

Legacies:

JMW Turner and contemporary art practice

22 September 2017 – 14 January 2018



Exhibition guide

JMW Turner
Dorothy Cross
Gerry Fox
Susan Hiller
Idris Khan
Christopher Le Brun
Elizabeth Magill
Cornelia Parker
Bob and Roberta Smith
John Smith
Jonathan Wright



Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Chain Pier, Brighton*, c.1828 © Tate, London 2017.

A master of history, landscape and marine painting, Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775 - 1851) challenged accepted conventions in art, often shocking his contemporaries with his innovative techniques and candid portrayal of the modern world. This exhibition considers JMW Turner's legacy through the lens of contemporary art, highlighting the ongoing relevance of his work for artists practising today.

Tate is home to the largest collection of Turner's works in the world and almost all of the works accepted by the nation as part of the 1856 Turner Bequest. *Legacies* presents 16 works by Turner from Tate's collection alongside art by contemporary artists who have responded to Turner's legacy or made works addressing his major subjects or themes. From the Turner Bequest, we are delighted to present Turner's first exhibited oil, *Fishermen at Sea*, 1796, a nocturnal seascape emphasising nature's power over humankind. Late paintings, sketchbooks, watercolours and diagrams provide a modest glimpse into Turner's extensive range of interests and intensely inquisitive mind.

The work of Turner has influenced a wide range of cinematographers, filmmakers and artists working with film over the decades. Gerry Fox's video works pay homage to specific paintings Turner made in response to travel: *Staffa*, *Fingal's Cave*, 1832 (Yale Center for British Art) and *Venice: the Church of San Luca and the Back of the Palazzo Grimani from the Rio San Luca*, c.1840 (Tate).



Joseph Mallord William Turner, from *The Whalers Sketchbook* [Finberg CCCLIII], *Whalers at Sea at Sunset*, c.1845 © Tate, London 2017.

Turner often journeyed on foot but during the latter half of his working life steam power was introduced, expanding opportunities for travel and providing a subject for studies such as *Steam Boat* c.1830. In 1831 Turner boarded a steamer bound for the remote Island of Staffa, recording his approach and the interior of Fingal's Cave in a series of rapid sketches. We are delighted to present Turner's *Staffa Sketchbook* alongside Fox's *Sunset at Fingal's Cave, After Turner*, 2015/17, a work that retraces and brings to life Turner's memorable voyage. *After Turner*, 2010, recreates in slow-motion Turner's luminous watercolour of an unusual view from the Rio San Luca, one of the narrow channels leading off the Grand Canal that Turner painted during his last trip to Venice in 1840.

John's Smith's 2012 film, *Horizon (Five Pounds a Belgian)*, records dramatically different weather events, in and around Margate on the English coast, where Turner spent an increasing amount of time in the later years of his life. His film records and contrasts changes in light, colour and movement, recalling Turner's experimental late paintings, concerned with capturing the movement and nature of the sea.

We are especially pleased to show Cornelia Parker's *Room for Margins*, 1998, a room installation comprising six canvas liners and five sets of tacking edges, removed by Tate conservators in the 1950s and 1960s, due to their deteriorating condition, from paintings by Turner in Tate's collection. Parker came across the damaged support material when trawling the Tate conservation department in connection with research for her 1998 Serpentine Gallery show. Mounting them behind glass and displaying as a work authored by herself, Parker reveals the liners and edges as precious objects of beauty and value in their own right. *Rough Sea with Wreckage* c. 1840-5, one of the 'originals' from which a set of tacking edges were removed, is displayed close to Parker's installation, thereby reuniting Turner's painting with a fragment of its history.

Dorothy Cross and Jonathan Wright have been specially commissioned by The New Art Gallery Walsall to produce a new work each in response to Turner. Wright's installation, *Harnessing Light*, 2017, celebrates Turner's candid approach to recording the rapidly changing English landscape. The tanning drum symbolises Walsall's historic trade and connects, via a leather harness, to a view of the canal and modern Wharf development outside. The harness line is inspired by Turner's 1828 painting of Brighton Chain Pier while the form of the corner structure is directly borrowed from Turner's sketch of a lifting gantry at Tintagel, displayed nearby. Turner produced a number of sketches and paintings depicting landscapes with distant mountains. Dorothy Cross' exquisite mountain floor references Turner's extensive travels and his recording of nature and topography. The white marble rectangle alludes to a blank sketchbook or canvas, upon which Turner might record various landscapes.

Legacies is presented as part of a three-year partnership with Tate involving major loans from the Tate collection to exhibitions at The New Art Gallery Walsall. We are grateful to Tate for helping to realise this exhibition, in particular Caroline Collier, Director, Partnerships and Programmes, Helen Cooper, Manager, National Programmes, and Chris Higgins, Collection Registrar.

Zoë Lippett
Exhibitions and Artists' Projects Curator



Jonathan Wright, *Buoy*, 2017, graphite on paper. Courtesy the artist.

JONATHAN WRIGHT IN CONVERSATION WITH ZOË LIPPETT

Folkestone-based artist Jonathan Wright works with sculpture, installation and drawing to produce works that refer to the structures and objects that support and service our everyday lives: pylons, water towers, boats, fences. Most of these works have been made for the public realm and developed through research into the local history and infrastructure of a particular place. His newly commissioned installation, *Harnessing Light*, 2017 brings Turner's vision to bear on Walsall, reflecting the artist's recording of industrial subjects, technological advances, and the rapidly changing English landscape.

Zoë Lippett: Turner had an extraordinary range of interests, offering up a wide range of possible approaches, themes and subjects for this commission. Can you describe your idea and intention with *Harnessing Light*, 2017?

Jonathan Wright: What became immediately apparent when I started work on the commission was how little I knew about Turner's practice. It became clear that his approach to producing work was a very contemporary one. His interest in science and technology and the



Window in JMW Turner's studio, Petworth House, West Sussex.
Photo: Jonathan Wright.

workings of the human body provided a context for the way he perceived and recorded the changing landscape around him. *Harnessing Light* is an attempt to mimic Turner's multi-disciplinary approach to working. I wanted to imagine how he might approach working in Walsall and create that in three dimensions; a drawing that you can walk into.

ZL: You visited Petworth, Lord Egremont's house in Sussex, early on in the commissioning process. In 1809 Turner was commissioned to paint views of the park and house and was later given his own painting room with a specially constructed window. Your work connects to a large window in the gallery. Were you inspired by the window in Turner's room, by his desire to capture and harness light?

JW: The window in Turner's studio is quite remarkable. The light coming from it floods the space and feels physical when you enter the dark wood-paneled room. The light literally hits you.

ZL: Turner reflected the reality of the living landscape in his work - a warts and all view of the world. The window you have selected in the gallery takes in a view of the once-derelict Walsall Town Wharf, bringing together a historic waterways landmark with commercial real estate. Was it important to connect the work inside the gallery with the redeveloped landscape outside?

JW: The moment I walked into the gallery space I felt that the window was very important, not only as a light source but as a 'view'. It was really the starting point for the commission, providing the canvas for the work to sit within. The opportunity offered by the window to make the connection between the inside and outside of the Gallery was a perfect chance to literally focus the historical and contemporary as an image.

ZL: The Fresnel lens fitted into the window subtly distorts and inverts the view outside. Does the lens allude to Turner's interest in scientific ideas?

JW: The lens is a direct reference to Turner's interest in the workings of the eye and his fascination with the science of optics. Turner's scientific inquisitiveness is a continuous sub-text in his work.

ZL: In preparation for the commission, you viewed a number of sketchbooks from the Turner Bequest, including the *Cornwall and Devon Sketchbook*, 1811 (displayed in *Legacies*), from which the lifting gantry motif in your work is borrowed. What drew you to this sketch of stone-lifting gear in Tintagel? Turner's interest in this scene seems to be engineering and human ingenuity.

JW: The sketch made in Tintagel strikes a chord with my own practice. The lifting gantry is the kind of simple machine that I find fascinating. There are very few diagonals in nature so the structure stands out in the drawing as a very human intervention. These structures add to the beauty of the scene rather than detract; to include them in the drawing marks Turner's evolution of the Romantic tradition to include the new and the modern.

ZL: Other influences include Turner's *The Chain Pier, Brighton*, c.1828 and the artist's 1847 version of the painting *The Hero of a Hundred Flights*. How do the forms and motifs within these paintings manifest in your commission?

JW: When I visited Walsall last year I knew that there was one material that had to be used on the making of the work - leather. The history and identity of the area is shaped by the leather industry so I wanted to reflect that story materially. The nature of the material lent itself to mimicking the lines in the chain pier, a unique structure at the time, marking a technological milestone as the first suspension bridge ever built. I have used the leather as a drawing

material. The large tanning drum structure refers to the chrome tanning process and the form was suggested to me by the focus and circular shapes in the foundry scene Turner depicts in *The Hero of a Hundred Flights*. It gives a centre of darkness to the installation that is countered by the bright light source provided by the window. I have tried to recreate the intense dynamic that exists in the painting.

ZL: The leather used in your work was sourced locally and worked into a large latticework harness at Walsall Leather Museum, where you engaged with local people involved with preparing Walsall-made leathers. Why was the town and its history such an important frame of reference for your response to Turner?

JW: When Turner visited an area with his sketchbooks he worked directly from what he saw in front of him - as you said earlier, a warts and all approach. I wanted the *Harnessing Light* piece to have the same uniqueness, for it to be a view of the town and its history in one image. I think my approach is one usually used in the development of work for the public realm rather than traditional gallery contexts, where there is not always a direct connection outside the immediate gallery environment. It is a site-specific gallery work, if that makes sense?

ZL: You are also showing some graphite drawings alongside your commission. These depict nautical scenes: boats and a buoy caught in choppy seas. There are



Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Fishermen at Sea*, exhibited 1796 © Tate, London 2017.

parallels, I think, with some of Turner's seascapes in the exhibition, for example *Rough Sea with Wreckage*, 1840-5 and his earlier *Fishermen at Sea*, 1796. With these images, Turner points to the overwhelming power of nature and the inevitable vulnerability of humankind.

JW: I am a big fan of the writings of Joseph Conrad, who is known for his colourful accounts of dangerous life at sea. I think that my interest in boats and the sea is about the smallness of the human spirit in the landscape. I also enjoy the formal beauty of boats: they are a visual counterpoint to the structures made by the water that support them.



Elizabeth Magill, *Gondolier (Venice mono 19)*, 2008. Elizabeth Magill & Paragon | Contemporary Editions Ltd. Photo: Steve White.

ELIZABETH MAGILL

In 1819, at the age of forty-four, Turner travelled for the first time to Italy, visiting Rome, via Milan, Venice and Bologna. During his tour of Italy, he collected a mass of reference material in some twenty notebooks. Turner's images of Venice were quickly recognised by their first viewers as some of his most magical, luminous works, including several romantic and mysterious studies he painted of Venice by moonlight. Elizabeth Magill's Venice series came about during a print residency in 2008 at Scuola Internazionale di Grafica, Venice. They share with Turner a meditation on light, colour and the reflective surfaces of water. Of her Venice series Magill has said: "I wanted the work to look nocturnal because, I found, as night fell in the city the reflected colours seemed more visually charged. There was a velvety darkness to the place that I tried to work into the etchings."



Idris Khan, *every... William Turner postcard from Tate Britain*, 2004. Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro, London © Idris Khan.

IDRIS KHAN, OBE

every... William Turner postcard from Tate Britain, 2004 forms part of a large group of photographic and sculptural works Idris Khan has made paying homage to great artists, thinkers and composers. Here, commercially reproduced images of Turner works held at Tate Britain are overlaid and combined to create a single, composite image. In Khan's multi-layered photograph, the oeuvre of Turner can be seen in a murky, yet illuminated, instant, simultaneously hiding and revealing the power and singular identity of the original images. Many of Khan's works are a meditation on the nature of repetition and this photographic print is characteristic of the artist's repetitive and intensely time-consuming process. The subject reflects Khan's interest in authorship and photography's inherent relationship to painting.



Gerry Fox, still from *Sunset at Fingal's Cave, after Turner*, 2015/17. Courtesy the artist and Eleven Fine Art.

GERRY FOX

Gerry Fox is known for his films about contemporary artists, including *The Fundamental Gilbert and George* (1997), *Gerhard Richter* (2003) and *Viola* (2016). His displayed video works pay homage to two well-known paintings by Turner: *Staffa, Fingal's Cave*, 1832 and *Venice: the Church of San Luca and the Back of the Palazzo Grimani from the Rio San Luca*, c.1840. Turner's Staffa painting depicts a steamboat disappearing into the sunset at the legendary Fingal's Cave on the uninhabited island of Staffa, off the west coast of Scotland. To produce his moving version of the painting, Fox retraced Turner's journey to Staffa, a trip the painter recorded vividly in his *Staffa Sketchbook*, 1831, displayed nearby. Remarkably, Fox witnessed the same atmospheric weather events as Turner captured so vividly in his painting: "A huge white cloud emerged right above the cave and the golden light suddenly transformed itself

at a critical juncture in the filming, the white smoke trailing from the boat turning visible against the dark background of the island." Applying some painting effects at the post-production stage, Fox attempted to digitally recreate the power of Turner's brushstroke and the essence of his churning green sea against a soft, dying sun.

After Turner is taken from Fox's *Venetian Impressions* series (2010), which recreates in slow-motion paintings by great artists of the past, including Turner, Sargent, Manet, Monet and Renoir. Displayed on a plinth instead of the wall, the work is given a more sculptural treatment in this particular exhibition. The miniature framed screen hints at how great works of art are frequently consumed via handheld digital devices, the flat image becoming a 'stand-in' for the physical original.



John Smith, still from *Horizon (Five Pounds a Belgian)*, 2012. Courtesy the artist, Tanya Leighton, Berlin and Kate MacGarry, London. Commissioned by Turner Contemporary, Margate.

JOHN SMITH

Turner had a lifelong fascination with the sea. His first exhibited oil painting, *Fishermen at Sea*, 1796 (displayed in *Legacies*), was a seascape and the artist's interest in sea painting was unwavering, from oil sketches made with finished marine compositions to more experimental late works concerned with capturing the movement and nature of the sea itself. Indeed, many of the apparently incomplete paintings found in Turner's studio following his death, not exhibited in his lifetime, were concerned with the subject of the sea. John Smith's 2012 film, *Horizon (Five Pounds a Belgian)*, records dramatically different weather events in and around Margate on the English coast, where Turner spent an increasing

amount of time in the later years of his life. The film was commissioned originally by Turner Contemporary, an art gallery situated on Margate sea front, the same site as the boarding house where Turner stayed when visiting the town. Mrs Booth's lodgings offered the perfect vantage point from which Turner could observe happenings on the shore and out at sea. For three months, Smith filmed from the large 'picture window' of the gallery, capturing the ever-changing nature of the sea. His painterly recording of the sea emphasises and contrasts changes in light, colour and movement, moving back and forth between documentary representation and near abstraction.



Susan Hiller, *Rough Times*, 2010. © Manchester Art Gallery / Bridgeman Images.

SUSAN HILLER

Turner rejected academic conventions that defined what was beautiful and appropriate in art, injecting new vision and vitality into British art through a more direct response to what he saw and experienced on land and at sea. His seascapes masterfully capture the fleeting effects of weather and the sea's potential as a destructive, unstoppable force.

Rough Times, 2010 shows nine views of stormy seas battering against cliffs. It is taken from an extensive and ongoing series of archival dry prints, exploring specific relationships between photography and painting. The series extends from Hiller's seminal postcard piece, *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists*

(1972-1976), featuring 305 postcards collected over a long period from British seaside towns. Many of the postcards were reproductions of paintings, while others were printed versions of photographs that had been hand-tinted by unknown artists prior to reproduction. The images reflect the British fascination with bad weather and borrow some of the conventions of seascape paintings of the 1800s; turbulent waves dominate the images and dramatic tonal contrasts emphasise the sea's insurmountable power. The work as a whole can be seen as a comment on the influence of Romantic art on later landscape photography.



Cornelia Parker, from *Room for Margins*, from *Rough Sea* c. 1840-5, JMW Turner, No5479, Tate Collection, 1998. © Tate, London 2017.

CORNELIA PARKER, RA

Room for Margins, 1998 is an installation comprising six canvas liners and five sets of canvas tacking edges, removed by Tate conservators in the 1950s and 1960s, due to their deteriorating condition, from paintings by Turner in Tate's collection. Cornelia Parker came across the damaged support material when trawling the Tate conservation department in connection with research for her 1998 Serpentine Gallery solo show. Intrigued by the fragile beauty of the liners and edges, Parker sought permission to display them as a work authored by herself. Mounted behind glass, and labelled with the title of the work they were the underside of, the canvas liners act as 'physical stand-ins' for the original paintings, their beautiful patina, accrued from many years with their backs to the wall, and water stains bearing the traces of history. Close to disintegration, the edges are a reminder of the vulnerability of works of art and the threat of physical loss.



Dorothy Cross, *Basking Shark*, 2013. Image courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin. Lent by Ireland's Great Hunger Museum at Quinnipiac University.

DOROTHY CROSS

Working across sculpture, film and photography, Cross looks at relationships between the body and time and the human and natural world. Her process involves scouring the landscapes of rural Ireland for animal remnants and geological fragments, natural materials that are often combined with manmade objects to produce hybrid sculptures with great symbolic weight. The shark has been a recurring theme in Cross' practice. In *Basking Shark*, a shark skin is stretched over a currach, bonding the shark, one of the planet's most ancient and mysterious creatures, with a traditional boat used on the West Coast of Ireland. The dead animal was found on a beach, the skin preserved and then collected by Cross. Turner also took sea creatures as a theme, producing several works in the 1840s depicting whaling scenes and large fish, for example *Sunrise with Sea Monsters*, c.1845. 'Sea monsters' and whaling ships are the subject of Turner's *Whalers Sketchbook* from the same period, displayed nearby.

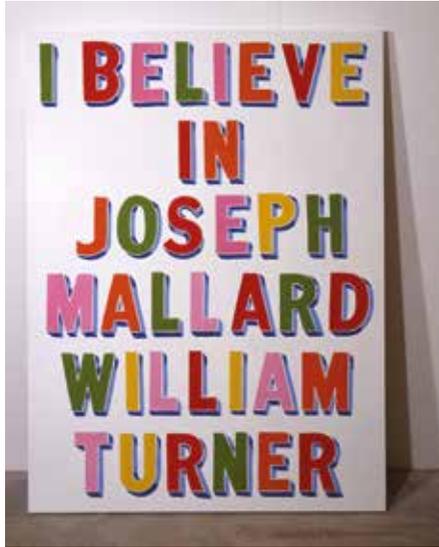
CHRISTOPHER LE BRUN, PRA

The Trial was originally titled *Dido II* and part of a group of works Christopher Le Brun made in the years up to 2011 that took poet Virgil's account of Dido and Aeneas as inspiration. Dissatisfied with the painting after it was exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition the following year, Le Brun returned to the studio and repainted it completely so that no trace of the previous imagery remained. *The Trial* therefore represents a transition to a new phase in Le Brun's practice, where his work moved away from a reliance on representational imagery. The title, reflects the artist's struggle to resolve his painting over a three year period, from 2011 to 2014.

Turner famously abandoned landscape reference points in his later work and his progressively loose brushwork also took his work in an increasingly abstract direction. Relating the shift in his own practice to his observation of Turner's, Le Brun has said, "*The Trial* stood as if suddenly independent with light and colour as the main carriers of feeling. I am aware that Turner often dramatised the central role of light in paintings such as *Regulus* and also, famously, in his occasionally disputed last words, 'The Sun is God'. He never abandoned resemblance or the appearances of nature, even in the late paintings, but it's certain that the underlying momentum of his work favours light to provide motif, medium and meaning."



Christopher Le Brun, *The Trial*, 2011-14, Oil on canvas. Photo: Steve White. Private Collection, London.



Bob and Roberta Smith, *I BELIEVE IN JOSEPH MALLARD WILLIAM TURNER*, 1998. British Council Collection
© Bob and Roberta Smith

BOB AND ROBERTA SMITH, RA

Bob and Roberta Smith is the adopted persona of the artist Patrick Brill, who is best known for his text works which often resemble political placards. *I BELIEVE IN JOSEPH MALLARD WILLIAM TURNER*, 1998 is one of Smith's many 'I believe in' painted signs, this time proclaiming faith in JMW Turner. Other giant texts exploring personal heroes, memories, likes and dislikes include *I BELIEVE IN THE CLASH* and *I BELIEVE IN DÜRER*. Speaking in 1997, the artist said, "In England we define ourselves by our jobs far too much and I think we ought to define ourselves by the reality we construct around ourselves - define ourselves by the things we enjoy rather than the things that earn us money."

Smith's text works often involve deliberate spelling mistakes or a play on words. The replacement of 'o' from Turner's middle name (Mallord) with an 'a' playfully confuses a great landscape painter with a common duck, thereby poking fun at anxieties in the art world around the relevance of the medium to contemporary art, where, with the proliferation of unconventional art materials, painting has been considered something of a sitting duck.

Everest Floor, 2017

"As a boy, Turner pinned drawings of the sky on the ceiling of his father's barbers shop for the clients leaning back in their chairs to be shaved.

White marble paving slabs form a floor out of which a mountain rises. The mountain appears diminutive and domestic but, in fact, represents the highest pinnacle on our planet: an exact replica of Mount Everest.

The mountain emerging from the stone was carved from within. The floor brings together architecture and nature, which is appropriate for Turner who so vividly brought nature, weather, and topography into the salon. Turner emerged from a modest background and travelled extensively, recording light and nature - wind, rain, space and distance."

Dorothy Cross

EVENTS

Adult workshops with Tim Wright

Saturday 7 October 2017 &
Saturday 25 November 2017
11am-4pm

A painting experience exploring the work of JMW Turner with Tim Wright, Painting Consultant for the 2014 film *Mr. Turner*, directed by Mike Leigh. £30. Materials provided. No experience required. Places limited, please book by calling 01922 654400.

Bite-size talks

Wednesday 25 October 2017 &
Wednesday 15 November 2017
12.30pm-12.45pm & 1pm-1.15pm
Free, drop-in
Join *Legacies* curator, Zoë Lippett, for a bite-size tour of the exhibition.

Curator talk

Saturday 9 December 2017
2-3pm
Free, drop-in
Join *Legacies* curator, Zoë Lippett, for a talk on the exhibition, considering the relationship between Turner's work and the contemporary works on display.

In Conversation with Gerry Fox

Saturday 13 January 2018
1.30-2.30pm
Free, drop-in
A talk by the BAFTA award-winning filmmaker focusing on the video works he has made paying homage to great works by Turner.

In Conversation with Jonathan Wright

Saturday 13 January 2018
3-4pm
Free, drop-in
Commissioned artist, Jonathan Wright will introduce his sculptural installation and drawings produced in response to themes of industry, progress and light in Turner's work.

A full public programme accompanies this exhibition – visit our website for details of further events and family workshops.

A large print version of this guide is available on request.

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