William Turner
and
Turner Contemporary Gallery
Joseph Mallord William Turner (23 April 1775 – 19 December 1851) was an English Romantic landscape painter, watercolourist and printmaker, whose style can be said to have laid the foundation for Impressionism. Although Turner was considered a controversial figure in his day, he is now regarded as the artist who elevated landscape painting to an eminence rivalling history painting. His work was exhibited when he was still a teenager. His entire life was devoted to his art. Unlike many artists of his era, he was successful throughout his career. Turner left more than 19,000 watercolors, drawings, and oils to the British nation. Most of these works are in the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery, London.
Life and career

Turner was born in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London, England. His father, William Gay Turner, was a barber and wig maker. His mother, Mary Marshall, became increasingly mentally unstable, perhaps, in part, due to the early death of Turner's younger sister, Helen Turner, in 1786. She died in 1804, after having been committed to a mental asylum in 1799. Possibly due to the load placed on the family by these problems, the young Turner was sent to stay with his uncle on his mother's side in Brentford in 1785, then a small town west of London on the banks of the River Thames. It was here that he first expressed an interest in painting. A year later he went to school in Margate on the north-east Kent coast. By this time he had created many drawings, which his father exhibited in his shop window.

He entered the Royal Academy of Art schools in 1789, when he was only 14 years old, and was accepted into the academy a year later. At first Turner showed a keen interest in architecture but was advised to keep to painting by the architect Thomas Hardwick (junior).
As he grew older, Turner became more eccentric. He had few close friends except for his father, who lived with him for thirty years, eventually working as his studio assistant. His father's death in 1829 had a profound effect on him, and thereafter he was subject to bouts of depression. He never married, although he had two daughters by Sarah Danby, one born in 1801, the other in 1811.

He died in the house of his mistress Sophia Caroline Booth in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea on 19 December 1851. He is said to have uttered the last words "The sun is God" before expiring. At his request he was buried in St Paul's Cathedral, where he lies next to Sir Joshua Reynolds. His last exhibition at the Royal Academy was in 1850.

The architect Philip Hardwick (1792–1870) who was a friend of Turner's and also the son of the artist's tutor, Thomas Hardwick, was one in charge of his funeral arrangements and wrote to those who knew Turner to tell them at the time of his death that "I must inform you, we have lost him".
Style

Turner's talent was recognised early in his life. Financial independence allowed Turner to innovate freely; his later pictures were called "fantastic puzzles." However, Turner was still recognised as an artistic genius: an influential English art critic described Turner as the artist who could most "stirringly and truthfully measure the moods of Nature." Suitable vehicles for Turner's imagination were to be found in the subjects of shipwrecks, fires, events (some of which Turner rushed to witness first-hand, and which he transcribed in a series of watercolour sketches).

Natural catastrophes, and natural phenomena such as sunlight, storm, rain, and fog. He was fascinated by the violent power of the sea and all awe-inspiring, savage grandeur, a natural world unmastered by man, evidence of the power of God - a theme that artists and poets were exploring in this period.
Although these late paintings appear to be 'impressionistic' and therefore a forerunner of the French school, Turner was striving for expression of spirituality in the world, rather than responding primarily to optical phenomena.

In his later years he used oils ever more transparently, and turned to an evocation of almost pure light by use of shimmering colour, where the objects are barely recognizable. The intensity of hue and interest in evanescent light not only placed Turner's work in the vanguard of English painting, but later exerted an influence upon art in France, as well; the Impressionists, particularly Claude Monet, carefully studied his techniques.

One popular story about Turner, though it likely has little basis in reality, states that he even had himself "tied to the mast of a ship in order to experience the drama" of the elements during a storm at sea.
Turner's collection of finished paintings was bequeathed to the British nation, and he intended that a special gallery would be built to house them. This did not come to pass owing to a failure to agree on a site, and then to the parsimony of British governments.

Legacy
Turner left a small fortune which he hoped would be used to support what he called "decayed artists". Part of the money went to the Royal Academy of Arts, which does not now use it for this purpose, though occasionally it awards students the Turner Medal.

It has been suggested that the high levels of ash in the atmosphere during the 1816 "Year Without a Summer," which led to unusually spectacular sunsets during this period, were an inspiration for some of Turner's work.
Twenty-two years after his death, the British Parliament passed an Act allowing his paintings to be lent to museums outside London, and so began the process of scattering the pictures which Turner had wanted to be kept together. In 1910 the main part of the Turner Bequest, which includes unfinished paintings and drawings, was rehoused in the Duveen Turner Wing at the Tate Gallery. In 1987 a new wing of the Tate, the Clore Gallery, was opened specifically to house the Turner bequest, though some of the most important paintings in it remain in the National Gallery in contravention of Turner's condition that the finished pictures be kept and shown together.

In 1974, the Turner Museum was founded in the USA to house his collection of Turner prints. A prestigious annual art award, the Turner Prize, created in 1984, was named in Turner's honour, but has become increasingly controversial, having promoted art which has no apparent connection with Turner's. Twenty years later the more modest Winsor & Newton Turner Watercolour Award was founded.
A major exhibition, "Turner's Britain", with material on loan from around the globe, was held at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery from 7 November 2003 to 8 February 2004. In 2005, Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* was voted Britain's "greatest painting" in a public poll organised by the BBC.

In October 2005 Professor Harold Livermore, its owner for 60 years, gave Sandycombe Lodge, the villa at Twickenham which Turner designed and built for himself, to the Sandycombe Lodge Trust to be preserved as a monument to the artist. In 2006 he additionally gave some land to the Trust which had been part of Turner's domaine. The organisation The Friends of Turner's House was formed in 2004 to support it.
Creating a space to celebrate Turner’s association with Margate was the aspiration of local resident and former Chairman of the Margate Civic Society, John Crofts. He, along with a number of active members of the community, wanted to recognise and share the importance the seaside town played in Turner’s life.

Through their enthusiasm and commitment, the group’s ambitions had grown by 1994 to a centre “which would explore Turner’s connection with Margate”, as well as offer a contemporary art programme.

http://www.turnercontemporary.org
In 1998, the Leader of Kent County Council and representatives of Kent Artists met to discuss the idea. At the same time, plans were being developed to create a cultural quarter in Margate’s Old Town as part of a wider East Kent Cultural Strategy – the idea of a Turner gallery that would stimulate Margate’s culture-led regeneration was born.

In the late 1990s Kent County Council offered to fund and support the building of a new landmark gallery (later joined by Arts Council England and the South East England Development Agency). Kent County Council remained committed to the project and appointed the multi award-winning David Chipperfield Architects in July 2006 to design the gallery.

In the same year, our exhibitions space expanded to the empty Marks & Spencer shop on Margate High Street, where we held a number of our internationally acclaimed exhibitions. From 2008 to 2011, work was underway to create a stunningly beautiful building on Margate’s seafront.

Realising the dream

http://www.turnercontemporary.org
Situated on the same site as Mrs Booth’s guest house, where Turner stayed when he visited the town, everyone can now experience the same views and unique Thanet light he saw, and that inspired much of his work. In 2001, Turner Contemporary was officially established, our Director Victoria Pomery was appointed and Droit House on Margate’s stone pier was opened as our exhibition space.

A prestigious competition for the gallery design was originally won by architects Snøhetta + Spence but their proposal was abandoned in February 2006 due to technical problems and escalating costs.

The gallery opened on 16 April 2011.

Moments from the opening ceremony.
We look forward to welcoming you to Turner Contemporary. “Turner Contemporary promises to become an exciting new voice in Margate and the country’s broader cultural landscape. Its programme will appeal to diverse audiences and will explore relationships between the art of the past and that of today.”

In 2010, we became an independent charitable trust.

Turner Contemporary Today
Turner's legacy as a visionary who bridged the gap between traditional and contemporary art and his sense of enquiry continues to inspire our innovative exhibition, events and learning programme. Sadly, John Crofts died in 2009 before he was able to see this concept realised. The commitment, hard work and enthusiasm of many individuals over the years has ensured that the dream of Turner Contemporary has been made a reality.
Turner Contemporary Today

http://www.turnercontemporary.org
On Tuesday 16 April 2013 Turner Contemporary celebrates its second birthday. It's been a remarkable 2 years since the gallery opened, with over 850,000 visits to date.

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