

## Turner's Blue Rigi saved for the nation

01 March 2007

Turner's *The Blue Rigi* has been saved for the nation, thanks to an overwhelming public response to a fundraising appeal launched by The Art Fund and Tate in January, and a major grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) announced today.

Image



The Blue Rigi by JMW Turner

With the public appeal raising over £550,000 in just over five weeks, the NHMF – the ‘fund of last resort’ for heritage at risk – has underwritten the acquisition of Turner's *The Blue Rigi* to a maximum of £1.95m. This grant represents over a third of NHMF's current annual budget of £5m, and means that *The Blue Rigi* is now safe, ahead of the export deadline on 20 March.

This significant contribution mirrors the phenomenal response from the general public to the appeal that The Art Fund and Tate launched on 22 January. Over 11,000 people have donated £550,000 to save the watercolour for the nation, making it one of the most successful public appeals ever. Members of the public have been pledging their support by ‘buying a brushstroke’ for £5 each from *The Blue Rigi*, by visiting a special website created by The Art Fund for online donations at [www.artfund.org/savebluerigi](http://www.artfund.org/savebluerigi), as well as by telephone and post.

Donations have been received from all over the UK and there have also been contributions from as far away as Singapore, United States, Japan, Russia and Australia. People who wish to contribute to the campaign can still do so until 5 March and all money received until then will go towards acquiring the work.

The Art Fund, the membership charity which has helped secure great works of art for Britain's public collections for over 100 years, has awarded Tate £500,000 - one of the largest grants in its history - toward the purchase. This means that in total the public have contributed over £1m to this appeal. In an unprecedented move by Tate, its Trustees have allocated £2m including a generous contribution from Tate Members.

Further details on the success of the fundraising appeal and the final amount needed from the NHMF will be announced once the appeal has closed in March and the many thousands of public and private donations have been fully counted.

Sir Nicholas Serota, Director, Tate said, "There is nothing like *The Blue Rigi*. It is a truly extraordinary work of ineffable beauty. I would like to thank every member of the public who has generously given money towards our campaign, and The Art Fund for orchestrating the process. I am delighted that the National Heritage Memorial Fund has recognised the watercolour's importance and supported our collective determination to save this work from leaving the country. Tate holds the world's greatest Turner collection and the acquisition of *The Blue Rigi* will have a significant impact on our ability to reveal the full brilliance of his mature work."

Commenting on the success of the public appeal David Barrie, Director of The Art Fund, said, "We have been overwhelmed by the popularity of this appeal, both with the public and with our own members, who generously contributed 70% of the total raised in the past five weeks. There is a powerful message here for our politicians - the public care about great works of art and they want to see them acquired by our public collections."

Liz Forgan, Chair of the NHMF commented, "With this huge level of support from NHMF, *The Blue Rigi* is now guaranteed to be saved and will stay in the UK where it belongs. The public has overwhelmingly demonstrated their passion for this exceptional painting and it is a perfect demonstration of what the NHMF was set up to do - to act as a fund of last resort for the UK's most treasured and endangered heritage. Demand for our funding is at an all-time high so the more the public raise in the closing days of the campaign, the more we can spend to help save other heritage treasures."

*The Blue Rigi* was sold at auction on 5 June 2006 for the record price of £5.8m making it the most expensive British watercolour ever sold. A temporary export bar was then put in place until 20 March 2007 by the Culture Minister, David Lammy, and Tate was subsequently offered the painting at a reduced purchase price of £4.95m, following the application of eligible tax remissions.

As part of the fundraising campaign, Tate has united for the first time ever *The Blue Rigi*, *The Dark Rigi* and *The Red Rigi* in the exhibition JMW Turner: The Three Rigs at Tate Britain until 20 March 2007. These highly-prized finished watercolours are widely regarded as Turner's finest works, as well as being arguably among the very finest watercolours ever painted.

Further details on the success of the fundraising appeal and the final amount needed from the NHMF will be announced once the appeal has closed in March and the many thousands of public and private donations have been fully counted.

## **Notes to editors**

JMW Turner (1775 – 1851) is considered to be one of the greatest painters Britain has ever produced. His ground-breaking use of watercolour, which spanned his career, culminated in the early 1840s with a series of transcendent views of Swiss lakes and mountains. Chief among these are the three views of Mount Rigi as seen from Lake Lucerne. Each shows the mountain at a different time of day and is characterised by a defining colour or tone (Dark, Blue or Red).

*The Blue Rigi* was Turner's first attempt at recording the moment before dawn when the sun just perceptibly begins to chase away the cool darkness of night. Using subtly modulated washes of blue, Turner recreates the stillness and wonder of this instant, anticipating by many years the unified tonal approach to image-making of the Aesthetic Movement.

The Turner Bequest, left to the nation by the artist following his death in 1851, is the largest and finest collection of his work and comprises hundreds of oils and thousands of watercolours and other works on paper, providing a profound insight into his creative evolution.

Since 1903 The Art Fund has given grants towards 30 works by JMW Turner and distributed 176 works as gifts and bequests. It is the UK's leading independent art charity. It offers grants to help UK museums and galleries enrich their collections and campaigns widely on behalf of museums and their visitors. It has

80,000 members. Since its foundation in 1903, The Art Fund has helped UK public collections acquire over 850,000 works of art, ranging from Bronze Age treasures to contemporary works of art. In 2006 The Art Fund offered over £5million to museums and galleries. Independent of government, The Art Fund is uniquely placed to campaign on behalf of public collections across the UK. It was at the forefront of the campaign for free admission in 2001 and the campaign to save the Macclesfield Psalter in 2005. Visit the charity's website at [www.artfund.org](http://www.artfund.org)

## **Further information**

Press enquiries:

Helen Beeckmans/Louise Butler, Tate.

Phone: 020 7887 8730/8732

Alison Scott/Dervish Mertcan,

Phone: 020 7591 6032/6102 Mobile: 07973 613820; [www.nhmf.org.uk](http://www.nhmf.org.uk)

Sarah Harrison/Tanera Bryden, The Art Fund.

Phone: 020 7225 4820/4822