

The Museum of Modern Art

West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Circle 5-8900 Cable: Modernart

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PRESS PREVIEW:

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11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Turner: Imagination and Reality, an unprecedented loan exhibition of paintings and watercolors from the British national collection, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from March 23 through May 22.

During the last 20 years of his life, Turner developed a style of extraordinary originality. He evolved a new order of art, which was virtually unparalleled until the 20th century. This exhibition gives, for the first time in any country, a close and concentrated view of this revolutionary achievement.

The entire range of Turner's final years is shown -- the paintings exhibited in his lifetime and those which were kept in his studio, the watercolors, the intimate sketchbooks and the notes of his technical researches -- with a few earlier works to place them in perspective.

The exhibition consists of 40 oils, 59 watercolors and three sketchbooks. Fewer than half the oils were exhibited during his lifetime; some of the watercolors selected from the 19,000 he left the British collection at his death in 1851 have never before been exhibited anywhere.

Turner died 115 years ago, but some of his pictures look as if they were painted yesterday, directors of the exhibition Lawrence Gowing and Monroe Wheeler observe. "These pictures from the last twenty years of Turner's life, reveal potentialities in painting that did not reappear until our time. They tell us something about the inner nature of a whole pictorial tradition, of which recent American painting is an integral part. Turner not only saw the world as light and color; he isolated an intrinsic quality of painting and revealed that it could be self-sufficient, an independent imaginative function."

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TURNER: IMAGINATION AND REALITY, by Lawrence Gowing. 64 pages, 77 illustrations (16 in color). Hardbound, \$4.95; paperbound, \$2.95. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Doubleday and Co., Inc.

The Museum of Modern Art exhibition was organized in collaboration with The Tate Gallery and with the assistance of the British Foreign Office, The National Gallery and The British Museum. Nine masterworks from American private and public collections have been added to the British loan of 90 pictures. Lawrence Gowing, Keeper of British Paintings at the Tate, and Monroe Wheeler, Director of Exhibitions and Publications at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, are the directors of the show.

One of the climatic experiences of Turner's life and a turning point in his art, the burning of the Houses of Parliament on October 16, 1834, is recorded in one of the sketchbooks shown for the first time outside of England. "It is a sign of how much the fire at Westminster meant to Turner that he worked for once in colour direct from the subject," Gowing notes. "He blotted the pages of his sketchbook one against another in his haste. A drama of flame and water on which he had brooded all his life was being acted out in front of him....The Burning of the Houses of Parliament released a fantastic force in Turner's work. A barrier between reality and imagination had vanished; they were never distinct again."

This sketchbook is on public exhibition for the first time. Furthermore, as its contents have not been published, except for one watercolor, the entire group is being made available to visitors in the form of a continuous projection of color slides in the sequence in which Turner made them that night. The slides are shown in a gallery adjacent to the exhibition. The great final oil of the subject, from The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, is in the exhibition.

Two-thirds of the works shown are watercolors. Turner's probing, experimental use of watercolor was unique in painting before Cézanne, Gowing points out. "He used the medium constantly throughout his life; his work in it was always a step ahead of that in oil." On view are the delightful gouaches Turner painted of the life of the house at Petworth, Venetian scenes, seascapes and sunsets.

Gowing concludes his monograph: "Now we find that a kind of painting, which is of vital concern to us, was anticipated by Turner. And by Turner alone, no one

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else before developed so far and with such devotion this special order of painting, which is so hard to define and yet so recognisable. It is hard to define because the fantasy and the image are implicit in the material it is made of, inseparable from the actual behaviour of paint in the painter's hands. Turner showed that a certain potentiality was inherent in the nature of painting. The latent possibility has emerged again. Turner's vision and his towering fantasy remain his own, beyond compare. Nevertheless we meet him with a sense of recognition."

The exhibition was installed under the direction of Lawrence Gowing and Alicia Legg, Associate Curator, Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions, in galleries designed by Wilder Green, Program Coordinator.

Photographs, catalogs, and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Circle 5-8900.