

# A Vision of the First Proper National “Turner’s Gallery”



*The Fighting ‘Temeraire’ tugged to her last berth*  
by J.M.W. Turner, R.A.  
Voted the nation’s favourite picture in 2005

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## Preface

*“Any visit to the Turner Galleries should be overwhelming, shouldn’t it? There should be room after room – he can take it – the work is certainly there, and the task is to convey to the public the huge range, the monumental achievement, of Turner.”<sup>1</sup>*

How should the Turner Bequest ideally be presented? Curiously no one has answered that question in the 150 years since the nation received it in 1856, though Ruskin once proposed a sketchy outline and I adumbrated some ideas in *The Fallacy of Mediocrity: The Need for a Proper Turner Gallery*. So, in response to requests for a picture of what the proper Turner Gallery might look like, I offer this outline.

I do so making the assumption that the desire to honour Turner’s wishes and to reunite his bequest in a truly worthy setting is shared by the reader. The rock on which earlier schemes have been shipwrecked has been the failure to state unambiguously first principles. The question has to be asked: is the aim of a Turner Gallery really sincere, or is the Turner Bequest’s fate merely to be a resource for two galleries (the National and Tate) which have acquired parts of it almost by accident? As for the Clore Gallery (in effect the 1910 Duveen Wing Mark 2) I summarise at the end why no one believes that is the answer.

This is only an outline, not a blueprint. No doubt others will have their own ideas. But I hope the reader will concentrate on the broad picture rather than get hung up on details which belong to a later stage of planning.

Exactly 150 years ago the Turner Bequest began to be shown for the first time in a makeshift way (then at Marlborough House). The story since has been of one shift after another. Would any other great nation apart from Britain have been so pathetically remiss for so long?

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Turner House, London, 8 February 2007

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Christopher Le Brun RA, interviewed in *Turner Society News*, 103, August 2006, p.5. His full remarks imply dissatisfaction with the current display in the Clore Gallery.

## Aladdin's Palace

On 7 August 1906 The Times published a letter from the Director of the National Portrait Gallery<sup>2</sup> calling for “the building of a real Turner gallery”, but – with characteristic English defeatism! - saying that “the Turner Gallery will probably remain but ‘the baseless fabric of a dream’”, which is indeed how it has remained.

However his words were felicitously chosen. If any painter was a dream painter, it was Turner, and the dream of a Turner Gallery has lain deep in the hearts of his admirers. Turner referred to the gallery at his house as “Alladins palace”.<sup>3</sup> When the first, temporary, rooms were built for the Turner Bequest at South Kensington the portrait painter William Bewick wrote: “How one revels in the Turner Gallery! What a feast of colour! How the eye is filled with gorgeous effects! What delight he must have felt in pouring out such imaginative creations of his ethereal soul!”<sup>4</sup>

How can that enthusiasm now be recaptured?

## Let There Be Light!

Turner even in his earlier paintings seemed to “mingle light itself with his colours.”<sup>5</sup> The subtlety of the British climate was reflected in his English views giving them the poetic quality admired then and since. His gallery must also capture the height of his achievement, the dissolution of matter in brilliant light and colour. Therein lies his originality and modernity. He saw houses revolutionised by gas, large windows and conservatories such as the one at Farnley Hall which he painted. Yet too often his paintings’ radiance is muted by inadequate lighting even more than by the effects of ageing.<sup>6</sup>

His oils were painted by daylight and are best seen by daylight, on which limits are today set from conservation considerations. So it is sometimes supplemented by glaring spotlights which can ruin his effects. In rooms lit solely by daylight it has been noted that his paintings can

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<sup>2</sup> (Sir) Lionel Cust.

<sup>3</sup> *Collected Correspondence of J.M.W.Turner*, ed. John Gage, 1980, p.82. Turner was writing to his future executor, W.F.Wells, in November 1820 with regard to his first gallery opened in 1804.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Letters of William Bewick*, ed. Thomas Landseer, 1871, II, p.197, 4 September 1861. The electricity generated from Turner’s grave, hailed by Albert Irvin RA on an anniversary of his death, has seemed greater than that given off by the Clore Gallery.

<sup>5</sup> John Landseer in 1808 (ed. Luke Herrmann in *Turner Studies*, VII, 1, Summer 1987, p.28.)

<sup>6</sup> Julian Spalding, *The Poetic Museum*, 2002, p.94.

take on a magical effect at twilight, glowing out of the gloom. The works need to seem brighter than the ambience.<sup>7</sup>

Turner gave his own gallery a diffuse light which was quite bright, made to seem even more so by the fact that the visitor was first left to wait in a darkened room downstairs. A visitor to James Ensor's house at Ostend had a similar experience. In both cases the pictures, when finally reached, appeared indeed like the magical creations of an Aladdin's lamp.

## **The Approach: Discord and Concord**

This effect would have been magnified in Turner's case by the approach to the house from the prosaic and smoky streets of Marylebone. Turner was painting for a public seeking an antidote to that, whether in the sunny shores of the Mediterranean, the romance of myth or the light on water nearer home. If one does away with the background, the impact of the pictures is diminished.

Contrariwise a contemporary view was that the approach to the museum should put the visitor in the right frame of mind for what he should see.<sup>8</sup> So Turner may have thought when he finally made his bequest to the "present" National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, being constructed by Barry to sum up the recent history of the nation, also adjacent to its art quarter. Whether a site there today were chosen or elsewhere, it should have a resonance with a leading aspect of his oeuvre. As a seminal book on Turner declared, "Turner is an artist who was always supremely conscious of the environment, of the destination of his art."<sup>9</sup>

Augmentation and contrast should be the twin leitmotifs throughout the display.

## **The Two Boyhoods**

Inside the building the ground floor should act as further preparation. There might be an introductory room, with subdued light for the works on paper, dealing with Turner's boyhood in Covent Garden, which Ruskin contrasted memorably with Giorgione's in Italy.<sup>10</sup> Another room would

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<sup>7</sup> I have benefited from discussions with the late Dr William Allen CBE FRIBA, who wrote an unpublished report for me and Bickerdike Allen Partners on the deficiencies of the Clore Gallery.

<sup>8</sup> Such concerns were expressed by one of the National Gallery trustees, Lord Overstone, to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Turner Bequest, 1861.

<sup>9</sup> John Gage, *Colour in Turner: poetry and truth*, 1969, p.148 (chap.9 "The Turner galleries").

<sup>10</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, V, ix, chap.ix.

deal with watercolours of English abbeys, cathedrals and castles, including ruins, the preoccupation of his early antiquarian patrons, a world of history seen through a romantic and picturesque sensibility.<sup>11</sup> This Gothic world would be echoed in a staircase of a dim religious light leading up to the first floor with rooms lit from above by daylight.

## The Palace of Varieties

Bursting on the visitor's view could be Turner's early paintings of the Thames, luminous in their subdued way, as refreshing to the eye after the London streets now as then. A distinction should be made, as Turner would have, between the finished oils and the oil sketches, made c.1805, when Turner opened his own gallery with such works.<sup>12</sup>

Next one would ascend the Parnassian slopes to Coniston Old Man, accompanied by the lines from *Paradise Lost* with which the picture was exhibited, emblem of Turner's lifelong poetic propensity and presentiment of Ruskin, destined to die in sight of the Old Man, who saw Turner as the poet among his prosaic painter contemporaries. Next the painting of Buttermere would conjure up thoughts of Wordsworth, father of British romanticism.

The sublime depictions of the sea, popular then and now, would ratchet up the drama further in another room. It was with a picture such as *Calais Pier* and *The Shipwreck* that Turner earned his early election as an Academician.<sup>13</sup>

The equally sombrely elevated, though less popular, pictures from biblical and classical subjects, some influenced by Poussin or Claude, would fill another room. These might culminate in a masterpiece of the first half of his career, *Hannibal crossing the Alps*, a combination of the classical past, the climate of Yorkshire and Turner's own original sense of composition. As in the gallery of Turner and of others of the time, such a major work should be given an end wall to itself. (Ruskin insisted that landscapes should be hung with the horizon level with the viewer's eye, adherence to which can make a dramatic difference. Generally pictures are hung too low to accommodate children and shorter adults. A

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<sup>11</sup> A third boyhood, that of Tom Girtin, would here provide an echo rather than a contrast.

<sup>12</sup> The Thames sketches "must surely deserve more focused and sympathetic presentation" than they have received at the Clore Gallery (David Hill in *Oxford Companion to J.M.W. Turner*, 2001, p.336).

<sup>13</sup> *The Bridgewater Seapiece*, 1801, (private collection). His first great success, helping his election as an Associate of the RA, was a watercolour, *Norham Castle*, 1798, (exhibited at Agnews, 2004).

solution in the case of such major works would be to allow viewing from different levels – a bench which could be sat on or stood on).

The *Hannibal* and *The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire* had resonances for contemporaries of the Napoleonic wars, represented more directly by *The Death of Nelson* and *The Field of Waterloo*. The last might be contrasted with a painting of the following year, *England: Richmond Hill, on the Prince Regent's Birthday*, vividly drawing a line between the gloom of the war years and the joy of peace. This and the small unfinished scenes of George IV's visit to Scotland come as a relief – to people then and to the visitor today – after the preceding dramas. The theme of royal patronage might be continued with the link with the artist's Twickenham neighbour, Louis Philippe, continued decades later.

A complete change of tempo would also be provided by the little oil sketches made in Devon in 1813, and the iconic *Crossing the Brook*, Claude translated to the Tamar. Further alternations between the sublime and the light-hearted would occur in the 1820s and 1830s, sometimes descending into the ridiculous, fear of being tarred with which might have held others back from experimenting, but not Turner.

At the half-way mark in Turner's career around 1815-20, between the naturalism of the first half and the extravagances of the second, there might be a pause marked by a room with windows opening on to the outside, a tried and tested way to refresh the visitor and a reminder of the relevance of the museum surroundings.

No rule of thumb should prevail. The aim should be to suit the arrangement to the collection and to Turner's ideas. In one room one would have similar works in a row, "bang, bang, bang," in the words of a Tate curator,<sup>14</sup> building up an impression by mass, as in a garden bed of uniform flowers. Sometimes the complaint of "too much of a good thing" is made.<sup>15</sup> The object of a monogrammatic exhibition, however, is to show an artist in profusion. Moreover Lawrence Gowing referred to "perhaps two dozen separate Turners".<sup>16</sup> Indigestion has been caused by compressing these rather than allowing each to be seen adequately. Elsewhere the variegation of a herbaceous border is called for. Turner

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Butlin in *The Antique Collector*, June 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Not only about Turner, but also about Constable, eg with regard to the 1991 exhibition at the Tate (John Barrell in *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 June 2006, p.20). Constable however is very different.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Gowing, "A Wealth of Turners," *Sunday Times Magazine*, 17 November 1974, pp.28-9. "Rather than picking and choosing, it seems better to journey wandering through the distinct and disconcerting changes – perhaps two dozen separate Turners, each of them worthy of more comprehension and credit than has sometimes been his lot."

increasingly had a love of pairs of pictures which contrasted both in subject and hue, such as *War and Peace*. Moreover themes, such as that relating to Dido and Carthage, stretch from early to late in his career, and some pictures alluded to more than one theme, so that the whole should be viewed like a symphony or opera in which themes recur at various points rather than a series of discrete chapters.<sup>17</sup>

The aim would be to combine intelligibility, variety and drama. Grouping related works together and following a broadly chronological order should make the Turner story apparent.<sup>18</sup> The arrangement of the oils in *L'opera completa di Turner* shows, when the half in the Turner Bequest are highlighted, how many fall naturally into groups, sequences or pairs.<sup>19</sup> However poetic licence may allow departure from strict chronology. Thus the Thames scenes in the first room postdate the Coniston. But Turner knew the Thames before the Lakes.

The works of the last decade, mostly fairly small, could be on a second floor (above the lateral rooms on the first described below), symbolising the further shift to the immaterial and celestial, and again a pause and contrast could be provided by a dark stairway.

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<sup>17</sup> Ruskin related that Turner wanted his works kept together (*Modern Painters*, V). This has been a common wish of artists. A quest for the Whole was a fundamental characteristic of the Romantic artist (August Wiedmann, *Romantic Art Theories*, 1986, chapter II, "The Holistic Conception of Art".)

<sup>18</sup> Douglass Montrose-Graem in his catalogue of Turner's prints in *Turner Triple Treat* (2004) has arranged these strictly chronologically and not in groups, saying that this best reveals Turner's development. This is an argument for keeping fairly close to chronology and not chopping up the material into subjects. That was how Turner's *Liber Studiorum* was issued and how the Yale University Press catalogue of Constable's works is arranged as opposed to its one of Turner's oils. However an exhibition is different from a book or catalogue. Moreover stylistic development is not the only thing of importance. The Turner curator is like a juggler who has to keep several balls in the air. The English landscape garden rather than of the French formal one should be the pattern: follow the genius of the place (collection).

<sup>19</sup> Evelyn Joll and Martin Butlin, *L'opera completa di Turner*, Rizzoli, 2 vols, 1982. This catalogue of the 532 Turner oils was arranged chronologically and more instructively than the same authors' catalogue published by Yale University Press. The Turner Bequest comprises 98 finished oils (two given to the National Gallery to hang with Claudes); 181 unfinished oils; 43 oils on paper (*DNB*, 1899). It has pictures representative of virtually all of Turner's categories with the exception of his country-house portraits. Another weakness is in the centre of his career, 1834-6, as noted by Evelyn Joll (*The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Yale, 1984, p.xv), weakened further by the removal to the National Gallery of works such as *Ulysses deriding Polyphemus* and *The Fighting Temeraire*, picked out by Ruskin as key works. So far from the popular view – that all the Turners are concentrated in the Tate – being true, relatively few of the iconic works are there. A breakdown of the 32 plates in *The Oxford Companion to J.M.W. Turner*, edited by Martin Butlin, Luke Herrmann and Evelyn Joll, and so representing higher Turnerean opinion, is instructive. Eleven are of watercolours. Of the oils only five are at the Tate (whether currently *on view* there is another matter!), and five at the National Gallery. Eight are in North America and one in Europe.

Ruskin said that *The Fighting 'Temeraire'* should always conclude the sequence.<sup>20</sup> Professor Josef Strzygowski believed that it should have a room to itself.<sup>21</sup> Others might prefer to pair it with another contrasting/complementary oil, such as *Rain, Steam and Speed* or *Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*. Certainly these masterpieces need to be prominent and are vital if one considers that Turner's interest in steam and modern technology are an important aspect of his achievement. Turner himself ended with four scenes devoted to Dido and Aeneas, but the Tate has lost one. Some unfinished pictures, such as the hugely popular *Norham Castle – Sunrise*, would provide a suitably elegiac note to end with. Or else there are the late symbolic exhibited works, such as *Angel standing in the Sun*. Ascent to this could symbolise Turner's spiritual ascent to a sort of religious experience, expressed also in the late watercolours of the Rigi. "The sun is god." Whatever is chosen, there needs to be one final climax.

## The Wizard of Watercolour

For the appreciation of Turner's stylistic progress it is vital to see that that developed simultaneously in oil and watercolour. And the watercolour work was often preparatory for the prints.<sup>22</sup> (Ruskin in his serpentine Turner Gallery saw this).<sup>23</sup> So smaller rooms devoted to these should open off the main suite of rooms for oils, not be tacked on at the end. They would be artificially lit more dimly than the paintings rooms. Whether these should be flexible spaces is a moot point. The main rooms should not be, as the finished pictures demand a feeling of architectural stability only such can give. Whereas the oils should be on permanent view, the watercolours are customarily rotated for conservation reasons.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> John Ruskin, *Notes on the Turner Collection at Marlborough House, 1856-7*. As this was written while the finished oils were put on display in instalments, it covers only those shown at the time of writing. Professor Michael Kitson said that he recommended this work to all his Turner students.

<sup>21</sup> Josef Strzygowski, "Turner's Path from Nature to Art," *The Burlington Magazine*, XII, 1907-8, pp.335-42. Stephen Bayley remarked, "Ruskin knew that Turner's magnificent pictures look best in isolation" (*The Architect*, June 1987).

<sup>22</sup> No engravings were included in the Bequest, but I am assuming that a collection of them can be acquired, transferred or loaned.

<sup>23</sup> John Ruskin, *Works*, XIII, pp.xxviii-ix; Luke Herrmann, *Ruskin and Turner*, 1968, pp.24-5. Ruskin's idea was that the drawings should be protected from the light by being covered when no one was looking at them. That is impractical when the number of visitors is large. The miniatures at the V&A are automatically illuminated only when someone stands in front of them. The fashion for mixing oils and drawings in the same room seems to be returning, fatally, as it means that the oils have to be lit worse than ever.

<sup>24</sup> R.N.Wornum, who greatly disparaged the unfinished oils, estimated that 500 drawings were "of a high class" and 15,000 were "mere lead-pencil outlines" (*The Turner Gallery*, 1862, p.xxi). The *DNB* (1899) said there are "19,751 watercolours and drawings, many bound in sketchbooks, of which 135 are finished watercolours and 1,757 unfinished watercolours. Sir Charles Holmes in 1928 said that there were 3-4,000 watercolours finished or partially finished "of very great aesthetic interest and



Many have expressed greater admiration for the watercolours than for the oils, but the latter have the advantage of size, greater durability and often more ambitious subject matter, and Turner realised that any Turner Gallery must principally hinge on them.

## **Illumination and Mystery**

These lateral rooms could do more. They could inform the visitor about the many topics which formed the basis of the exhibited oils or underlay Turner's approach to art. Some have been indicated already and have been the subject of temporary exhibitions. Some are so important that they need to be permanent displays in order to show Turner whole and in the round. One such could be his sympathetic curiosity in steam power and the industrial revolution. Another might be the place of architecture in his career from his student days through his work as his own architect to the architectural fantasies of his classical pictures. This penchant for the classical could be contrasted with the earlier prosecution of the gothic, emblematic of his tendency to face in opposite directions on many matters. Another popular subject is his Petworth work. A few of the gouaches could be shown in rotation with other material illustrating the connection. These would adjoin a room with the relevant oils.

Some topics have never really been dealt with specifically, such as love, a theme of his classical works scattered throughout his career.<sup>25</sup> Prints of his scenes taken from Ovid might be supplemented by his erotic drawings (subject to frequent comment, but hardly ever seen) and material relative to his supposed dubious visits to Wapping (made the lurid subject of a recent novel). There is nothing like a mystery and the idea of entering the arcana for creating interest, as the Holy Grail fever shows. Linked for the art-loving Moravian sect and followers such as Blake were mystical and religious ideas. For others so were fears about madness (Turner's mother became insane and he had her Mad Doctor as early instructor).<sup>26</sup> One subject, and one room, might lead to another in a maze-like way.

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value" and about 12,000 "mere scribbles and note-books." E.T. Cook recorded that at the National Gallery there were "only 1,156" exhibited in any way, making, with loans to the provinces, 1,700 exhibited in total (*Hidden Treasures at the National Gallery*, 1905, p.20). This was a far greater number than today, but included those framed and kept in the cabinets designed by Ruskin. For the purposes I propose and for conservation reasons a much smaller number would suffice, though the Ruskinian system might also be partly reintroduced.

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Nicolson, *Turner's Classical Landscapes*, 1990, p.144, "That Turner may have found an outlet for his own guarded emotions in treating these stories about the myth of love suggests that the Ovidian works should be accorded a privileged place in his oeuvre."

<sup>26</sup> Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, 2006. Other artists who were influenced included Richard Cosway, de Louthembourg and Gillray. A connection with the Moravians and also the Monro mad doctors may have existed through Turner's maternal grandparents.

The Turner Gallery should combine the informative with the mysterious, as in Sir John Soane's Museum.<sup>27</sup> The mystery of light, of the spiritual and intangible. Rembrandt, Turner remarked approvingly, threw "a mysterious doubt" round his subjects.<sup>28</sup> Turner wanted the public to work out his meanings for itself. On the whole labels should be brief (though not necessarily uniformly so). With a static display soundguides are feasible. Very cheap (20p?) unillustrated leaflets should be available, one with details of each work, another reprinting Ruskin's seminal booklet on the bequest pictures hung at Marlborough House in 1856.<sup>29</sup>

## Down to Earth

Descending to the ground floor again, the visitor would find a large and welcoming **reading room** with a wide-ranging library.<sup>30</sup> This would be quite separate from a **print room** with its necessarily more restricted access, which would hold the sketchbooks. There might be an intermediate room with framed and glazed watercolours in racks for greater access as pioneered by Ruskin.

Further illumination might be provided by a room devoted to the prints of the *Liber Studiorum* through which the young Turner tried to indicate the range of pictorial categories which he essayed to master – buildings, mountains, the sea, historical scenes, rustic ones ... The didactic tone could be taken further with the large illustrations to his lectures on perspective and a further room devoted to his methods and materials. Other rooms might feature the chequered histories of the Turner Bequest, the Turner Medal (and Royal Academy's Turner Fund) and the abortive Turner's Gift almshouse (and gallery) – further illuminating "Fallacies of Hope" to add to his unfinished poem of that title.

As the first and second floors would be extensive in order to accommodate 20-30 main rooms and almost an equal number of smaller subsidiary ones, there would also be considerable space on the ground

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<sup>27</sup> Selby Whittingham, "The poetry of the museum," *Museum International*, 191, 3, July-September 1996, pp.4-8.

<sup>28</sup> Turner in his *Backgrounds* lecture, 1811. He continued, "over each [form] he has thrown that veil of matchless colour, that lucid interval of Morning dan and dewy light on which the Eye dwells so completely enthrall'd, and it seeks not for its liberty, but, as it were, thinks it a sacrilege to pierce the mystic shell of colour in search of form."

<sup>29</sup> Robert Walmsley and Selby Whittingham, ed., *Ruskin's Guide to the Clore Gallery*, 1989. This adaptation of Ruskin's work has been nullified by the constant rearrangement and dilution of the pictures in the Clore, something which has also put paid to its soundguide.

<sup>30</sup> Revolutionary ideas about openness were formulated in a paper I wrote for the Turner Society soon after it was formed in 1975. These appealed to some more than others.

floor.<sup>31</sup> (Letting part for commercial use might be a risky strategy?). There would be the usual offices which a museum would have - for curators, storage (very few of the oils, only those in really bad condition, would not be on view), conservation, refreshment, bookshop, etc.

There should also be a few rooms for **temporary exhibitions**. These could deal with the non-core aspects and those less easy to illustrate from the bequest: the influences of poetry, philosophy, music, as well as of the old masters or contemporaries (represented by the watercolourists – hardly seen at Tate Britain – as well as the oil painters). Turner’s influence on later Western art – again hardly seen at Tate Britain – would be another theme. Yet another would be the political subtexts of his work.

## Links

Links with the National Gallery, Tate Britain, Tate Modern, British Museum and V&A should facilitate the illustration of Turner’s connections with art of the past, present and future. Temporary loan displays around the Turner Bequest would much more effectively show artistic pedigrees than can the permanent displays at National or Tate.

The Turner Gallery could have a secondary role as a **Museum of Romanticism**, like the houses of Wordsworth at Grasmere or of Ary Scheffer at Paris (Musée de la Vie Romantique). These museums could form another group - of Museums of Romanticism - exchanging small exhibitions such as have been pioneered at Grasmere and Paris.

## The Public

“Shakespearian in his mightiness,” said Ruskin, a comparison which Sir Lionel Cust must have intentionally echoed in his quotation above from *The Tempest* in 1906. Turner’s Shakespearian range means that the appeal can be wide. He fully reflected the eclectic and multicultural tendencies of his age, and people of different races, religions, classes and politics, as too the modernist and anti-modernist, can all find something with which to sympathise or which touches on their own concerns.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The number of rooms would depend on their size and on how far each group should be given its own room. Fairly small rooms are here envisaged in this computation. The 1974-5 bicentenary exhibition at the Royal Academy had 18 congested rooms in which to show 650 exhibits besides a further area to show 153 items devoted to the “Life and Times”. The Duveen and Clore wings each had originally about 10 rooms for Turner.

<sup>32</sup> The full extent of this range has never been apparent in the Turner Bequest as it has been displayed. It has been contentious how far Turner was a traditionalist or was a precursor of art of the next 100 years. His basis in tradition can hardly be missed. On the other hand the foundation of abstract design

The Turner Gallery should be designed to appeal to everyone – the academic, the living artist, the London art lover, the visitor from outside London; *the last not least*, if the aim is to have a large number of visitors, which alone might justify such an extensive gallery, and whose numbers in turn would demand a large gallery to avoid overcrowding. For people visiting London just once or only very occasionally to be told that they can see vital parts of the collection if they return is no good. With no certainty that the masterpieces will be in place, a certainty the visitor to the National Gallery has, confidence will falter.

If the Van Gogh Museum can get 1.3 million paying visitors annually,<sup>33</sup> then the Turner Gallery should manage 500,000 - 1 million admitted free, provided that it is marketed as a distinct attraction, a 5 star one (or, in the Michelin classification, 3 star “worth a journey”), one featured as such in all the London guidebooks and publicised by the wide distribution of leaflets. European public collections are virtually bereft of Turners, so anyone other than from North America wishing to see his work would have to come to London, an enormous asset on which Britain should capitalise.

The specialists, curators and Londoners would more especially be catered for by provision of temporary exhibitions. These, and the accompanying opportunities to publish research, would save the curators from feeling moribund. The common cry that museums which do not collect die is seen to be untrue, if one looks at some of the best which do not collect. However, it can be expected that the collection may grow somewhat by gift, though the failure to provide a proper Turner Gallery so far has meant that many very desirable gifts have been lost.

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underlying his work and increasingly characterising it has struck many, including, in his last years, *Punch*, which depicted one of his late exhibited oils as a purely abstract collection of shapes. This demolishes the view that his finished paintings were conventional and his sketches are what matter today. Turner clearly rested his posthumous fame on his finished paintings, but equally clearly valued sketches, as did contemporaries. William Bewick (*op.cit.*) said he had a rubbing in by Turner of “a bridge of one arch, high up between two rocks, thrown into shade, with a spurt of water jumping over them,” adding, “If anything is Turner’s, this dash of water is.” Claims that only parts of his oeuvre matter have been detrimental.

<sup>33</sup> *Museums Journal*, August 2006, p.25. See also Selby Whittingham, *World Directory of Artists’ Museums*, 1995, p.xxx. The figure given there for the Clore Gallery (227,243) was simply a guess on the part of the Tate. From observation of the numbers at any one time, I would estimate that the total is under 100,000, only a quarter of whom reach the upper rooms. If charging decreases numbers by 40%, as is sometimes maintained, one has to allow for that when making comparisons with charging museums such as the Van Gogh Mudeum, Musée Picasso at Paris or the Teatro-Museo Dalí at Figueres. A dozen years ago the Musée Rodin in Paris was getting 520,000 paying visitors.

## Conclusion

Henry Moore saw Turner as a great moneyspinner like Shakespeare.<sup>34</sup> The cost of a new museum would be considerable, but vacating the Clore rooms would free those and save the cost of others which Tate Britain will have to build, just as vacating the Duveen rooms did.<sup>35</sup>

Like the Turner Report on pensions, this plan is composed of interlocking proposals which in essentials cannot be cherry picked. These involve a permanent display of the *whole* collection in a self-standing gallery of adequate size and suitability aimed at a large public, which in turn will justify the outlay and necessitate the space. The size of the display would be such as to demand a whole visit, not just a few minutes at the end of a tour of another gallery. And its attraction and complexity should be such as to attract repeat visits.

This is only a sketch rather than the finished picture.<sup>36</sup> For the latter a very detailed plan would need to be worked out, perhaps before a site was chosen, and modified thereafter, specifying exactly which painting would go where, as was done for the National Gallery's Sainsbury Wing. Past attempts have suffered from a veritable Turnerean mist of ambiguity leading to inevitable confusion and failure. A grand statement is made about solving the problem at last, and then salami slicing reduces the collection and also the projected building. Ambition falters, the result is a dog's breakfast and the crowds do not come.

Yet what other collection calls for such a grand effort? Worth up to £1 billion,<sup>37</sup> utterly unique, the product of the nation's greatest artist, whose work is a proven crowd-puller under favourable circumstances, it cries out for such a solution. Meanwhile millions of Lottery money have been poured on museums and exhibitions which anyone without an axe to grind, judging solely on track records, would prioritise far below the Turner Gallery.

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<sup>34</sup> *The Times*, 28 January 1975. While the huge earnings of the Picasso and Warhol estates are known, Turner's are never computed. Yet the value of Turner merchandise must be very great.

<sup>35</sup> In reality the £6 million spent on the Clore wing was largely an expenditure for the rest of the Tate other than Turner! In 150 years almost the only genuine expenditure on housing Turner was that of Sir J.J.Duveen. The nation, which received the bequest solely on condition that it paid for its housing, has never really done that.

<sup>36</sup> I have earlier sketched an outline in *The Fallacy of Mediocrity*, 1992, pp.146-58, "A Proper Turner Gallery." There is of course no one single right way of arranging such a museum. But there are ways which are clearly inferior. I have benefited from discussions with, amongst others, the late Kenneth Hudson CBE, Director of the European Museum of the Year Award.

<sup>37</sup> My estimate of £½ billion a decade ago, accepted in *The Oxford Companion to J.M.W.Turner* in 2001, now seems rather out of date after the latest record auction prices.

# APPENDICES

## Cost/Benefit Analysis

1. **Cost of site:** free?
2. **Cost of building:** £30-40 million?<sup>38</sup>
3. **Annual running costs:** £1 million? To include staff, energy, repairs etc. The building would be “green”, planned to have a low energy consumption. Control of staff numbers would also be rigorous. The curators might number only two with three further office staff. The main cost would be for the attendants in the exhibition rooms and for staff to man the Print Room and Reading Room.
4. **Income from shop, reproductions:** £50,000 p.a.? The income from the Picasso and Warhol estates is huge.
5. **Income from café:** £50,000 p.a.?
6. **Sponsorship.** The sponsorship from major UK companies for exhibitions (in effect for research and its publication in catalogues) should continue to be promoted.
7. **Entrance charges.** There might be a small charge for entry to temporary exhibitions to cover transport and insurance costs?
8. **Benefit to UK and London economies.** If it attracted 500,000 to 1 million visitors, half of those might come from abroad. If 250,000 each spent £100, that would bring £25m p.a. to the British economy. If 100,000 of those were additional visitors above the number already attracted, that would be £10m p.a. extra. If there were 300,000 visitors from the UK, they might bring profit to London of £1m p.a.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In the National Assets Register 2007 the Clore Gallery is valued at £4m (land and buildings) and £7m (plant & machinery). Its original cost at today's values was c. £15m. **If Turner vacated the Clore, that would free it for other works, saving the cost of another Tate extension for those.**

<sup>39</sup> These computations err on the conservative side. Making them is difficult, as VisitBritain points out. It is estimated that English cathedrals benefit the tourist trade by c. £91m p.a (*D.Telegraph*, 7.10.06); the UK's major museums by £1.5 billion (*E.Standard*, 14.12.06). The annual number of visitors to the Clore may be c. 100,000. Advertising the Turner Gallery adequately (for mention of the

## Not Fit For Purpose: The Fawly Gallery

American hotel guest: *Is this a hotel or isn't it?*

Basil Fawly: *Well, within reason.*

Defence of the Clore Gallery has been rare, defensive and qualified. At its opening in 1987 praise was directed at the contents. And that praise was often, as in the case of James Lees-Milne, for pictures which only hung in it for the first six months. Sir Philip Goodhart MP did say, "I think it is exceptionally well done," but damningly added, "but in the Reserve Galleries upstairs, there are about fifteen major Turner paintings which one cannot see adequately at all because the lighting is all wrong".<sup>40</sup> That problem has been resolved by omitting such pictures from the hang! Whatever the Clore Gallery's architectural merits (which are generally considered to be less than those of other designs by Sir James Stirling), as a showcase of Turner's work it has been so widely condemned that even the Tate has been forced to acknowledge the criticisms (some made by its own staff!).<sup>41</sup> On the one hand the art critics have damned it on aesthetic grounds, and on the other museologists and architects have damned it on practical ones. After rehangs made in response to such criticisms, Dr Maurice Davies, Deputy Director of the Museums Association, concluded, "The Clore probably can't be significantly improved; it is simply not good enough for Turner".<sup>42</sup>

A.A.Gill has recently restated the indignation of many:

**"In the late 1980s, a grudgingly grateful nation got round to knocking up the Clore wing of the Tate. It is both inappropriate and insubstantial. Built during a barren and parsimonious moment of self-doubt, the galleries are cramped and mean, the ceiling too low, the proportions huddled. Turner's vitally complex canvases pace the walls like beautiful athletes queuing in a social-services drop-in centre. I came here when it opened, with my father [director of Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation*]. I remember the disappointment when we saw the Clore wing. That a First World country could build this as a temple to its pre-eminent artist beggars both belief and pride. It is just far, far too small. Turner's bequest was vast: 300 oil paintings, of which only half are ever on show, and about 30,000 images on paper – drawings, sketchbooks, watercolours – of which 70 or so make it to the public galleries."**<sup>43</sup>

Is a Fawltyesque apologia sufficient? Surely not. The preceding pages start from first principles and paint a picture of an alternative.

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Clore or Turner in the current Tate programme one has to hunt diligently) and as a unique attraction could bring many times that number to judge from comparable museums abroad.

<sup>40</sup> *Museums 2000*, ed. Patrick J.Boylan, Museums Association, 1992, p.48.

<sup>41</sup> These have been summarised in *Critiques of the Clore Gallery 1987-2003* ([www.jmwturner.org](http://www.jmwturner.org)).

<sup>42</sup> *Turner Society News*, March 2003.

<sup>43</sup> *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 4 June 2006.

## Comments

**“I think this is brilliant – a most enjoyable and inspiring read ... I am increasingly convinced that your dedication will finally be rewarded ... for two reasons: there is an appetite for more high quality tourist attractions and Tate Britain will want more space”** (*Julian Spalding, former Director of Glasgow Museums & Art Gallery and Master of the Guild of St George*).

**“The fundamental concept: show Turner as a whole, not chop him up by media ... Thank you for setting the ball rolling ...”** (*Douglass Montrose-Graem, Founder and Director of The Turner Museum, USA*).

**“I myself am quite hopeful that this is a pretty good time for a clarion call to action as opposed to the penny-pinching days of 1975! ... It is generally agreed that the Clore Gallery is quite inadequate for a colossal genius like Turner, but it was built in a parsimonious age to stifle the agitation caused by the Royal Academy exhibition and spearheaded by the Turner Society.”** (*J.Allan Pearce, first Chairman of the Turner Society and Treasurer of Venice in Peril*).

**“Full of good things and a complete guide for a really New Gallery for JMW”** (*Stanley Warburton, former Chairman and Vice-President of the Turner Society*).

**“I am not keen on shrines to individual artists, but your point that a Turner Gallery would be able to bring together his work in several media is a major consideration. And I am not keen on the Clore Gallery as a dedicated gallery or as a piece of architecture.”** (*Norbert Lynton, Emeritus Professor of the History of Art, University of Sussex; former Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery; Chairman of the Charleston Trust*).

**“Admirably worked out.”** (*Graham Reynolds CVO OBE, former Keeper of Paintings, Victoria & Albert Museum*).

**“Concerning your *Outline*. It is brilliant and I hope it will have its desired effect.”** (*Avigdor Arikha, artist*).

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**SELBY WHITTINGHAM** born in 1941 in Malaya; escaped to England; lived at Trebetherick and then London; Wagners School, London; Copthorne School, Sussex; Shrewsbury School; Oxford University (MA, Classical Moderations and Greats); Manchester University (PhD, art history). National Portrait Gallery, London (temporary assistant); Manchester City Art Gallery (assistant keeper); organiser of Turner Symposium (University of York, 1980) and International Colloquium on Artists' Museums (University of Paris, 1990); founded the Turner Society (1975), the Watteau Society (1984), the Independent Turner Society and J.M.W.Turner, R.A., Publications (1988) and Donor Watch (1995). Author of numerous articles and publications on Turner amongst other subjects.



## Summary

1. The object of The Turner Gallery is to show the united Turner Bequest properly for the first time; that is, to base its exhibition on its particular nature and on Turner's ideas rather than on preconceptions. Its purpose is
  - (a) To show permanently 300 oil paintings.
  - (b) To have changing displays from 30,000 works on paper.
  - (c) To include miscellaneous other material – palettes etc.
2. It should be sited somewhere easily accessible by public transport, appropriate and providing sufficient space. Security from flood, fire and blast is required.
3. It should be a building on 3 floors.
  - (a). Ground Floor. To include exhibition rooms lit by artificial light or from side windows: 3 introductory rooms, 3 more at the end of the circuit with 5 rooms for temporary exhibitions. Other rooms would be for the Print Room, Reading Room, storage, shop, café, offices. The first six exhibition rooms should be for watercolours and prints. From the introductory rooms would be a staircase up to the first floor. Another staircase would descend from the first floor to the further exhibition rooms.
  - (b). First Floor. The main suite of 20 or so rooms would be lit from above by daylight and show most of the oil paintings. An equal number of lateral rooms lit by artificial light would show works on paper.
  - (c). Second Floor. Another 6 rooms or so above the lateral rooms on 1<sup>st</sup> Floor to show the late oils. (Whether the Print Room should be sited on this floor for protection from flood would depend on the site chosen).
4. It should be capable of taking comfortably up to 1 million visitors p.a.

