



View of Venice: The Ducal Palace, Dogana, and Part of San Giorgio, 1841

Joseph Mallord William Turner (English, 1775-1851)

Oil on canvas | 25 x 36 5/8 in. (63.5 x 93 cm)

- What colors are visible in this painting and how has the artist used them?
- What kind of weather is evident in this work? Why might the buildings be so blurry and hard to see?

VISUAL ANALYSIS

In Turner's *View of Venice*, form seems to dissolve in shimmery reflections of light and water. The broad expanse of calm water is framed by *gondolas*, which lead one's eye to the buildings in the distance, particularly the recognizable Ducal Palace. Strong horizontals are broken by verticals such as the *campaniles*, flagpoles, *spires*, and masts on the boats. Groups of buildings flank the middleground at asymmetrical angles, yet the composition remains balanced. The gondolas are placed at various angles

in the water, implying motion, as if in a few moments they might move towards open water in the center of the work. The boat to the far right is cut off at its furled sail, as it moves off the edge of the canvas and out of the frame; not quite a part of the full composition, but still emphasizing that sense of dynamic motion.

The romantic and ephemeral character of the city is conveyed by Turner's soft, suggestive brushwork and brilliant yet delicate palette. Most of all, it shows the *evanescent* quality of light that became

- What might Turner have meant when he said “The sun is God”?
- How did Turner depict the sunlight in *View of Venice*? Does the light there look different than in other regions?

a signature quality of Turner’s paintings after his travels to Italy and Venice.

FUNCTION/Form & Style

This work illustrates Turner’s fascination with the architecture and activity of Venice. He painted it in his London studio after his third and final trip to Italy in 1840. His is an incredibly successful interpretation of the city’s humid atmosphere, brilliant blue sky, clouds, and glimmering reflections in the water. Turner was also very interested in conveying a sense of movement—motion is deliberately implied, as mentioned before, by the positioning of the gondolas in relation to the water, and each other.

Cultural and Historical Importance

J.M.W. Turner’s influence on the history of painting is undeniable—Impressionism was greatly influenced by his astute observations of changing light, color, and atmosphere, and his attention to painting brief moments in time.

His depiction of men and buildings as quite small in relation to the sky and the sea demonstrates his overarching metaphorical interest in how man fits into nature. Ultimately, Turner hoped to raise the art of landscape painting

to a higher level—he believed that the precise observation of nature was merely an aid to the realization of his own pictorial worlds.

At the time that Turner was working, his home country of England was experiencing cultural change on many different levels, both domestically and internationally. As the most powerful country in the world at this point, England was asserting its influence through Colonialism and Imperialism. Therefore, Turner’s classic, majestic landscapes, especially his recurring attention to water and boats, could also be seen as an allusion to England’s naval prowess and power.

Artist Biography

Joseph Mallard William Turner was a British painter, watercolorist, engraver, and *draftsman* born in 1775, in London. He is most celebrated for his landscapes, especially his seascapes. In 1789, he enrolled in the Royal Academy School at age 13, with an interest in landscape painting. Afterward, he received training as an architect and draftsman, which solidified his interest in topography, and the accurate depiction of places. In 1802, he was elected a full member of the Royal Academy. He frequently traveled across

VOCABULARY

Campanile: A bell tower, especially one near but not attached to a church or other public building.

Draftsman: A skilled worker who draws plans of buildings or machines.

Evanescent: Vanishing; fading away; fleeting.

Gondola: A lightweight narrow barge with ends curving up into a point, often with a small cabin in the middle, propelled with a single oar from the stern,

Spire: A tapering, pointed part of something; a tall, sharp-pointed summit, peak or the like.

OHIO ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

Study of this work and its related classroom activities meets some or all of the following K-12 benchmarks:

- **Language Arts:** Acquisition of Vocabulary; Communications: Oral and Visual; Concept of Print, Comprehension Strategies, and Self-Monitoring Strategies; Information, Technical, and Persuasive Text; Research
- **Mathematics:** Geometry and Spatial Sense; Mathematical Processes; Measurement; Numbers, Number Sense, and Operations
- **Sciences:** Physical Sciences; Science and Technology
- **Social Studies:** Economics; Geography; History; People in Societies; Skills and Methods
- **Visual Arts:** Analyzing and Responding; Connections, Relationships, and Applications; Historical, Cultural, and Social Contexts; Valuing the Arts/Aesthetic Reflection

the Continent, especially in Italy and Venice. There he studied Titian, Poussin, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and Rubens among other masters, and these artists, as well as the Italian city itself, were a vital inspiration to him.

His immense body of work includes some 250 sketchbooks, in excess

of 19,000 drawings and watercolor sketches, several hundred finished watercolors, and more than 500 oil paintings.

On his deathbed, in 1851, Turner uttered the words "The sun is God," proving his devotion to the effects of light and color to the last.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

MATHMETICS: Count all the boats, and then try to count all the people seen in the painting. Are there more boats or people? What did Turner do to diminish the presence of people in the painting? What fraction of the painting is devoted to canals, buildings and the sky? (In each case, one-third. This follows the 'rule of thirds,' whereby important features of a work, such as the horizon line, are aligned with one-third of painting, in this case the bottom third. Artists often state that this rule helps works look more aesthetically pleasing.) *(Elementary School)*

SCIENCE: What is the climate like in Venice? How is this city different than other cities in Italy, including Florence or Rome, and how would these differences influence artists who focus on painting light and atmosphere? Has Turner succeeded in capturing the reality of the climate? *(Middle School)*

SOCIAL STUDIES: Turner was inspired by the Romantic notion of nature overwhelming humanity and its creations. Many of his early works express his belief in the "course of empire" - that all great societies, from ancient Rome to France, and even his own Britain, must decline. In this context, examine some of his other paintings, including *The Fighting 'Téméraire,' Tugged to Her Last Berth to Be Broken Up*, and *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament* (at the Cleveland Museum of Art). What techniques does Turner use to express this Romantic notion? How is *View of Venice* different or the same? *(Middle and High School)*

VISUAL ARTS: Investigate the use of vanishing points in creating the illusion of perspective. Draw a scene or landscape with one-point, two-point, and three-point perspective. Which one does Turner use in *View of Venice*? *(Middle and High School)*