

PRESS RELEASE

from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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**MAJOR 2017 TURNER EXHIBITION UNITES TRIO OF
MONUMENTAL PORT SCENES FOR THE FIRST TIME PUBLICLY**

***TURNER'S MODERN AND ANCIENT PORTS:
PASSAGES THROUGH TIME***

**BRINGS TOGETHER
PAINTINGS, WATERCOLORS, SKETCHBOOKS, AND PRINTS**

February 23 through May 14, 2017



Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Harbor of Dieppe: Changement de Domicile*, exhibited 1825, oil on canvas, The Frick Collection; photo Michael Bodycomb

Exploring a turning point in the career of Britain's greatest land- and seascape painter of the nineteenth century, a major exhibition at The Frick Collection will illuminate Joseph Mallord William Turner's (1775–1851) distinctly modern approach to the theme of the port. Opening in winter 2017, *Turner's Modern and Ancient Ports: Passages Through Time* centers around the Frick's grand-scale *Harbor of Dieppe* and *Cologne*, both painted by the artist in the mid-1820s, and unites them for the first time publicly with a closely related yet unfinished work from Tate, London, that depicts the harbor of Brest, in Brittany. This trio of port scenes is accompanied by

more than thirty of Turner's oil paintings, watercolors, sketchbooks, and prints, among them other contemporary views of France, Germany, and England, as well as imagined scenes set in ancient Carthage and Rome. A longstanding subject in art, the port is a space of arrival and departure that links the city interior and the open water beyond, evoking a sense of journey and the passage of time.

Whether portraying the ancient world or encapsulating contemporary life in a specific region, Turner returned to this time-honored theme to explore the relationship of past and present and, conscious of his own place in



J.M.W. Turner, *Shields, on the River Tyne*, for *The Rivers of England*, 1823, watercolor on paper, Tate; Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856; © Tate, London 2016

history, showcase his artistic innovations, chief among them his dazzling treatment of light and color.

Comments Susan Galassi, “As with so many of our exhibitions, this show is built around major works in our collection and provides the occasion to bring fresh perspectives through new scholarship and engaging programming. The Frick’s harbors of Dieppe and Cologne, purchased more than a hundred years ago by Henry Clay Frick, are restricted from travel and have not been exhibited elsewhere for the past century. We are thrilled to provide our audiences with insight into Turner’s masterful technique and process by reuniting the Frick’s ports, which themselves have never before been the focus of an exhibition, with a third harbor scene from the Tate on a similar scale, along with other port scenes—both imagined and set in the present—in oil and watercolor that reveal how the artist developed this subject over time.”

Turner’s Modern and Ancient Ports: Passages through Time was organized by Susan Grace Galassi, Senior Curator, The Frick Collection; Ian Warrell, independent curator and Turner specialist; and Joanna Sheers Seidenstein, Anne L. Poulet Curatorial Fellow, The Frick Collection. It will be accompanied by a range of public programs as well as a catalogue published with Yale University Press. Principal funding for the exhibition is provided by The Honorable and Mrs. W. L. Lyons Brown and Northern Trust. Additional support is generously provided by The Christian Humann Foundation, The Peter Jay Sharp Foundation, Gilbert and Ildiko Butler, Helen-Mae and Seymour R. Askin, the families of George and Michael Eberstadt in memory of Vera and Walter Eberstadt, Francis Finlay, the Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Foundation, the Christian Keese Charitable Trust, David and Julie Tobey, The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, Mrs. C. Sidamon-Eristoff, and the Robert Lehman Foundation. The exhibition catalogue is underwritten by a gift from an anonymous donor in memory of Charles Ryskamp.

TURNER AND TRAVEL

The central decades of Turner’s career coincided with political, technological, and cultural developments that created a new context for his depictions of ports. With Napoleon’s decisive defeat at Waterloo in 1815, a new era of tourism began. Travel restrictions between England and France that had been in place since 1797 were lifted, and contact with the Continent was renewed. British artists, writers, and the public at large crossed the Channel in droves to rediscover it and to see how their neighbors had fared during the interim. English ports that had only recently served as the country’s defensive borders were now being transformed into commercial hubs and seaside resorts. The advent of the steamboat and high speed carriages as well as improved roads made travel easier and more accessible to a larger segment of the population, including the middle class. A market developed for images of the picturesque sights that travelers had seen or planned to visit. As an insatiable traveler and the foremost topographical artist of the period, Turner was well equipped to meet this demand. On his extensive trips through the British Isles and, after 1817, the Continent, Turner filled notebooks with sketches of land formations, architecture, ships, and people in regional costumes at both work and play.

THE FRICK COLLECTION'S *DIEPPE* AND *COLOGNE*

During these years, Turner moved beyond the idealized naturalism and earth-toned palette that had gained him acclaim to a new form of poetic topography. As fusions of land-, sea-, and townscapes, ports offered fertile ground for experimentation and innovation in both oil and watercolor. Turner's focus turned increasingly to the representation of light and color, a preoccupation that continued to the end of his career. In the 1810s, he seized on the new high-keyed colors that had just become available—chrome yellow and chrome orange—applying them, with other light-colored hues, to canvases primed with white to create works of surprising (and, for the time, shocking) luminosity. During his first trip to Italy, in 1819, he experienced firsthand the warm glowing tones of the southern climate, which contributed to the increased brilliance of his paintings, a direction that the public and critics found disturbingly unnatural and eccentric.

The Frick Collection's *Harbor of Dieppe: Changement de Domicile* (shown on page 1) can be seen as a major statement of Turner's direction in the mid-1820s. For this genre scene depicting the everyday life of the French port city, Turner adopts the grand scale traditionally reserved for historical or religious subjects. He borrows his compositional scheme from the renowned harbors of Claude Lorrain, placing his work in an artistic lineage with the master who set the standard for the motif. In *Dieppe*, as in many of Claude's ports, two "arms"—comprised of piers, buildings, boats, and people—reach out from a vanishing point on the horizon to embrace a central body of water that extends to the bottom edge of the painting. The mirror image of the sun's orb and reflections of the boats are suspended in the water's ruffled surface. A pale-blue sky takes up more than half of the canvas, in which Turner gives priority to light and water over solid substance. Working from sketches made on two trips to Dieppe, in 1821 and 1824, and drawing from memory and imagination, Turner filled his sun-drenched vista with a cast of some two hundred figures who interact in scenes of daily life: moving house, lounging aboard ships, and jostling each other in the broad streets as they go about their business. At the right, a row of meticulously rendered eighteenth-century houses lining the quay (most still standing today) serves as the backdrop for Turner's loosely rendered vision of the town's teeming life and spectacular setting. On the horizon at the vanishing point of the painting, the tower and dome of the church of St. Jacques, Dieppe's spiritual center, anchors the scene, set off by the sun's radiance.

In *Dieppe*, Turner transcended the limits of topographical representation to present his subjective view of the place. When the painting debuted at the Royal Academy, both critics and the public were quick to point out that its golden atmosphere had little or nothing to do with the temperate climate of northern France and its characteristic gray skies. To one critic, *Dieppe* was "a specimen...of mingled truth and falsehood." Turner also took poetic license by excluding any sign of the transformation the town was then undergoing from a sleepy fishing port to a modern resort, with tourists arriving by steamboat, presenting instead a nostalgic, idealized vision of the port that was on the verge of disappearing.



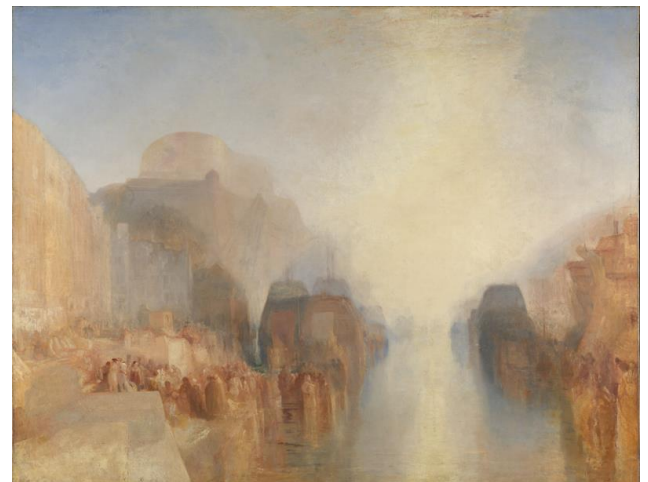
J.M.W. Turner, *Cologne, the Arrival of a Packet-Boat: Evening*, exhibited 1826, oil on canvas, The Frick Collection; photo Michael Bodycomb

In *Dieppe's* companion piece, *Cologne, the Arrival of a Packet-Boat: Evening*, Turner turns his attention to the historic city and pilgrimage center on the banks of the Rhine, replacing the sun-filled harbor in *Dieppe* with an evening scene in which life appears suspended in time. The deep recession of space that characterizes *Dieppe* is blocked in *Cologne* by the two packet boats that approach the shore. The Claudian reference of the former work is replaced here by allusion to the peaceful, domestic river scenes of the Dutch masters, in particular, Aelbert Cuyp. Light again establishes the emotional register of the painting, conveying a mood of reverie through the

diffused, shimmering pink and violet tones that fill the water and expansive sky and collect around the spire of the church of Gross St. Martin, the highest point in the painting. Carefully delineated foreground details, such as the abandoned fishing apparatus half submerged in water, the peasant women lugging lumber, and the lone dog drinking at the water's edge, as well as the defensive medieval walls and towers that bar entry into the city, contribute to a sense of frozen time. Yet, encroaching on the shore aboard the packet boat, about to disrupt the spell, is a lively band of tourists in fashionable attire, ambassadors from the modern world. The contrast of past and present, often subtly evoked in Turner's harbor scenes, is represented here as two vastly different spheres on a collision course. As is the case with *Dieppe*, Turner's view of Cologne is nostalgic, emphasizing the grandeur of the past. In his painting, he kept the city's medieval face intact, although a number of its walls and towers had been torn down over the course of his visits to make way for the expansion and modernization then underway. Here too, Turner's exaggerated tonal range met with hostility from critics, one of whom complained of the "glitter and gaud of colors" while conceding that it is "impossible to shut our eyes to the wonderful skill, and to the lightness and brilliance which he has effected."

UNITING THREE RELATED SCENES

Dieppe and *Cologne* will be presented at the Frick with a third monumental port, *The Harbor of Brest: The Quayside and Château*. This scene, approximately the same size as the Frick canvases, was most likely painted between 1826 and 1828, but was left unfinished. Identified in 1997 by Ian Warrell, the exhibition's co-curator, as a view of the Breton city, this work has long been connected with the Frick paintings, although they have never before been exhibited together. Recent technical analysis carried out by Rebecca Hellen, Painting Conservator at the Tate, revealed that the grounds of the three canvases were prepared in the same way



J.M.W. Turner, *The Harbor of Brest: The Quayside and Château*, ca. 1826–28, oil on canvas, Tate; Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856; © Tate, London 2016

and that the same type of paint was used in all of them, confirming that the paintings were conceived and developed as a series.

The Harbor of Brest presents an unparalleled opportunity to observe Turner's painting process arrested in a molten state. Large masses of diluted blue, orange, brown, and yellow oil establish the major forms of the composition, creating a glowing effect similar to that of watercolor. In parts of the canvas, crowds of figures and boats and buildings are given definition through modeling in light and dark. Further work would have brought *Brest* up to the level of finish of the Frick paintings. Left in this state, the canvas, with its luminous blurred forms, seems to anticipate the less resolved and more abstracted character of Turner's later work.

ANCIENT PORTS IMAGINED

Following *Dieppe*, *Cologne*, and *Brest*, Turner returned to the motif of the port in the late 1820s, now as a setting for subjects from the ancient world. The theme of the rise and decline of civilizations had long preoccupied Turner, and his second trip to Italy, in 1828, reinvigorated his love of antiquity. The three ancient ports included in the exhibition complement his modern views, works rooted in on-the-spot observation of the setting and local populace and filtered through the artist's imaginative recollection. In his classical harbors, accounts from ancient history are the departure points for the works, which Turner filled with details of everyday life that lend the scenes the immediacy of his modern ports.



J.M.W. Turner, *Regulus*, exhibited 1828, reworked and exhibited 1837, oil on canvas, Tate; Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856; © Tate, London 2016

In *Regulus*, painted and exhibited during his second trip to Italy, in 1828, then reworked and shown again in London in 1837, Turner depicts an episode from the life of a third-century Roman general, Marcus Atilius Regulus, a model of stoic virtue and self-sacrifice. According to literary sources, the Roman general, captured by the Carthaginians, was sent to Rome to negotiate a treaty. On failing to do so, he kept his vow to return to Carthage, where his eyelids were cut off and he was forced to stare at the sun until blinded, before being executed. Here, as in *Dieppe* and *Brest*, the glaring sun and its reflection in the water occupy the center of the painting, with figures grouped along the sides and in the foreground. Within the scene, the hero is reduced to a few pale brush strokes and displaced to the right side of the canvas—nearly impossible to find. Through this imaginative conceit, Turner forces the viewer to confront head on the painting's blazing light while searching for the protagonist, taking up the position in front of the sun that Regulus himself endured. In *Regulus*, Turner not only defies the norms of history painting, but makes use of the classical narrative to slyly respond to criticisms of his work, which had been described as “blinding” and “almost [putting] your eyes out.”

WATERCOLOR AND OIL, A DIALOGUE

Turner's lifelong obsession with the representation of light and atmosphere found an ideal outlet in watercolor, a medium to which he brought an array of unconventional methods to create heightened visual effects. In his atmospheric water-filled scenes of ports, medium and motif formed a perfect union. Whereas his experimental mid-career oils were met with controversy, his watercolors were universally praised. Turner's watercolors, many of which were made for British topographical serial print publications, celebrated the country's richness of notable sights. They provided him with a steady source of income and earned him widespread recognition as the greatest contemporary watercolor artist. Working alternately in oil and watercolor and often treating the same subject in both, Turner deliberately blurred distinctions between the two mediums, enriching each with aspects of the other. In some of his watercolors, for example, he employed the same compositional structures as in his grand-scale canvases, while in his oils he achieved a sense of transparency usually associated with watercolor. To some of his vociferous critics, Turner's monumental port scenes in oil were essentially blown-up watercolors.

The exhibition includes some two dozen watercolors depicting picturesque ports on the British coast and up and down its rivers, as well as images from northern France and the Rhineland, along with a selection of prints. Showcasing the diversity and beauty of the English landscape and seascape, Turner depicted every type of port: naval strongholds, fashionable resorts, industrial harbors, major anchorages in large cities, and remote river landings, some seen from the shore and others looking back from the water. He embellished his images with historical references and allusions to contemporary issues and expressed an



J.M.W. Turner, *Dover Castle from the Sea, for Marine Views*, 1822, watercolor and gouache on paper, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Bequest of David P. Kimball, in memory of his wife, Clara Bertram Kimball, © 2017 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

often ambiguous attitude to the “progress” of industrialization. In *Dover Castle from the Sea*, Turner takes as his subject one of England's oldest and most strategically important ports, the departure point for the cross-Channel ferry service. He plunges the viewer into the scene as if on board a ship in the foreground, pitching and heaving in roiling waves as it attempts to make shore. Other wind-tossed fishing boats arrive and depart, while townspeople spill over the piers. In a characteristic pairing of past and present, Turner includes in the flotilla of sail boats a steam-powered ferry, a symbol of modernization cutting a steady path through the waves and trailing a plume of sooty smoke. Presiding over this maritime scene is Dover's ancient castle and fortifications atop its white cliffs, a reference to England's enduring power.

In *Shields, on the River Tyne*, painted for a print series, Turner again makes use of a Claudian composition, evoking the weight of tradition and Arcadian subject matter for his extraordinary night scene, emphatically set in the present of England's industrial hub in the northeast (see page 1). The full moon, reflected in water, serves as a spotlight that

allows for the around-the-clock labor of workers shoveling coal onto small boats that carry it to the waiting ships for transport to manufacturing centers. Competing with the moon's eerie brilliance is the burning glow of an industrial furnace at right, set against the overall blue tonality of the painting. Turner's pitting of man against nature within the setting of a modern port is made all the more eloquent through the unfamiliar, almost surreal, beauty he achieves in his watercolor, charting new aesthetic territory. With this small work, like the other mid-career oils and watercolors included in the show, Turner expanded the boundaries of landscape art, leaving behind strict adherence to naturalistic representation for a more poetic treatment of light and color that gave form and meaning to a world transforming before his eyes.

PUBLICATION

In the accompanying catalogue, the Frick paintings and a wide selection of works by Turner from the 1820s and 1830s, depicting both modern and ancient harbors, are examined in various contexts. Drawing from contemporary travel accounts, literary and visual sources, and critical reviews, as well as new technical analyses of Turner's work, the five essays present a fresh perspective on the middle years of the artist's career. The book features essays by the show's curators as well Gillian Forrester, Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings, Yale Center for British Art; and Rebecca Hellen, Conservator of Paintings, Tate Britain. Among the topics addressed are the radical changes in the social and economic structures of Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century; the rediscovery of the Continent by the British after Waterloo following two decades of war with France; the rise of mass tourism; Turner's involvement in producing watercolors for various print series; and the interconnection between his manner of painting in various media. Published by Yale University Press in association with The Frick Collection, the book is available in the Museum Shop or can be ordered through the Frick's Web site (frick.org) or by phone at 212.547.6848. Hardcover (\$45, member price \$40.50) Softcover (\$25, member price \$22.50).

INTERACT

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BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

Building project: www.frickfuture.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

App: frick.org/app

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

Museum Hours: open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

Admission: \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; "pay what you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

First Fridays: museum admission and gallery programs are free from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on the first Friday evening of the month (except January)

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Visits: Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

297, December 14, 2016 (revised February 2, 2017)

For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Associate Director of Media Relations & Marketing

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