pure Pickwick and brings home just how close Turner is to Dickens in his presentation of the social complexity of contemporary Britain.

The central, largest room of the show is dominated by the two Trafalgar pictures, and also contains *The Fishmarket on the Sands* (no.44; Fig.82), a too-rarely seen gem from the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; and the Baltimore *Raby Castle* (1818; no.57; Fig.83), newly cleaned and breathtaking in its simplicity and panoramic evocation of the spaces of northern England. By contrast, the Tate's *Field of Waterloo* (no.58), from the same year, demonstrates Turner's constantly surprising ability to turn the obvious on its head: the heroic battle scene we expect is not forthcoming, but rather an elegy for the dead, among whom women search desperately for their loved ones.

Later rooms concentrate on Turner's foreign tours, to the Rhine, to France and Italy, and especially to Venice. It is good to have the chance to see *Juliet and her Nurse* (no.107) borrowed from an Argentine private

collection; but sad to find its surface obscured by what one hopes is only tobacco smoke. There are further insights into British life too: the National Gallery of Art's own *Keelmen heaving in Coals by Moonlight* of 1835 (no.115), a translation of the Claudian harbour into the language of modern industrial England, enveloped in a magical moonlight sheen. A separate room is devoted to the two great paintings of the *Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons* (nos.130 and 131), exhibited in 1835, the year after the conflagration. The knockout force of the two depictions of the scene, one from the opposite bank of the



83. *Raby Castle, the Seat of the Earl of Darlington*, by Joseph Mallord William Turner. 1818. Canvas, 119.1 by 180.7 cm. (Walters Art Museum, Baltimore; exh. National Gallery of Art, Washington).

Thames, the other from a high viewpoint downriver, is supplemented by all the colour sketches related to them, although it remains unclear to me how scholars can be certain that they refer specifically to this fire: all the architectural details discernible in them seem unrelated to the buildings at Westminster.

The final two rooms ought, surely, to have been reversed: a fine selection of the late exhibited pictures precedes the sketches that Turner was making for them, and for other projects at the same time. The effect is to reinforce the prejudice, abetted by Modernist theory, that Turner was working inexorably towards abstraction. Nothing could have been further from his thinking: the multitudinous reality of nature and of human life was always central to his vision. *The Evening of the Deluge* (here the two versions, from London and Washington, are hung together for comparison; nos.153 and 154), the *Steam boat off a harbour's mouth* (no.136) and *Peace: Burial at Sea* (no.152) are astoundingly original in their own right, and would have made a dramatic conclusion.

The accompanying catalogue is largely the work of Ian Warrell, of Tate Britain, although it is encouraging to see so many younger and newer contributors, including the essay 'Turner and America' by the National Gallery of Art's own Franklin Kelly.² This showing augurs well for the future of Turner studies both in Britain and America. Book and exhibition make the artist's constant reinvention of himself, and his pyrotechnical wizardry as a painter, vividly apparent at every stage.

¹ After closing in Washington, the exhibition will be seen at the Dallas Museum of Art (10th February to 18th May) and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (24th June to 21st September).

² Catalogue: *J.M.W. Turner*. Edited by Ian Warrell, with an essay by Franklin Kelly. 320 pp. incl. 210 col. + 50 b. & w. ills. (Tate Publishing, London, 2007), \$55/£24.99. ISBN 978-1-85437-690-9.