



Turner and Bonington: Watercolours from the Wallace Collection

20 September 2023 – 21 April 2024

This autumn the Wallace Collection invites visitors to embark on a journey – from the rugged Yorkshire Dales to the grandeur of Venice, pausing en route to enjoy the bucolic delights of crab fishing on Scarborough’s beach and to marvel at the gothic splendour of Rouen cathedral from the dockside.

This odyssey is undertaken through a one-room display of watercolour landscapes by J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) and Richard Parkes Bonington (1802-1828), the first time the works have been on display in 17 years.

The display brings together ten works by the two artists: with four views of Yorkshire by Turner and five scenes of Normandy and Venice by Bonington. Turner was, of course, a British artist, while Bonington was born in Britain but was brought up and received his artistic training in France and is considered Anglo-French.

In a manner that was remarkably prescient of our own experiences during the Covid lockdowns, Turner’s Yorkshire paintings were made during a time when travel to mainland Europe was prevented by the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815). In response to which, the British sought to discover the Romantic concept of the ‘sublime’ at home in the British Isles.

These pictures belong to a period of British art in which watercolour emerged as a more respected and exhibited medium – the Society for Painters of Watercolour had been founded in 1804. After exhibiting his first watercolour at the Royal Academy in 1790, Turner went on to produce nearly 1,600 more throughout his career, an aspect of his work which is particularly celebrated.

Turner’s relationship with Yorkshire began with his first visit in 1797 and he would return repeatedly throughout his life. The four watercolours on display were painted for Sir William Pilkington of Chevet Hall, near Wakefield, brother-in-law of Turner’s friend and patron, Walter Fawkes. They are based on on-the-spot drawings in his sketchbooks, now part of

the Turner Bequest at Tate Britain. Two of them are hunting scenes in which Pilkington, Fawkes and Turner are depicted in person. The other two show famous 'picturesque' sites.

The works were painted at dates between 1809 and 1816. Turner was in his mid-thirties at the start of this period and enjoying great success as a landscape painter. He was already a Royal Academician with his own commercial gallery at 64 Harley Street, not far from our museum. He was also becoming increasingly experimental in his watercolour technique.

The landscapes are displayed in chronological order, starting with Turner's *Scarborough Castle: Boys Crab Fishing* (1809), then continuing with Bonington's views of the Normandy coast, painted in the early 1820s following his sketching tours of that region, and concluding with his two views of the Doge's palace in Venice, where he visited in 1826: *Venice: The Piazzetta* (c.1826-27) and *Venice: The Doge's Palace from the Ponte della Paglia* (c.1827-28).

Born in Arnold, near Nottingham, Bonington moved with his parents to Calais in 1817 when he was 15 and was encouraged by the local watercolourist François Louis Thomas Francia (1772–1839) to follow him in painting coastal and shore scenes. In 1818 the family moved to Paris where Bonington made watercolour copies of Dutch and Flemish landscapes in the Louvre. In 1820 he became a pupil of Baron Gros (1771-1835) in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and from 1821 he undertook regular sketching tours in Normandy.

Bonington showed two watercolours in the 1822 Salon, and in 1824, when his exhibits included three oil seascapes, he was awarded a gold medal. In the summer of 1825, he came to London where he met Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863). Together they sketched armour in the collection of Sir Samuel Meyrick (much of which is now in the Wallace Collection).

In January 1826 Bonington exhibited for the first time in London, two coastal scenes in oil at the British Institution. His small-scale works were eagerly sought by dealers and private collectors. On his final visit to London in 1828, he died of consumption, when only 26 years old.

In both sets of landscapes, visitors will be able to admire and compare Turner and Bonington's shared objective of exploring the atmospheric effects of light.

"The theme of the display is travel; in the sense of finding captivating views whether within the confines of one's own country or through exploring other countries," explains Dr Lucy Davis, Curator at the Wallace Collection. *"The Normandy coves depicted by Bonington were notorious at the time for smuggling, which would have piqued the curiosity of the contemporary viewer, while Venice was, of course, the centre of the Grand Tour and attracted artists and aristocratic tourists in great numbers."*

Broader themes include the atmosphere and sense of place evoked in these works, with an opportunity to enjoy the artists' skills and techniques in the medium.

"Watercolours from the Wallace Collection provide art lovers with a chance to see a selection of works which are rarely displayed due to their light sensitivity. We hope visitors to the display will be inspired to explore our first-floor galleries, where they will find more views of Venice by Canaletto and Guardi, as well as Bonington's fabulous seascapes."

Watercolours from the Wallace Collection is the first in a new series of free displays following the installation of a new display space at the museum in summer 2023, supported by the DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund.

Dr Xavier Bray, Director of the Wallace Collection says: *"We are incredibly grateful to the DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund for supporting the creation of a completely new display space at the Wallace Collection with a donation of £50,000. The new space will allow us to design a programme of free displays to complement our temporary exhibitions, and to engage our audiences with the wonders we hold within the Collection. It is fitting that we inaugurate*

the space by showing watercolours which haven't been seen by the public for almost twenty years by two renowned British artists."

Paul Ramsbottom, Chief Executive of the Wolfson Foundation says: *"For over two decades, the DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund has been an example of what can be achieved when philanthropy and government work together.*

"We were pleased to support the Wallace Collection to create this new free display space, giving visitors greater access to the remarkable collections in Hertford House, starting with the glories of these watercolours."

Minister for Arts & Heritage, Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay says: *"I am delighted that, thanks to this combination of Government funding and private philanthropy, these remarkable watercolours from two such distinguished painters are going to feature in this display, free for all to visit.*

"The DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund provides vital support to organisations like the Wallace Collection, enabling them to share more of their wonderful collections with the public. I look forward to seeing it myself."

NOTES FOR EDITORS

[HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES FOR MEDIA USE CAN BE DOWNLOADED HERE](#)

Richard Parkes Bonington, *Rouen*, c. 1825 © The Trustees of the Wallace Collection

Richard Parkes Bonington, *Venice: The Piazza San Marco*, 1828 © The Trustees of the Wallace Collection

J.M.W. Turner, *Scarborough Castle: Boys Crab Fishing*, 1809 © The Trustees of the Wallace Collection

About the Wallace Collection

As one of Britain's preeminent cultural institutions, the Wallace Collection is home to one of the most significant ensembles of fine and decorative arts in the world. Highlights include oil paintings from the fourteenth to the late nineteenth centuries by artists such as Titian, Velazquez, Rubens and Van Dyck; princely arms and armour; and one of the finest collections of eighteenth-century French paintings and decorative arts. Visitors can also enjoy superb medieval and Renaissance objects, including Limoges enamel, maiolica, glass and bronzes. Displayed at Hertford House, former home to Sir Richard and Lady Wallace, this outstanding collection is displayed in a manner designed to evoke the lives and tastes of its founders, creating a special ambiance that remains an essential part of its charm.

www.wallacecollection.org. The Wallace Collection is open daily, 10.00-17.00.

Instagram: @wallacemuseum / Facebook: @wallacecollection / Twitter: @WallaceMuseum / YouTube: TheWallacecollection

About the DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund:

The DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund provides capital funding for museums and galleries across England to improve displays, protect collections and make exhibitions more accessible to visitors. In 2022-24, DCMS and the Wolfson Foundation each contribute £2 million to the Fund, which has benefitted more than 400 projects in its 20-year history.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS AND IMAGES

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