


The Life of William Turner

Myra Easton

Table Of Contents

- 01 Early Years
 - 03 First Flourishes
 - 05 Mastering the Elements
 - 07 Rise to Prominence
 - 09 Innovative Techniques
 - 11 Personal Trials
 - 13 Painter of Light
 - 15 Lasting Legacy
- 

Early Years

The early years of William Turner, known more commonly today as J.M.W. Turner, form the bedrock of an extraordinary life devoted to pushing the boundaries of art. Born on April 23, 1775, in Covent Garden, London, Turner grew up in the bustling environment of a city that was rapidly transforming during the Industrial Revolution. His father was a barber and wig-maker, while his mother struggled with mental health issues, which were to cast a long shadow over Turner's childhood. This familial backdrop, though challenging, would eventually serve as both a source of insecurity and inspiration for Turner's later works.

Turner's early exposure to art was serendipitous. His father, recognizing his son's talent for drawing, proudly displayed young Turner's sketches in his shop window, attracting the admiration of customers. At the age of 10, Turner was sent to stay with relatives in Brentford, a suburban village along the River Thames, to escape the polluted air of London. This relocation proved to be pivotal as the picturesque landscapes and the tranquil riverside ignited Turner's lifelong passion for nature and scenery.

In 1789, at just 14 years old, Turner entered the prestigious Royal Academy of Art. His enrollment was nothing short of a watershed moment. Under the mentorship of seasoned artists, Turner honed his skills in drawing and painting, quickly becoming proficient in various techniques. His early sketches, often monochromatic works focusing on architectural details and nature scenes, showcased a maturity beyond his years. It was evident that Turner was no ordinary student; his dedication to perfecting his craft was apparent in every piece he produced during this formative period.

During these early years, Turner supported himself through commissions and freelance work, developing a reputation for his skilled topographical drawings. This period of his life is marked by extensive travels across England and Wales, where he meticulously captured landscapes and architectural marvels. His relentless pursuit of artistic excellence was driven by a passion that bordered on obsession. Turner's sketches from these journeys were later used as references for larger oil paintings and watercolors, which would become central to his acclaim as an artist.

One notable aspect of Turner's early years was his exposure to the burgeoning cultural and artistic movements of the time. He lived through a period marked by significant political upheaval and social change, including the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. These events, combined with the Industrial Revolution's transformative impact on England, provided Turner with a wealth of subjects and themes to explore. His early works often reflect a sense of dynamism and urgency, capturing the rapidly changing world around him.

Young Turner also forged influential relationships during this stage of his life. He befriended fellow artists such as Thomas Girtin, whose expertise in watercolor profoundly influenced Turner's technique. The camaraderie and competitive spirit shared with his peers pushed Turner to continually refine his skills and push the boundaries of his art. Additionally, Turner's interactions with art patrons and critics provided him with opportunities to showcase his work, laying the foundation for his future success.

As he transitioned from a budding artist to a recognized talent, Turner's early years offer a fascinating glimpse into the genesis of a genius. These formative experiences, shaped by a combination of innate talent, rigorous training, and relentless determination, laid the groundwork for a career that would revolutionize the world of art. In understanding Turner's early years, we gain insight into the raw elements that fueled his creative spirit, providing a crucial context for appreciating the masterpieces that followed.

