

## **Turner and the Sublime**

*Québec City will host an exclusive Canadian engagement of the English master's grandiose landscapes*

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Québec City, Tuesday, February 9, 2021 ✕ Minister of Culture and Communications Nathalie Roy is joining with the entire Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ) team to celebrate from **February 10 to May 2, 2021** the work of one of the foremost 19th century European artists, the visionary English painter, watercolourist, and engraver **Joseph Mallord William Turner** (1775-1851), to mark with pleasure the reopening of the museum by showcasing an artist who shaped the history of international art.

“It is a genuine honour for the Capitale-Nationale and Québec as a whole to host this outstanding major exhibition. Your government is proud to support the MNBAQ in carrying out its projects, which are drawing ever greater numbers of culture enthusiasts. Moreover, I would like to congratulate the MNBAQ for enhancing Québec’s cultural reputation abroad and its determination to make its exhibitions key events,” Ms. Roy noted.



Musée national  
des beaux-arts  
du Québec

Québec 

The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec is a  
state corporation funded by the Gouvernement du Québec.

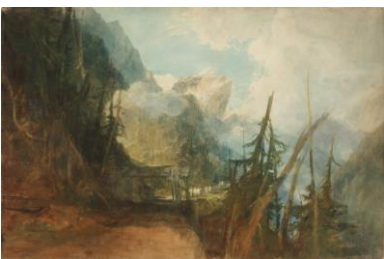
The international exhibition *Turner and the Sublime* presented by National Bank of Canada during an exclusive Canadian engagement in Québec City this winter has been innovatively designed and focuses on very topical questions. It will afford visitors an opportunity to view striking landscapes that highlight spectacular storms, turbulent seas, or impressive mountain vistas, and to experience the sublime.

Turner’s unique, modern grasp of landscape continues to engage us. The innovative research of the so-called “painter of light” ranks him at the forefront of the Romantic movement. His avant-garde approach appeals to all generations.

### *Highly relevant, timeless works*

Organized in collaboration with Tate Britain from the Turner Bequest, this major exhibition affords an opportunity to see works that are rarely exhibited outside England. The works are drawn from the artist’s collection, bequeathed to the nation upon his death. This outstanding collection of 77 paintings and works on paper presented in Québec City covers the biggest portion of Turner’s career, from the outset in the 1790s until his apogee around 1840.

The works exhibited at the MNBAQ include major works such as *Fishermen at Sea* (1796), the first work that Turner, then 21 years old, submitted to the Royal Academy. This ambitious seascape posed a genuine challenge for the young painter, who heightened the level of difficulty by adopting as his subject a nocturnal scene illuminated by pale moonlight. The painting reveals Turner’s interest in striking plays of light that characterize his entire body of work. *The Blue Rigi, Sunrise* (1842) is a masterly work that celebrates the greatness of creation in an image of transcendent calm. The mountain bathed in the ambient light resembles a delicate coloured veiled suspended in space. The painting *The St Gotthard Road between Amsteg and Wassen, Looking up the Reuss Valley* (circa 1814-1815) also transposes the artist’s encounter with the sublime in the Swiss Alps. Turner produced the work, whose innovative composition hinges on powerful contrasts between light and shadow, several years after a trip in 1802.



## *Three immersive installations that capture Turner*

To highlight the English master’s emblematic work, the exhibition is proposing scenography centred on the contrast between light and darkness. In keeping with its desire to innovate in the realm of staging, the MNBAQ has also asked Lionel Arnould, a multimedia designer who has worked for Ex Machina, the Théâtre du Trident, and the Centre du Théâtre d’Aujourd’hui, in association with sound creation firm Peak Media, to create three original immersive video installations relating to three Turner paintings. They round out the presentation by proposing a contemporary experience of the sublime. *The Fall of an Avalanche in the Grisons* explores the theme of catastrophe when nature explodes. *Venice – Maria della Salute* focuses on a fabulous underwater Venice where the city of the Doges slowly sinks in the waves through a mirror-like effect. Lastly, *Sun Setting over a Lake* offers an experience linked to the phenomenon of industrialization. Is it an apocalyptic vision or the “industrial sublime”? Visitors will discover a virtual world in which clouds and black tides coalesce.

## *A Turner from the collection of the MNBAQ to be featured*



*Turner and the Sublime* will also enable the MNBAQ to highlight a painting by the English artist from its collection. This is a rare opportunity to see a seminal work from the MNBAQ’s European art collection.

*Scene in Derbyshire* (1827) is a gift from the estate of Maurice Duplessis in the late 1950s. Its remarkable history reveals that the landscape represents the Derwent Valley seen from the heights of Abraham, near Matlock Bath, a site in Derbyshire named to pay tribute to British General James Wolfe, who died on the Plains of Abraham, during a pivotal battle in the Seven Years’ War.

*“Atmosphere is my style.”*

– Joseph Mallord William Turner, 1844

## *The art of the sublime*

The exhibition focuses on the theme of the sublime, a core concept of late 18th century aesthetics and art criticism in Germany and England, which spread throughout Europe in the 19th century. Irish writer Edmund Burke’s seminal work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) influenced an entire generation of artists by proposing a new conception of beauty, centred on the emotion that the force of nature arouses. This notion of the sublime expressed itself in Turner’s work in dramatic landscapes describing spectacular storms, tumultuous seas and grandiose natural spaces.

## *Turner, a master of landscapes*

Turner developed an eminently sensitive conception of landscapes. He sought to render atmospheric effects through the suggestive power of colour. He is recognized for his great mastery of the rendering of light on the sea or mountainous landscapes glimpsed through clouds or rain. Throughout his life, the artist constantly travelled around England and in Europe. He is regarded as a master watercolourist and developed an especially bold technique. His landscapes have a resolutely modern dimension. With Turner, landscape painting became a major art form.



The first section of the exhibition is devoted to Turner’s early works. The second section proposes a fine series of mountain landscapes, whose striking majesty is especially suited to rendering the notion of the sublime. A spectacular series of historic and mythological scenes is followed by magnificent lakeside landscapes in Switzerland and Italy, including a superb series of views of Venice, in which the water motif is used to develop a lyrical interpretation of nature. The seascapes and studies of the sky propose fantastic, deeply suggestive images that evoke the infinite. Lastly, the theme of machines, which the artist uses extensively, makes it possible to place Turner at the root of modernity and establish links between the first Industrial Revolution and the advent of environmental awareness.

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## An informative audio guide

The audio guide of the *Turner and the Sublime* exhibition not only reveals the English master but also enables visitors to discover why his works continue to be vibrantly topical nearly two centuries after his death. It proposes reflections from guest experts Ollivier Dyens, a full professor at McGill University, and Colleen Thorpe, Director General of Équiterre, on the links between the legendary artist, who revolutionized landscape art, and key societal challenges, especially related to the environment, and our place in the world. Visitors can download the contents, available in French and in English, on their smartphones.

**For listening:**

<https://soundcloud.com/user-426041794-859549171/sets/turner-et-le-sublime-anglais-english>

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## Credits

*The Turner and the Sublime exhibition is organized in collaboration with Tate. It has been made possible through a cultural development agreement between the Québec government and Québec City. The contribution comes from the Mesure d'aide financière à l'intention des musées d'État pour des expositions internationales majeures.*

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Senior Curator of British Art,  
1790-1850, Tate

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Senior Curator of British Art,  
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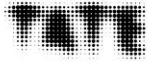
*Immersive installations*  
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Theatrical video designer

*Sound Creation*  
Peak Media

*The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec is a state corporation funded by the  
Gouvernement du Québec.*

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organisée en collaboration  
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*Turner and the Sublime*  
Pierre Lassonde Pavilion of the MNBAQ  
From February 10, to May 2, 2021

INFORMATION: 418 643-2150 or 1 866 220-2150

Page 1 – Photo: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Going to the Ball (San Martino)*, exhibited 1846. Oil paint on canvas, 61.6 x 92.4 cm. © Tate, London 2017

Page 2 – From top to Bottom: Photos: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Fishermen at Sea*, exhibited 1796. Oil paint on canvas, 91.4 x 122.2 cm. © Tate, London 2017 // Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Blue Rigi, Sunrise*, 1842. Watercolour on paper, 29.7 x 45 cm. © Tate, London 2017 // Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The St Gotthard Road between Amsteg and Wassen, Looking up the Reuss Valley*, c. 1814-1815. Gouache, graphite and watercolour on paper, 67.5 x 101 cm. © Tate, London 2017

Page 3 – Photo: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Scene in Derbyshire*, 1827. Oil paint on canvas, 45 x 61 cm. MNBAQ Donated by the heirs of the Honourable Maurice Duplessis (1959.579) Photo: © MNBAQ, Denis Legendre

Page 4 – From top to Bottom: Photos: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Landscape Composition with a Ruined Castle on a Cliff*, 1792-1793. Graphite and watercolour on paper, 21.4 x 27.3 cm. © Tate, London 2017 // Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Küssnacht, Lake of Lucerne: Sample Study*, c. 1842-1843. Graphite, watercolour and pen on paper, 22.8 x 29.2 cm. © Tate, London 2017

Page 8 – Photo: John Thomas Smith, *Turner in the British Museum Print Room*, about 1830-1832. Watercolour over graphite, 22,2 x 18,2 cm. British Museum, Londres

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## Biography of Joseph Mallard William Turner



**1775**

Birth of Joseph Mallord William Turner, in London. He is the son of William, a barber and wigmaker, and Mary, née Marshall.

**1789-1792**

Employed as an assistant in several architects' offices and print shops, while studying at the art school of the Royal Academy.

**1796**

Exhibits his first oil painting, *Fishermen at Sea*, which is well received by the press.

**1797**

Takes his first extended trip to the north of England. He will subsequently travel every summer to make sketches.

**1799**

Begins a relationship with Sarah Danby, by whom he will have two daughters.

**1802**

Made a full member of the Royal Academy, Great Britain's most important artistic institution at the time.

**1804**

Opens a gallery adjacent to his residence, to exhibit his works.

**1807**

Is appointed professor of perspective at the Royal Academy.

**1807-1819**

Publishes *Liber Studiorum*, a large collection of engravings illustrating different types of landscape.

**1812**

Begins accompanying his paintings by extracts from a poem of his own entitled *Fallacies of Hope*.

**1819**

Makes a six-month trip to Italy during which he visits Venice, Rome, Naples, Paestum and Florence. In Rome he is made an honorary member of the Academy of St. Luke.

**1827**

Exhibits five oil paintings at the Royal Academy, including *Scene in Derbyshire*, now in the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

**1829**

Death of his father. Makes a first will, in which he stipulates that two of his paintings are to be hung in the National Gallery alongside landscapes by Claude Lorrain.

**1830**

Publication of *Italy*, a poem by Samuel Rogers. Turner's accompanying illustrations meet with great success.

**1832**

Begins making regular visits to Margate, a seaside town on the Kent coast, where he stays in the guest house run by Sophia Caroline Booth. After her husband dies in 1833, she becomes the artist's partner.

**1833**

Exhibits his first pictures of Venice at the Royal Academy.

**1841-1844**

Travels each year to Switzerland, staying regularly in Lucerne. Makes commissioned watercolours for a small group of collectors based on "sample" studies executed during his travels.

**1843**

The young critic John Ruskin publishes the first volume of his book *Modern Painters* and becomes one of the artist's most ardent defenders.



**1846**

Turner's health begins to decline. He moves in with Mrs. Booth under the name of "Admiral Booth."

**1851**

Dies in Chelsea at the age of seventy-six. His estate consists of a considerable fortune together with close to three hundred paintings and 30,000 works on paper. In accordance with his will, all the works are bequeathed to the British nation in 1856.

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## General Information

### OPENING HOURS OF THE MUSEUM COMPLEX

**Until May 31, 2021**

Monday to Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Wednesdays till 7:00 p.m.  
Closed on Mondays

### ADMISSION

Adults: 22 \$  
Seniors (65 and Over): 20 \$  
Ages 18 to 30: 12 \$  
Ages 13 to 17: 7 \$  
Families (2 adults and 3 children  
13 to 17): 48 \$  
Families (1 adult and 3 children  
13 to 17): 26 \$  
Children 12 and under: free  
Members: free  
Wednesdays from, 5 p.m. to  
9 p.m.: **half-price**  
Reduced rates for groups

*\* A 30% discount applies to the  
MNBAQ's provincial collection  
rooms.*

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