



## **LATE TURNER: PAINTING SET FREE**

TATE BRITAIN EXHIBITION

THURSDAY 16 OCTOBER

DR JAMES HAMILTON

Whistler said of Turner's late works that they were 'as insane as the people who admire them'. Rippingille criticised them for being 'lamentable examples of want of care as well as conscience'. The Times wrote 'This gentleman has...chosen to paint with cream, or chocolate, yolk of egg, or currant jelly - here he uses his whole array of kitchen stuff. Where the steam-boat is - where the harbour ends - which are the signals...are matters past our finding out.' The ultimate insult came from the Athenaeum: 'Soapsuds and whitewash' it thundered when faced with Turner's 1842 'Snowstorm, Steamboat off a Harbour's Mouth, Making Signals in Shallow Water and Going by the Lead.'

When the Athenaeum criticism was published, Ruskin remembered Turner "...sitting in his arm-chair by the fire, I heard him muttering low to himself at intervals, 'Soapsuds and whitewash!' again, and again, and again. At last I went to him, asking 'why he minded what they said?' Then he burst out, "Soapsuds and whitewash! What would they have? I wonder what they think the sea's like? I wish they'd been in it."

Turner, even in his apparently most vaporous late works, was never inaccurate, as Ruskin recognised. The essayist William Hazlitt was wrong when he dismissed Turner's experiments with atmospheric effects as "pictures of nothing, and very like". They may indeed be paintings of the immaterial, but they are also evidence of Turner's search for the numinous.

MEET 10:30 am coffee for I I am lecture at the Art Workers' Guild

ENDS 4 pm at Tate Britain

COST £80 members, £90 non-members (£65 and £75 Friends of Tate), including coffee, lunch with wine and entry