

Unique Turner painting rescued

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The last privately owned Lake District watercolour by J M W Turner is being put on display in the Lake District having just been bought by the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere.

Image



Ullswater, Cumberland by JMW Turner

The drawing, *Ullswater, Cumberland*, was bought for £300,000. It was funded in full by the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), the National Art Collections Fund (Art Fund), the V&A/Museums, Libraries and Archives Purchase Grant Scheme, the Golden Trust and an anonymous donor.

It was a long-held ambition of Robert Woof, Director of the Wordsworth Trust, to acquire a Turner of the Lake District to add to an already comprehensive collection of watercolours showing the development of landscape art in the Lake District. The painting arrived in Grasmere shortly before Dr Woof's recent death and he took great delight in its arrival and arranging for it to be put on display.

The drawing has gone on show in the Wordsworth Museum, alongside Dove Cottage in Grasmere. It is the highlight of the recently opened Treasures of the

Wordsworth Trust exhibition, which celebrates the trust's collections of books, manuscripts and art work.

The trust already has an extensive collection of fine art from the romantic period with nearly all major artists who visited the Lakes represented. However, Turner was the notable gap.

Completed in 1835, it was the last great watercolour of the Lake District by Turner still in private hands, and its sale marked the trust's only opportunity to acquire a Turner. The watercolour was one of a set commissioned by Charles Heath for a series *Picturesque Views of England and Wales*. A total of 96 plates were published between 1827 and 1838.

Turner was famously championed by the art critic John Ruskin, who lived at Coniston in the Lake District and was also an admirer of Wordsworth. Ruskin described the England and Wales series as “the great central work of Turner's life” and he particularly singled out Ullswater for praise as being in “the most perfect peace”.

Charles Waddington, acting director of the Wordsworth Trust, said Robert Woof had been both delighted and worried when offered the drawing.

“It has been our ambition for so long to have a Turner as the keystone to this collection but our concern was how to raise so much money quickly when we also knew this would be our very last chance to acquire a Turner of exhibition standard. We are very fortunate indeed in this country to have organisations who were so quick to rally round to ensure that this very fine drawing was able to come to Cumbria where it can be seen alongside works by Farington, Gilpin, Towne, ‘Warwick’ Smith, White Abbott and many others.”

Stephen Johnson, Head of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, said: “Rescuing this extraordinary painting is a wonderful way to help us celebrate our Silver Jubilee this year as Turner, Wordsworth and even the Lake District itself are all such important British heritage icons. Over the past 25 years, the NHMF has been able to save over 1,200 treasured items and landscapes for the nation, ranging from the Flying Scotsman to the Brecon Beacons, and this Turner is a fantastic addition to that.”

Stephen Hebron, head of exhibitions said: “Turner based this wonderful view on sketches he made on his first tour of the north of England in 1797, but he also drew upon more recent memories of the Swiss Alps, and marvellously conveys the mood of an alpine lake. John Ruskin called it ‘one of three [drawings] that are

in the most perfect peace’.”

David Barrie, Director of the Art Fund, said “We had to help the Wordsworth Trust take advantage of the exceptional opportunity to acquire this magnificent Lake District scene. It is a wonderfully appropriate addition to their collection and a fine memorial to the man who devoted so much time and energy to building it: Robert Woof.”

Further information

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