

JMW TURNER AT THE TATE BRITAIN



When we arrived many of us were cold and wet however our guide Rob Humphries soon warmed us with his enthusiasm.

He guided us through a variety of paintings spanning Turner's career and along the way we also learnt more about Joseph Mallord William Turner as a person.

Turner was born in 1775 at Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London, to a modest lower-middle-class family. A child prodigy, Turner studied at the Royal Academy of Arts from 1789, enrolling when he was 14, and exhibited his first work there at 15

He travelled around Europe from 1802, typically returning with voluminous sketchbooks.

Intensely private, eccentric, and reclusive, Turner was a controversial figure throughout his career. He lived in squalor and had poor health from 1845, and died in London in 1851 aged 76. Turner is buried in St Paul's Cathedral, London.

Described as the 'father of modern art,' Turner shocked the art world with his unique brushwork and use of colour. His portrayals of the modern world were unlike any seen before. As one of the country's greatest painters, he fittingly lends his name to the contemporary Turner Prize.

Without Rob guiding us we would have just looked at the paintings and never taken the time to get a better understanding of not only the artwork but of Turner himself.

Highlights included

Fishermen at Sea

This was his first oil painting for the academy.

Rob explained how this painting juxtaposes the fragility of human life, represented by the small boat with its flickering lamp, and the sublime power of nature, represented by the dark clouded sky, the wide sea, and the threatening rocks in the background. The cold light of the Moon at night contrasts with the warmer glow of the fishermen's lantern.



Frosty Morning

Turner witnessed this scene of a ditch being cleared when travelling through Yorkshire in the north of England. However, no art critic seems to know exactly what he is trying to depict here.

So, our guide asked us to look closer at the picture and we each began to have different ideas on what was being represented.

Was it a funeral if so, whose? When paths divide, which one do we choose in life?

What does the bleakness represent?



The Battle of Trafalgar

We were informed that this painting was praised as the first 'British epic picture' because it combines key moments of the Battle of Trafalgar in one composition. At bottom left British naval leader Horatio Nelson collapses on the Victory's deck, shot by a French sniper seen high up in the right-hand ship's crows' nest. French flags are lowered, conceding defeat.



Seascape with Distant Coast

This is one of many unfinished sea paintings found in Turner's studio after his death. It represents a pivotal point in Turner's painting process. Areas of light and shade have been mapped out but there is as yet no narrative and no distinctive shapes. From here Turner could have worked this up into any subject that took his imagination.



THANKS TO ROB'S KNOWLEDGE AND ENTHUSIAM WE ALL LEFT WANTING TO LEARN MORE ABOUT TURNER.