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Peace - Burial at Sea

exhibited 1842





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ON DISPLAY AT TATE BRITAIN

Display Room: [Turner Exhibited 2: Ambition and Reputation](#)Display Theme: [Turner Collection](#)

ARTIST	Joseph Mallord William Turner 1775–1851
MEDIUM	Oil paint on canvas
DIMENSIONS	Support: 870 x 867 mm framed: 1110 x 1108 x 120 mm
COLLECTION	Tate
ACQUISITION	Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856
REFERENCE	N00528

Display caption

[Catalogue entry](#)**399. [\[N00528\]](#) Peace—Burial at Sea** Exh. 1842

THE TATE GALLERY, LONDON (528)

Canvas, 34 1/4 x 34 1/8 (87 x 86.5); partly painted up to frame, approx 33 1/4 x 34 (84.5 x 86.5), with corners cut across at approx. 8 3/4 (22) from corners of canvas.

Coll. Turner Bequest 1856 (42, 'Burial at sea' 2'9" x 2'9"); transferred to the Tate Gallery 1910.

Exh. R.A. 1842 (338); Manchester 1887 (623); Amsterdam 1936 (162, repr.); *Golden Gate Exhibition* San Francisco 1939; exchange loan to the Louvre, Paris, 1950–59; *Victorian Artists in England* National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, March–April 1965 (150, repr.); New York 1966 (24,



repr. p. 30); Edinburgh 1968 (18, repr.); Dresden (16, repr. in colour) and Berlin (26, colour pl. 13) 1972; Lisbon 1973 (18, repr. in colour); R.A. 1974–5 (521, repr.); Leningrad and Moscow 1975–6 (64, detail repr.); Hague 1978–9 (xviii, repr.); Munich 1979–80 (367, repr.); Tate Gallery 1982 (not in catalogue; see Hackney 1982 under 'Lit' below); Paris 1983–4 (70, repr.); Birmingham 1984.

Lit. Cunningham 1852, p. 26; Ruskin 1857 (1903–12, xiii, pp. 159–60); Thornbury 1862, i, p. 346; ii, pp. 182–3; 1877, pp. 171, 323–5, 465; Hamerton 1879, p. 292; Monkhouse 1879, p. 128; Bell 1901, p. 145 no 234; Armstrong 1902, pp. 153–4, 226, repr. facing p. 154; MacColl 1920, p. 21; Falk 1938, p. 161; Davies 1946, p. 186; Clark 1949, p. 106; Clare 1951, 107, repr. p. 110; Finberg 1961, pp. 390–91, 507 no. 548; Rothenstein and Butlin 1964, pp. 68–70, pl. 120; Gowing 1966, pp. 27–31, 38, repr. p. 30; Lindsay 1966, pp. 202–3; 1966², p. 52; Brill 1969, pp. 241–31, repr. in colour at end and, detail, p. 31; Gage 1969, pp. 109, 186, 191, 260 n. 83, 269 n. 10; Reynolds 1969, p. 187, colour pl. 159; Gaunt 1971, p. 11, colour pl. 45; Herrmann 1975, pp. 50, 234, colour pl. 174; William Walling, 'More than Sufficient Room: Sir David Wilkie and the Scottish Literary Tradition', Kroeber and Walling 1978, pp. 107–9, pl. 42; Wallace 1979, pp. 112–13, pl. 10; Wilton 1979, pp. 210–11, 216, pl. 230; Gage 1980, p. 231; Wilton 1980, p. 143; Stephen Hackney (ed), *Completing the Picture*, 1982, pp. 52–6, repr. in colour and with detail in raking light; Paulson 1982, pp. 65–6, 94, 96.

Exhibited in 1842 with the following lines:

'The midnight torch gleamed o'er the steamer's side
And Merit's corse was yielded to the tide.'

—*Fallacies of Hope.*

The [painting](#) is a memorial to Turner's friend and erstwhile rival Sir David Wilkie who died on board the *Oriental* on the way back from the Middle East on 1 June 1841; he was buried at sea off Gibraltar at 8.30 the same evening. Turner's picture was done in friendly rivalry with George Jones, who did a [drawing](#) of the burial as seen on deck. Jones reported that Clarkson Stanfield objected to the darkness of the sails; 'I only wish I had any colour to make them blacker', replied Turner, who may also have been alluding to Wilkie's marked use of black in his later pictures. Gage (exh. cat., Paris 1983–4) sees the black bird in the foreground, whose wings echo the black sails, as a duck or 'mallard' and hence a pun on Turner's second name.

At the R.A. the painting was paired with *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet*, a picture of Napoleon on St Helena (No. 400 [N00529]) and complementary in colour, being dominated by reds. Such pairings of works of contrasted colour were also to be a feature of Turner's Academy contributions in 1843 and 1845 (see Nos. 404 [N00531] and 405 [N00532], and 424 [N00549] and 425 [N00550]). Both pictures, though painted to the full extent of the square canvas, were finished off, presumably on the R.A. walls, as octagons. No. 399 [N00528] is now however framed to show the full extent of the painted surface.

Marcia Wallace has pointed out that Turner probably derived the irregular octagonal format in which he chose to exhibit this pair of paintings from works by Claude, the *Pastoral Landscape (Liber Veritatis* no. 11), a version of which belonged to Turner's patron Samuel Rogers, and the *Pastoral Landscape with Castel Gandolfo* which Turner saw and analysed in the Barberini collection when he was in Rome in 1819 ('Remarks' sketchbook, CXCI-96; the picture is now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Wallace has also suggested that this pair of paintings ironically contrasts the final resting places of the popular artist Wilkie, man of peace, various memorials to whom had specifically lamented the fact that it was not possible to pay respect to his body, and Napoleon, man of war, whose ashes had just, in 1840, been brought back from St Helena for a state burial at Les Invalides.

As usual the critics, after praising in most instances Turner's Venetian exhibits, vented their fury on his more imaginative works. 'He is as successful as ever in caricaturing himself, in two round blotches of *rouge et noir*', wrote the *Spectator* for 7 May 1842. The *Athenaeum*, 14 May, felt embarrassed that foreign visitors should see such works and concluded, 'We will not endure the music of Berlioz, nor abide Hoffmann's fantasy-pieces. Yet the former is orderly, and the latter are commonplace, compared with these outbreaks.' A 'Supplement' to *The Times* for 6 May described the ship in *Peace* as 'an object resembling a burnt and blackened fish-kettle'. Both *Ainsworth's Magazine*, June 1842, and the *Art Union*, 1 June, came out with the suggestion that the pictures would look as well turned upside down.

Surprisingly even Ruskin, though finally spurred on to write the first volume of *Modern Painters* by the hostility of the critics in 1842, had little to say about *Peace* (though a considerable amount about *War*) and dismissed it as 'Spoiled by Turner's endeavour to give funereal and unnatural blackness to the sails.'

For a brief technical account of this picture see Hackney, *loc. cit.*

Published in:

Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll, *The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner*, revised ed., New Haven and London
1984

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