

Press release

EMBARGOED until 09:30am on 21 January 2025

Turner 250

A year celebrating Britain's greatest artist

#Turner250

This morning, cultural institutions across Britain announced **Turner 250**, a year-long festival of special exhibitions and events. Taking place throughout 2025, the programme celebrates 250 years since the birth of renowned painter JMW Turner.

Whether visiting museums and galleries or tuning in on TV and online, everyone will have the chance to enjoy Turner's greatest works, learn about his incredible life and career, and discover the many ways he continues to inspire creativity today.

Born on 23 April 1775, JMW Turner is widely considered to be the greatest and most influential British artist of all time. From humble beginnings, he travelled the length and breadth of the country to capture its dramatic scenery, redefining landscape painting in the process. Today he remains a touchstone of British cultural life – the face on the £20 note – and the painter behind some of the most iconic images of the natural world ever created.

Today's announcement includes over 30 projects taking place this year, organised by venues large and small as well as by national organisations such as Tate, the BBC and Art UK.

- Turner exhibitions will be held in London, Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Norwich, Bath and Sussex, highlighting key themes in his life and work, and exploring his connections to other renowned historic figures like Jane Austen and John Constable.
- Turner's legacy in modern and contemporary art will be celebrated with displays, commissions and events in London and Margate, while the Turner Prize will be staged in Bradford as a highlight of the UK City of Culture programme.
- Books, films and digital content will be released through the year, including a complete catalogue of Turner's 37,500 sketches and watercolours on Tate's website, a major new BBC documentary bringing the man and his art to life, and a screening of Mike Leigh's award-winning film *Mr. Turner* at BFI Southbank.
- Talks and workshops will showcase new scholarship and ideas inspired by Turner, including an international conference at Tate Britain, a summit exploring art's connection to the natural world at Turner Contemporary, and the Turner Society's annual Kurt Pantzer memorial lecture.
- A keen international traveller in his own lifetime, Turner will also have his 250th anniversary commemorated far beyond the UK, with celebratory shows being staged in Connecticut, Cincinnati and Shanghai, as well as a special exhibition closer to home in Dublin.

Turner's birthday on 23 April 2025 will be a particular highlight: The artists shortlisted for the Turner Prize will be announced that morning ahead of their show in Bradford in the autumn, an exhibition of Turner's rarely-seen images of wildlife will open at Turner's House in Twickenham, and a new room of highlights from the Turner Bequest will open in Tate Britain's Clore Gallery, home to a permanent free display of 100 works by the artist.

Quotes

Arts Minister Sir Chris Bryant said:

"Turner was one of this country's greatest artists. An innovator who created some of our best known canvasses, he reshaped British art. A talent of Turner's stature requires a year of celebration, from the prize in his name to the back of the £20 note, his immense legacy continues to permeate through the arts and public life in Britain. The 250th anniversary of his birth will be an opportunity for the public to immerse themselves in our outstanding artistic heritage. I encourage everyone to take the time to find an event from the upcoming year to enjoy some of Britain's finest artists from the past and present."

Maria Balshaw, Director of Tate, said:

"Turner is a standout figure in the story of British creativity. It is Tate's privilege to care for the world's biggest collection of his art and showcase it to the widest possible public. Over the course of this year, I'm delighted that we will be showing over 150 of his stunning works at Tate Britain as well as lending over 100 more to venues right across this country and beyond."

Suzy Klein, Head of BBC Arts & Classical Music TV said:

"We're thrilled to be working with Tate to celebrate Britain's most celebrated artist and be granted unprecedented access to Turner's vast collection of rarely seen sketches. I can't wait to share this treasure trove with audiences, not only illuminating the workings of Turner's unique creative mind but also offering an unprecedented view into the extraordinary era of change during his lifetime."

Press information and images

To access the full press pack of listings information and press images, visit [Tate's Dropbox: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/qowab0x9t6akt1zc4et/AMrtfJRpAONJ2BQM7wmWteg?rlkey=perkzwwc0x5tlsxid0onaovub&st=l72zd9xc&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/qowab0x9t6akt1zc4et/AMrtfJRpAONJ2BQM7wmWteg?rlkey=perkzwwc0x5tlsxid0onaovub&st=l72zd9xc&dl=0)

Public information

Details of the programme are publicly accessible at tate.org.uk/turner-250

Press contacts

For press requests, email pressoffice@tate.org.uk or call +44(0)20 7887 8730

Ticketed Exhibitions and Venues

JMW Turner and Changing Visions of Landscape

Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery (Norfolk Museums Service), Norwich

Open until 23 February 2025

Turner's landscapes conveyed a full range of artistic, historical and emotional meanings. This exhibition brings together, for the first time ever, four of his paintings of the Bridges at Walton – from Norwich Castle, Tate, and a private collection – each of which gives a completely different character to this one location. Visitors can journey through landscapes real, imagined, dramatic, comforting, nightmarish, fragile and beautiful. Featuring work by artists from the 17th century to the present, the exhibition reveals the breadth and complexity of human concerns surrounding landscape and our changing attitudes to the natural world. *Generously supported by East Anglia Art Fund, WSP, Arts Council England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Art Fund and Norfolk County Council.*

norwichcastle.norfolk.gov.uk

Romance to Realities: The Northern Landscape and Shifting Identities

Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle

Open until 26 April 2025

For centuries the landscapes of the North of England and Scotland have fascinated artists. This exhibition focuses on how these landscapes – urban, rural, land, sea and sky – have changed over the centuries. Touching on more than 200 years of art, the exhibition is organised in collaboration with The Fleming Collection, bringing together works from their exceptional collection of Scottish art with the Laing's outstanding permanent collection. It also features JMW Turner's exquisite watercolour *Inverness* on loan from the Inverness Museum and Art Gallery.

laingartgallery.org.uk

Turner's Kingdom: Beauty, Birds and Beasts

Turner's House, Twickenham

23 April – 26 October 2025

Turner's House is the only remaining home designed by the artist himself, offering a rare and personal insight into his life and work. In 2025, it will stage a new exhibition focusing of Turner's portrayals of birds and animals. The show will highlight his fascination with nature, from pets at home to wildlife encountered on countryside visits. It will include personal artifacts like the artist's fishing rod, as well as important artworks on loan from Tate, the Royal Academy of Arts, and the British Library, and a group of exquisite and rarely exhibited watercolours lent by Leeds Museums and Galleries.

turnershouse.org

Austen and Turner: A Country House Encounter

Harewood House, Leeds

3 May – 19 October 2025

The work of two legendary artistic figures, both born in 1775, will be illuminated in this exhibition exploring their relationship to English country houses and landscapes at a time of great social change. A speculative encounter between Turner and Austen at Harewood House will be brought to life through interventions and works by contemporary artists, alongside artifacts including period costume, writing and artistic tools, rare illustrated books and prints, and major loans on show in the North for the first time. The exhibition will include celebrated Turner works including rarely seen paintings commissioned in the 1790s depicting views of Harewood.

Curated by Harewood House Trust in collaboration with The Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies at the University of York.

harewood.org

Impressions in Watercolour: Turner and his Contemporaries

The Holburne Museum, Bath

23 May – 31 August 2025

This will be a rare opportunity to see some of Turner's finest watercolours from a private collection. The exhibition will showcase Turner at his most experimental and gestural. The selection of works will also place him among notable contemporaries including Thomas Girtin and John Sell Cotman, to highlight the era of exciting developments in watercolour in which they worked.

holburne.org

Turner's Vision at Petworth

Petworth House, Sussex

21 June – 16 November 2025

Turner is Petworth's most celebrated artist thanks to his friendship with the 3rd Earl of Egremont and his regular visits to the house in the 1820s and 30s. Today there are few places anywhere in the country where the legacy of such fruitful artistic patronage can be better experienced. In 2025, for the first time in 20 years, a wide range of Turner's studies of the Petworth landscape will be exhibited in the very place that inspired him. Visitors will be able to dig deeper into his experiments with colour, his use of materials, and his artistic vision.

nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/sussex/petworth

Turner: Always Contemporary

Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

25 October 2025 – 22 February 2026

This exhibition will explore Turner's enduring impact on later generations of artists, featuring National Museums Liverpool's collection of Turner's oil paintings, works on paper and prints, alongside modern and contemporary artworks that delve into themes of travel, landscape, and artistic experimentation. It will offer fresh perspectives on Turner and his legacy, highlighting how he grappled with issues that remain relevant today: climate change, immigration, tourism, and the role of the artist. Alongside Turner's works, visitors will encounter pieces by Claude Monet, Ethel Walker, Bridget Riley and many more, bringing together 250 years of art to examine Turner's timeless appeal.

liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker-art-gallery

Turner and Constable

Tate Britain, London

27 November 2025 – 12 April 2026

This exhibition will bring together Britain's two most famous artistic rivals, who were born within a year of each other in 1775 and 1776. Although they started life in different social worlds, Turner and Constable both set their sights on transforming landscape painting, investing it with new layers of meaning and emotion. Tate Britain will explore these intertwined lives and legacies and reveal unexpected sides to their characters, offering visitors an unmissable chance to directly compare their spectacular works and see how their rivalry changed the course of British art forever.

In partnership with LVMH. Supported by James Bartos. With additional support from The Turner and Constable Exhibition Supporters Circle, Tate Americas Foundation and Tate Members.

tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain

Free Exhibitions and Displays

Turner in Public Collections

Art UK

Hundreds of paintings by JMW Turner can be found right across the UK, from the National Library of Wales to Aberdeen Art Gallery, and from the Ulster Museum to Abbot Hall. Art UK offers you the chance to see all these and more via their free online database. Featuring over 600 of the artist's works in public collections large and small, Art UK's online hub also includes fascinating stories and learning resources to help everyone engage with Turner's life and art.

artuk.org

Shields, on the River Tyne

South Shields Museum & Art Gallery, South Shields

Open until 23 January 2025

This exhibition spotlights a mezzotint print of JMW Turner's iconic watercolour, *Shields, on the River Tyne*, giving visitors an insight into the South Shields riverside area in the early 19th century through the eyes of Britain's most celebrated artist. The image shows coal being transferred into ships ready for transportation, as well as an early coal wagon at the end of a railway line from the mines. Turner closely supervised its engraving to ensure it faithfully captured the technical detail and spirit of his watercolour original.

southshieldsmuseum.org.uk

Turner in January: Ireland's Vaughan Bequest

Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh

Open until 31 January 2025

Every January, gallery-goers in Edinburgh and Dublin enjoy an annual free display of Turner watercolours from the Vaughan Bequest. As a one-off special take on this tradition, Turner's 250th anniversary sees the 31 works from Ireland shown at the Royal Scottish Academy building while the 38 works from Scotland are shown at the National Gallery of Ireland. These two exhibitions provide a unique opportunity for visitors to enjoy a different set of Turner's sweeping seascapes, dramatic landscapes and spectacular cities, drawn from across the artist's career and showcasing the breadth of his innovative techniques.

Supported thanks to the players of People's Postcode Lottery and Sir Ewan and Lady Christine Brown.

nationalgalleries.org/visit/royal-scottish-academy-building

JMW Turner: In Light and Shade

The Whitworth, Manchester

7 February 2025 – 2 November 2025

This exhibition will be a rare opportunity to see Turner's *Liber Studiorum* in its entirety for the first time in over 100 years. Turner is renowned for the vitality of his landscape paintings and the *Liber Studiorum* is a compelling visual manifesto in print, widely regarded as his most ambitious series of landscape engravings. The exhibition will pair Turner's most evocative *Liber* prints with his most admired watercolours from the Whitworth's collection, as well as loaned works from institutional and public collections. Visitors are invited to explore Turner's artistic legacy and the significance of his prints.

Supported by the Manchester Accommodation BID.

whitworth.manchester.ac.uk

Highlights of the Turner Bequest

Tate Britain, London

23 April 2025 – 28 June 2026

Tate Britain's Clore Gallery is the home of the Turner Bequest and showcases a permanent free display of around 100 works by the artist. In 2025, a new room will open in this display focusing on the strength and variety of his works on paper. The researchers currently compiling a complete catalogue of the Bequest's drawings and watercolours will showcase highlights from their work so far. They include exquisite images that reveal Turner's ideas and methods as a practising artist, as well as lesser-known images from his sketchbooks, such as natural history and animal drawings.

tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain

Turner's Waves Breaking on A Lee Shore at Margate (Study for 'Rockets and Blue Lights')

Turner Contemporary, Margate

Opening 8 April 2025

Turner Contemporary will present JMW Turner's masterwork *Waves Breaking on a Lee Shore at Margate (Study for 'Rockets and Blue Lights')*, on loan from Tate. This atmospheric painting, created during one of Turner's regular visits to Margate in the 1830s and 40s, captures the elemental force of a storm as seen from the safety of the shore. Turner Contemporary stands on the site of the boarding house where Turner stayed during these visits, and his radical vision defines the gallery's ethos today. The display will be accompanied by activities celebrating the painter's lifelong connection to Margate and his love of the ocean.

turnercontemporary.org

NG200: The Wonder of Art

The National Gallery, London

Opening on 10 May 2025

Turner's works will form a key part of the upcoming redisplay of the National Gallery collection, celebrating the Gallery's own 200th birthday. This will be a once-in-a-generation opportunity to see all the collection's major works at the same time, with more art on display than ever before, and special displays and interventions pairing works from different time periods. Turner was renowned for responding to and inspiring artists across Europe and from many different periods, and the National Gallery's redisplay will draw clearer links and spark conversations between more of these inspirations.

nationalgallery.org.uk

Turner Prize 2025

Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Bradford

27 September 2025 – 25 January 2026

Named in honour of Turner and his legacy of artistic experimentation, the annual Turner Prize is one of the best-known visual arts awards in the world. It has promoted public debate about new developments in contemporary British art for over four decades, offering a vital platform each year to artists who have achieved a breakthrough in their work. The 2025 exhibition will be held at Cartwright Hall as a highlight of Bradford's year as UK City of Culture, with the shortlisted artists due to be announced in April and the winner announced in December.

Produced by Bradford 2025. Delivered in partnership with Tate, Bradford District Museums & Galleries and Yorkshire Contemporary.

bradford2025.co.uk

Shadowsapes: Turner and Quantum

Orleans House Gallery, Twickenham

Opening in September 2025

Turner 250 meets the 100-year anniversary of quantum physics in this exhibition at Orleans House Gallery. Dr Libby Heaney, award-winning artist with a PhD in Quantum Information Science will create a pioneering new immersive work, displayed alongside and in conversation with Turner's sketches and paintings. Expanding on Turner's experimental approach, Heaney will transform the gallery through a digital-quantum installation and her paintings. The conversation between Heaney's work and Turner's is wide-ranging, from exploring the dark and light of modern society, to fascination with cutting edge technologies and experimentation, as well as playing with the sublime and supernatural.

orleanshousegallery.org

Turner's The Battle of Trafalgar

Queen's House, Greenwich

Planned opening on 21 October 2025

Turner's largest painting and only royal commission is one of the jewels in Royal Museums Greenwich's art collection. This spectacular canvas will be going back on free public display in the Queen's House art gallery. This new display is planned to coincide with Trafalgar Day on 21 October, the anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Visitors will once again be able to see Turner's dramatic and controversial depiction of the flagship HMS Victory in the midst of battle.

rmg.co.uk/queens-house

Films and Publications

Turner Unseen: The Secret Life of a Radical Genius

BBC Two and BBC iPlayer

2025, launch date TBC

This bold new film produced by Passion Pictures for BBC Arts will offer a revelatory look at Britain's most famous artist. It will unlock Turner's life and the inner workings of his mind through Tate's extraordinary collection of over 30,000 sketches and watercolours. These works survive as a window into Britain through an era of unprecedented change, and a kind of private diary revealing an intimate personal drama: a tale of love and loss, relentless ambition, artistic success and failure, celebrity and mortality. The film will incorporate beautiful animation to take viewers from the pages of Turner's sketchbooks deep inside the life and art of a radical genius.

bbc.co.uk/arts

JMW Turner's 'The Battle of Trafalgar': Commemoration and Controversy

National Maritime Museum

Publishing in March 2025

Turner's *The Battle of Trafalgar* is one of the most famous works in the collection of the National Maritime Museum. Yet the story of the artist's largest painting and his only royal commission is surprisingly complex. Published to coincide with the 250th anniversary of Turner's birth, this book – part of a new series – explores the fascinating history of the picture. It considers the enormous challenge that Turner faced during its creation and charts its tumultuous journey, from the storm of criticism that greeted its unveiling to its eventual place at the centre of a national art collection.

shop.rmg.co.uk

Mr. Turner

BFI Southbank, London

April 2025

Mike Leigh's award-winning film about JMW Turner, brilliantly played by Timothy Spall, will be given a special screening at BFI Southbank. This cinematic account of the artist's later years is both a luminous tribute to the master of light and a fascinating, meticulous character study of a man who attained greatness whilst resisting the art-world conventions of his time. Regular Leigh collaborator Dick Pope's glorious widescreen cinematography pays full tribute to an artist whose paintings evoked the moving image before there was cinema.

whatson.bfi.org.uk

Becoming an Artist: JMW Turner

Tate Kids

Launching in May 2025

Tate Kids is the online art destination for 5- to 12-year-olds, offering a place for kids to play, make, explore and share. The site includes a wide range of short videos, including the popular *Becoming an Artist* series, which introduces key figures in historic, modern and contemporary art. The next in the animated series will introduce JMW Turner, following the artist from his beginnings in London's Covent Garden to his travels around the world.

tate.org.uk/kids and youtube.com/@TateKids

JMW Turner: On The Wing

Tate Britain, London

Opening on 23 June 2025

Tate Britain's Clore Gallery, home of the Turner Bequest and a permanent free display of 100 works by the artist, will host a new multi-screen film installation to mark Turner's 250th anniversary. The film charts his life and career as seen through his constant travels, revisiting key locations he painted and showing how his experience of place and light influenced his art. From the lakes of Switzerland to the mountains of North Wales, and from the hazy landscapes of central Italy to the sheep-filled Scottish borders, visitors will be able to see the world through Turner's eyes.

tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain

JMW Turner: Sketchbooks, Drawings and Watercolours

Tate

Launching in November 2025

Over 20 years in the making, Tate's comprehensive online catalogue of the Turner Bequest's sketchbooks, drawings and watercolours will be completed in 2025. Images and descriptions of every one of his 37,500 works on paper will be made available to all for free on Tate's website. This definitive guide, written by art historians and curators, will offer an unparalleled study of the breadth of style, subject matter and geography represented in Turner's work, as well as providing a unique insight into the artist's ideas and practice.

Supported by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

tate.org.uk

Meet the Artist: JMW Turner

Tate Publishing

Publishing in November 2025

Meet the Artist is a series of activity books by Tate Publishing which introduce children to internationally renowned artists in a fun and engaging way. Every book explores themes and ideas in the artist's work through hands-on creative activities. To coincide with Turner's 250th anniversary, a new edition of *Meet the Artist: JMW Turner* will be published in 2025. Created by award-winning artist and illustrator Lizzy Stewart, it will invite budding young artists to create their own colourful Turner-inspired landscapes and seascapes.

shop.tate.org.uk

Talks, Activities and Events

Celebrating Turner 250: Easter Holidays

Windsor Castle

5-23 April 2025, Wednesdays to Sundays

Turner painted several views of Windsor Castle over the course of his life. To coincide with his 250th birthday in April, visitors will be able to get creative with some Turner-inspired arts and crafts throughout the local Easter school holidays. Make a memento to take home on the day and enjoy a free trail as you further explore The Castle.

rct.uk/visit/windsor-castle

The 45th Kurt Pantzer Memorial Lecture

The Turner Society

16 April 2025

Marking its own 50th anniversary in 2025, the Turner Society champions wide-ranging interest in Turner's work and times. Members enjoy a varied programme of talks and visits, and receive its twice-yearly illustrated journal, Turner Society News. Its annual Kurt Pantzer lecture, held at the Paul Mellon Centre, London, highlights related new scholarship and the 2025 speaker will be Professor Leo Costello (Rice University, Houston), making 'A 21st-century case for "Early Turner"'. Public attendance availability, including online, will be posted on the Paul Mellon Centre website from 19 March 2025.

turnersociety.com

Ocean Summit

Turner Contemporary, Margate

11 & 12 July 2025

This summit will showcase ways in which art can serve as a powerful tool for raising awareness, inspiring action, and fostering a deeper connection to the natural world. Open to all ages.

turnercontemporary.org

Exploring Turner's Legacy

Tate Britain, London

December 2025

This two-day international conference will provide an opportunity to understand the latest research into Turner's work. Leading experts and curators from around the world will gather at Tate Britain for an array of panel events, presentations and exhibition tours. At the end of Turner's 250th year, this symposium will give academics a chance to reflect on the year's programme and hear from emerging scholars in the field. It will also explore dialogues between the historic and the contemporary, and across disciplines, to consider Turner in his own time as well as his resonance today.

Supported by The Manton Foundation Fund for Historic British Art Scholarship and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain

International Exhibitions

Turner's Watercolours: Scotland's Vaughan Bequest

National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Open until 31 January 2025

Every January, gallery-goers in Edinburgh and Dublin enjoy an annual free display of Turner watercolours from the Vaughan Bequest. As a one-off special take on this tradition, 2025 sees the 31 works from Ireland shown at the Royal Scottish Academy building while the 38 works from Scotland are shown at the National Gallery of Ireland. These two exhibitions provide a unique opportunity for visitors to enjoy a different set of Turner's sweeping seascapes, dramatic landscapes and spectacular cities, drawn from across the artist's career and showcasing the breadth of his innovative techniques.

Proudly supported by Grant Thornton, Turner Exhibitions Partner.

nationalgallery.ie

Dialogues with Turner

Museum of Art Pudong, Shanghai

Open until 10 May 2025

Turner's revolutionary images of land, sea and sky came to exemplify the idea of 'the sublime', the sense of awe and fear which the natural world can inspire. This exhibition presents a selection of paintings from Tate's collection which chart the artist's journey from depicting scenic landscapes to evoking the elemental power of nature at its most dramatic. They are joined by works from contemporary artists who provide new interpretations of this idea, including Howard Hodgkin, Richard Long, Katie Paterson, Olafur Eliasson, Peter Doig, Cornelia Parker and John Akomfrah.

Produced by Shanghai Lujiazui Development (Group) Company Limited and jointly organized by Museum of Art Pudong and Tate.

museumofartpd.org.cn

JMW Turner: Watercolour Horizons

Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati

1 March – 15 June 2025

JMW Turner: Watercolor Horizons presents watercolours by Turner from two Cincinnati museums: ten from the Taft Museum of Art and two from the Cincinnati Art Museum. It is the first time these institutions have brought together all twelve these remarkable works. A prolific artist and intrepid traveler, Turner was especially drawn to mountains, alpine lakes, glaciers, river valleys, and the sea, as well as the human presence within these dramatic settings. The exhibition features views of Switzerland, Germany, France, England, Scotland, and Italy, highlighting Turner's skill with a brush on paper.

taftmuseum.org

JMW Turner: Romance and Reality

Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Opening in Spring 2025

29 March – 27 July 2025

The Yale Center for British Art's first exhibition focused on Turner in more than thirty years, *Romance and Reality* will showcase the museum's rich holdings of the artist's work. Unequalled in North America, this collection includes some of Turner's most acclaimed oil paintings, notably his masterpiece *Dort or Dordrecht: The Dort Packet-Boat from Rotterdam Becalmed* and his celebrated later painting *Staffa, Fingal's Cave*. Alongside these major works, the exhibition will also feature outstanding watercolours and prints from the YCBA's collection, including the artist's only complete sketchbook held outside of the British Isles.

Generously supported by the Dr. Lee MacCormick Edwards Charitable Foundation.

britishart.yale.edu

JMW Turner Biography

Growing up in London and Margate

Joseph Mallord William Turner was born on or around 23 April 1775 at 21 Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London, and was baptised on 14 May at the local church. His mother came from a family of London butchers and shopkeepers, while his father had moved to London from Devon to work as a barber. They also gave birth to a girl, Mary Anne, in 1778 but she died before her fifth birthday. Perhaps due to his mother's deteriorating mental health (she was later admitted to Bethlem Hospital), JMW Turner spent some of his childhood with relatives in Brentford and Sunningwell and went to school in Margate. At home in Covent Garden, his father encouraged his artistic talent and showed off his drawings in his barber's shop.

Training and travel around Britain

At the age of 14, Turner entered the Royal Academy Schools, where he quickly progressed from sketching casts of ancient sculptures to attending life drawing classes. He also attended Dr Thomas Monroe's evening academy and gained some work experience drawing for architects and painting scenery for the London stage, but his first real income came via the flourishing market for landscape watercolours and prints. He first sketched views of the Avon Gorge in 1791 while visiting his father's friends in Bristol, earning himself the nickname 'Prince of the Rocks'. By the time he was 20, he was regularly spending his summers sketching landscapes around the country – the Midlands in 1794, the North in 1797, Wales on several occasions up to 1799, and Scotland in 1801 – followed by winters spent working on commissions in his London studio.

Turner began exhibiting watercolours at the Royal Academy while he was still a teenager, but his first oil painting, *Fishermen at Sea*, was submitted in 1796 when he was 21. In the years that followed he made rapid advances in technique and challenged traditional styles. Prominent patrons soon began to support his work, commissioning him to paint not only views of their country estates, but also grand history paintings and vivid seascapes. A group of noblemen also sponsored Turner's first trip abroad in 1802 to study Old Masters at the Louvre in Paris and to the Swiss Alps to see some of Europe's most dramatic landscapes.

Forging a career

Having been elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1799 and an Academician in 1802, Turner was now widely recognised as a prodigy with the potential to become the outstanding painter of his generation. He painted his self-portrait as a confident young artist – the image which appears on the £20 note today – and moved into a smarter address at 64 Harley Street. In 1804 he even opened his own commercial gallery to showcase his work, attracting new patrons like Walter Fawkes and the Earl of Egremont, whose grand houses in Yorkshire and Sussex soon became Turner's homes from home. This success did not go unchallenged, as Fellow Royal Academicians complained that he was pushy and rude, and their President, Benjamin West, denounced some of Turner's newer work as 'crude blotches'. But Turner remained fiercely loyal to the Academy, which he described as the 'mother' of artists, and was proud to be appointed its Professor of Perspective in 1808.

Turner's fierce ambition left little room for a private life. His favourite hobby was fishing, which he pursued from riverside lodgings in Isleworth and Hammersmith while producing watercolour sketches of the Thames. In 1807 he built a villa near the river in Twickenham where he lived with his devoted father after his mother's death. They both grew close to a widow called Sarah Danby, whose two daughters are believed to be either Turner's or his father's. Turner continued to tour Britain, including Sussex, Kent and the West Country, producing views of coastlines, rivers and ports which were turned into hugely popular and profitable prints.

Travel abroad and fame

In 1817 Turner visited mainland Europe again and sketched the battlefield of Waterloo, from which he created a painting emphasising the aftermath of the battle and its human cost. Back in London, Walter Fawkes staged an exhibition of his growing Turner collection at his home in 1819 and Sir John Leicester also opened his town house to the public to showcase important Turner works. These exhibitions of private collections complemented Turner's regular exhibits at the Academy and the displays in his own gallery.

Turner's gallery was renovated in 1822 to become more like a private museum, showcasing favourite works he had kept from across his career, some of which he even bought back from collectors.

Further trips to Italy and France followed, which led to the publication of three volumes of prints showcasing river views pitched at a growing middle-class market. Turner also created literary-inspired vignettes based on works by Lord Byron, Samuel Rogers and Thomas Moore, and visited Scotland to create illustrations of Walter Scott's poems and novels. He became an increasingly prominent figure in literary and artistic circles in London, and finally obtained a longed-for royal commission – an immense picture of the Battle of Trafalgar – although his treatment of the subject proved typically divisive.

Late work and new supporters

Turner had now become a leader among his generation of artists, joining the committee to find a new space for the Royal Academy, and creating works which commemorated fellow artists on their deaths, including Thomas Lawrence and David Wilkie. His growing public status was also reflected in his choice of subjects, which focused on the emerging modern world: He grasped the symbolism of the burning of the old Houses of Parliament in 1834, captured Venice's transformation from decaying metropolis to modern tourist hotspot, turned the last journey of the old warship *Temeraire* into an elegy for the end of an age, and addressed the urgent moral issues of the day around slavey and industrialisation. During this time, Turner began visiting Margate regularly to escape London. He stayed at a seaside guesthouse owned by a widow called Mrs Booth, who soon became his long-term companion.

Turner remained a controversial figure in later life. A scathing review in 1836 led a young John Ruskin to spring to his defence and become one of his most ardent supporters, placing him at the forefront of his book *Modern Painters*. Critics continued to accuse Turner of extravagance and eccentricity, comparing his latest works to soapsuds and whitewash, but a new generation embraced it for its modernity. They also showed an enthusiasm for watercolours which encouraged Turner to continue experimenting in that medium, leading to the creation of iconic images of Swiss mountains made during his final summer tours in the early 1840s.

Death and legacy

In 1845 Turner was appointed Acting President of the Royal Academy while the incumbent was ill, and made several more career breakthroughs in the years that followed: *Staffa, Fingal's Cave* became his first work to go to America when he sold it to a New Yorker, while *The Dogano, San Giorgio* became his first work to be hung at the National Gallery in London. But he was also becoming increasingly reclusive, showing nothing at the Academy in 1848 and turning down a retrospective from the Society of Arts in 1849. He moved into a house on the river in Chelsea with Mrs Booth and her son. There he succumbed to a bout of cholera and is said to have died while lit by a sudden gleam of sunshine on 19 December 1851. His body was taken to rest in his gallery at Queen Anne Street before being interred in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral according to his wish 'to be buried among my Brothers in Art'.

Turner left funds for a grand funeral and a marble statue of himself, but his most powerful legacy was the Turner Bequest – nearly 300 of his oil paintings and around 30,000 sketches and watercolours which were all given to the nation. Most are now housed in the Clore Gallery at Tate Britain, where all his works on paper are accessible to the public alongside an ever-changing free display of around 100 paintings, while seven key works from the Bequest are regularly on free display at the National Gallery alongside his beloved Old Masters. Turner's desire to establish a prize for young British artists was finally fulfilled in 1984 with the annual Turner Prize, which remains one of the world's best-known awards for visual art. To this day, Turner's expressive and experimental style, his treatment of light and shade, and his radical spirit continue to inspire new generations of artists.