



Sion, Rhone, c.1836

TURNER IN JANUARY: THE VAUGHAN BEQUEST

1 – 31 January 2009

THE NATIONAL GALLERY COMPLEX, The Mound, Edinburgh

Telephone 0131 6246 6200; recorded information 0131 332 2266

www.nationalgalleries.org

The Gallery is open on 1 January from 12 noon until 5 pm; from 2 January opening hours revert to normal: Monday to Sunday 10 am – 5 pm, Thursday 10 am – 7 pm

Admission free

Exhibition sponsored by Artemis Investment Management Ltd

In keeping with a century-old tradition, New Year's Day at the National Gallery Complex in Edinburgh will be marked by the opening of the annual display of watercolours by J M W Turner (1775–1851). The thirty-eight works in the display were bequeathed in 1900 by Henry Vaughan, a London art collector who amassed an outstanding group of watercolours by the British painter. A perennial favourite in the Gallery's exhibition calendar, the display runs throughout January, providing a thoughtful counterpoint to the more energetic celebrations of Edinburgh's Hogmanay, and a welcome injection of colour during the darkest month of the year. This year the Vaughan Bequest display will also serve as a taster for a major international exhibition which will be the highlight of the Gallery's programme in Spring 2009. *Turner and Italy* will explore the artist's fascination with the country, and its impact upon his work (for further information, see below).

Recognised as perhaps the greatest of all British artists, Turner was a master of watercolour painting, using the medium to create stunning land- and seascapes, topographical views and designs for book illustrations. Vaughan acquired examples from every period of the artist's career, and chose each with a connoisseur's eye for quality. The exquisite works in his bequest range from early wash drawings of the 1790s, to colourful and atmospheric watercolour sketches of Continental Europe, executed in the 1830s and 1840s.

In the late 1790s, in early years of his career, Turner made a number of journeys to the mountains of North Wales that had a profound effect on his developing style. For Turner, as for many artists and writers at the end of the eighteenth century, the vastness and violence of nature inspired an awe, or even a terror, which equated to an experience of the 'Sublime'. It was the

opportunity to express these emotions through landscape painting which attracted Turner repeatedly to the mountains of Britain and the Continent, and to paint the savage elemental forces seen in avalanches, storms and mountainous seas. These forces can be seen in works such as *Loch Coruisk, Skye* which was painted after one of the artist's trips to the Scottish Highlands, in 1831; and *Sion, Capital of the Canton Valais*, which was probably painted after one of his many journeys to the Swiss Alps.

Turner also visited Venice on three occasions, in 1819, 1833 and 1840, and the Vaughan Bequest features six of the artist's stunning views of the city. In *The Piazzetta, Venice*, one of Turner's most spectacular Venetian studies, a bolt of lightning dramatically illuminates the Doge's Palace and St. Mark's Basilica. Turner created such effects by scratching away to reveal the paper once he had painted on it: he sometimes used his thumbnail, which he is reputed to have grown like an 'eagle-claw', for such a purpose.

Other works, such as *The Grand Canal by the Salute, Venice*, and *The Sun of Venice*, which were probably made *in situ*, in 1840, demonstrate Turner's consummate mastery of atmospheric lighting effects. In these watercolours, light itself seems to have become the main subject.

For much of his career, Turner was engaged in commissions to provide illustrations for books, and many of his trips were undertaken with a specific publishing project in mind. The artist's prolific activities as an illustrator are represented here by a number of images, including scenes painted for Robert Cadell's collected editions of the *Poetical and Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*.

In his will, Henry Vaughan stipulated that the Turner watercolours must not be subjected to permanent display, since continual exposure to light would result in their fading. Though the technology now exists to more easily protect these vulnerable works on paper, Vaughan ruled that the collection could only be shown in January, when daylight is at its weakest, and as a result the annual exhibition has become a much-loved tradition at the National Gallery.

Opening on 27 March, and running until 7 June 2009, the keenly-anticipated *Turner and Italy* will be the first exhibition to provide a comprehensive overview of Turner's complex and enduring relationship with the country. Turner was enchanted by Italy's climate, landscapes and architecture and drew inspiration from them to create some of his most admired works. This exhibition of around 100 oil paintings, watercolours and sketchbooks will include spectacular loans from collections across the world, including works from Washington, Philadelphia, Melbourne, Paris and London. *Turner and Italy* has been organised by the National Gallery of Scotland, and Edinburgh will be the only UK venue in the exhibition's international tour.

[ENDS]

**For further information and images, please call the Press Office on 0131 624 6325/ 332/ 314
pressoffice@nationalgalleries.org**