LOT 11
PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED JAPANESE PRIVATE COLLECTION
JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER, R.A.
LONDON 1775 - 1851
LANDSCAPE WITH WALTON BRIDGES
oil on canvas
87.5 x 118 cm.; 34 ½ x 46 ½ in.

ESTIMATE £4,000,000-6,000,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 8,171,000 GBP

PROVENANCE
Sophia Caroline Booth (1798–1875), the artist's landlady and companion in later life;
By whom given to her son, Daniel John Pound (d. 1894);
His sale, London, Christie's, 25 March 1865, lot 195, to Agnew;
With Thomas Agnew & Sons, London;
By whom sold to John Mountjoy Smith (1805–1869);
Bought back from his executors by Agnew in 1870;
With Thomas Agnew & Sons, London;
By whom sold, in 1871, to John Graham (1797–1886), Skelmorlie Castle, Ayrshire;
His sale, London, Christie's, 30 April 1887, lot 90, for 1,100 guineas to Agnew;
With Thomas Agnew & Sons, London;
By whom sold, in May 1887, to Junius Spencer Morgan (1813–1890);
By descent to his son, John Pierpont Morgan Sr. (1837–1913);
By descent to his son, John Pierpont Morgan Jr. (1867–1943);
By descent to his son, Henry Sturgis Morgan (1900–1982);
His sale (‘Property from the Estate of Henry S. Morgan’), Sotheby’s Parke-Bernet, New York, 28 October 1982, lot 1.

EXHIBITED
London, Thomas Agnew & Sons, An Exhibition on Behalf of the Artists’ General Benevolent Institution,
November–December 1913, no. 15;
New York, M. Knoedler & Co., Gainsborough and Turner, 14–31 January 1914, no. 38;
New York, M. Knoedler & Co., Exhibition of paintings; collection of J.P. Morgan, for the benefit of the Citizens Committee for the Army and Navy, 23 November – 11 December 1943, no. 39;

LITERATURE
G. Rawlinson, Turner’s ‘Liber Studiorum’, London 1878, pp. 32–33, no. 13 (for the etching ‘the Bridge in the Middle Distance or The Sun Between Trees’);
H. Ward and W. Roberts, Pictures in the Collection of J. Pierpont Morgan at Prince’s Gate and Dover House, London 1907, n.p., reproduced (as Italy: Bridge in the Middle Distance);

CATALOGUE NOTE
Landscape with Walton Bridges is one of a highly important, late group of roughly ten paintings by J.M.W. Turner, painted in the last ten years of the artist’s life. Loosely handled and light-filled, they are inspired by compositions found in the Liber Studiorum, the unfinished series of engraved views that had occupied much
of Turner’s creative imagination between circa 1807 and 1819 and which are considered one of his most significant artistic achievements. This is the only one to remain in private hands. Based on the composition of plate thirteen of the original Liber designs, published by the artist in 1808 under the title The Bridge in the Middle Distance, the central motif of this painting was correctly identified by Martin Butlin as the distinctive double span of Walton Bridges, a subject that the artist had previously treated twice before in oils, in 1806 and 1807, and was clearly of significant meaning to Turner.

This painting is one of only a very small handful of late works to have left Turner’s studio, given to his partner and landlady Sophia Booth, with whom Turner lived in Margate and London during the last years of his life. In 1887 it was bought by the great American financier and collector Junius Spencer Morgan, acquired in the last years of his life together with his son, John Pierpont Morgan – probably the greatest art collector in American history – and spent the next hundred years as one of the jewels in the crown of the celebrated Morgan Collection in New York.

Seemingly inspired by a sense of sheer delight in the working of paint, these visionary, experimental late works are essentially explorations of the effects of light and were retained by the artist for the development of his art. As Butlin, Shanes and Blayney Brown have all discussed, today this group of late works are among the most widely appreciated of Turner’s late paintings and include what has become one of his best loved works, Norham Castle, Sunrise (Tate Britain, London, N01981, fig. 1). Whether this group of late Liber oils can really be considered ‘pictures’ by Turner’s definition – i.e. a finished, exhibitable painting – or whether they test a redefinition is ultimately unanswerable. Equally difficult to answer is the question of what inspired these works. Was it memory, either art-historical, cultural or his own experiences as a traveller, that inspired such electrifying excursions in paint; or was it simply a profound enjoyment in the handling of his materials that drove him to revisit and reinvent some of his fondest works? Turner sold remarkably few of his exhibited paintings produced towards the mid-1840s, with several sales falling through as new collectors reneged on their purchases, and it would seem that he turned increasingly to painting essentially for himself.1

Nevertheless, handled with a formal sophistication, a remarkable tonal subtlety and a striking intensity of colouring, this group of late Liber compositions arguably forms ‘the most impressive of the late groups of related images by Turner’ and are ‘perhaps the supreme expression of the artist’s idealism’.2

In addition to this picture, the other eight paintings that are unanimously agreed to belong to this group include: Inveraray Pier. Loch Fyne: Morning (Yale Centre for British Art, New Haven), derived from plate 35 of the Liber Studiorum views; Norham Castle, Sunrise (previously mentioned), from Liber plate 57; The Falls of the Clyde (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, Liverpool), from Liber plate 18; Landscape: Woman with Tambourine (Tochigi Prefectural Museum, Japan, fig. 5), from Liber plate 3; Sunrise, a Castle on a Bay: ‘Solitude’ (Tate Gallery, London), from plate 53 of the Liber Studiorum; The Ponte delle Torri, Spoleto (Tate Gallery, London, fig. 2), from Liber Studiorum plate 43, where it is given the title Bridge and Goats; Europa and the Bull (Taft Museum, Cincinnati), from the frontispiece of the Liber Studiorum; and Landscape with a River and a Bay in the distance (Musée du Louvre, Paris), also referred to by its Liber title Junction of the Severn and Wye, though the oil composition is much simplified, which is based on plate 28.3

In addition to this group of large-scale oil paintings based on Liber subjects, Turner painted a further thirteen similarly ground-breaking oils, apparently for his own enjoyment and experimentation, that were never exhibited, at least three of them Alpine views.4 Together with the Liber group, they constitute a body of twenty-three of the artist’s most significant late works. Most of these pictures were bequeathed to the British nation under the terms of the artist’s will, and today fourteen of them are housed at the Tate Gallery as part of the Turner Bequest. Another eight are in major museums around the world; including two in Liverpool (one at the Walker Art Gallery and one, previously mentioned, at the Lady Lever Art Gallery); one at the Louvre in Paris; and three in public galleries in the United States of America. This painting is the only one to remain in a private collection.

Walton Bridge crosses the Thames between Sunbury and Shepperton Locks, under twenty miles south-west
of London, connecting Walton-on-Thames on the south bank with Shepperton, Halliford and Sunbury on the north. The bridge depicted by Turner was the second bridge to cross the Thames at Walton. Designed by John Payne with the advice of John Smeaton, it was built in 1788 to replace an earlier wooden bridge which had been made famous in a series of paintings by Canaletto in the mid-1750s. The elegant stone arches of the second bridge were a favourite subject among artists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and much admired for their picturesque qualities. Famously, it appeared in Boydell’s History of the Thames, illustrated through a series of hand-coloured aquatints published between 1774 and 1776 by Turner’s friend and fellow artist, the celebrated diarist Joseph Farington (1747–1821); and was described by James Thorne in Rambles by Rivers: The Thames, published in 1849, as a ‘long straggling combination of arches called Walton Bridge. It is in fact a sort of double bridge, a second set of arches being carried over a low tract of ground, south of the principal bridge, which crosses the river. According to popular tradition this marshy tract was the original bed of the Thames’.

In 1804 or early 1805 Turner had moved out of the London to Isleworth, seeking solace from political infighting at the Academy (to which he had recently been elected a full member of the council) and attempting to distance himself from the professional rivalries of his contemporaries, taking the lease on Sion Ferry House, right on the banks of the Thames. He had known these picturesque reaches of the Thames as a boy growing up nearby at Brentford and the river at Isleworth was to him what the Stour at Dedham was to Constable. During his time at Sion Ferry House, Turner had spent a productive series of summers sketching along the course of the Thames, using a small boat to navigate the river, and numerous drawings of Walton Bridge appear in his sketchbooks around 1806–07. It was also here that he first experimented with painting oil sketches en plein air, as the Impressionists were to do over half a century later, and Turner produced two large-scale exhibition oil paintings of Walton Bridges at this time: one that he sold to the Earl of Essex (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne); and the other which was bought by Sir John Fleming Leicester (sold in these rooms, 4 July 2018, lot 21, fig. 3).

Here, however, revisiting the subject forty years later, Turner sets the bridge in an idealised, Italianate landscape of his own imagining. Indeed, for many years this painting was wrongly believed to be an Italian view and went unrecognised as relating to the series of late Liber compositions. Armstrong catalogued it simply under the title Italy, and Kitson also pointed out that the composition is remarkably Italianate in its topography. The subject is one for which Turner held a special affection, exploring as it does that staple of classical landscape, a bridge in the middle distance, in a suitably arcadian landscape. Consequently, we see Turner, right at the very end of his career, returning once again to Claude – the artistic gift that kept on giving – and a genre that he classified as the epic or elevated pastoral. It has been suggested that this return to such idyllic subject matter, particularly when so many of Turner’s late landscapes seem to demonstrate an obsession with scenes of natural disaster – such as fire, avalanche or storm – shows Turner reaffirming his faith in Nature in her more tranquil moods and showing to the world that there was still a place for a softer form of romanticism in the landscape painter’s repertoire.

THE LIBER STUDIORUM

Considered for half a century after his death to be one of the most significant achievements of Turner’s career, the Liber Studiorum, or ‘Book of Studies’, was an unfinished series of engravings after his designs, supervised and published by the artist himself. Inspired by Claude Lorrain’s collection of drawings known as the Liber Veritatis, it consumed a great deal of his energies for nearly twenty years and became a lifelong preoccupation. Turner probably had the idea for such a project, as a vehicle for disseminating his work to a wider public, for some time, having produced designs for engraving from the very start of his career, however he did not start work on the series until 1807/8. Publication of the plates ceased in 1819, however, the year of Turner’s departure for Italy on the first of his grand continental sketching tours, which would dominate much of his time over the next twenty years.

As Sir Nicholas Serota has commented, during his own lifetime Turner’s primary means of communication
with the public at large was through engravings. While his paintings were seen by those who visited the exhibitions of the British Institution and the Royal Academy – royalty, the aristocracy, connoisseurs and wealthy collectors – and the private gallery he set up in Marylebone was frequented by a close knit group of patrons and friends, by means of the illustrated topographical tour or souvenir Annual he could reach everyone with access to a library. As such Turner’s works (and his celebrated status as Europe’s greatest landscape painter that was founded upon them) were best known to the contemporary public through engraved reproductions, rather than the works themselves. From very early on in his career he had been well aware of the role engravings could play in popularising his work. Indeed, with the level of skill among English engravers of the period and the pioneering techniques that were being perfected in London at the time, Turner recognised printmaking as one of the greatest channels of communication available to the British artist – both as a way of increasing his celebrity and as a vehicle for communicating his ideas about landscape painting.

In 1845, twenty-six years after he had abandoned the original project, John Ruskin, Turner’s long-standing patron and champion, ordered a complete set of Liber prints, inspiring the artist to have his London printer, McQueen’s, run off fifteen new sets of the published plates in May and June of that year, even though the copper plates were by then very badly worn. The artist must have overseen the printing himself, for, as Shanes has argued, the original mezzotint would have degraded considerably and unless the artist was on the spot to dictate how the new overlaying mezzotint was carried out, very little in the way of coherent imagery could have been obtained from the plates at all. It was perhaps this episode that rekindled Turner’s interest in the Liber project and might naturally have provided him with the required inspirational stimulus to embark on a group of paintings based upon Liber subjects. The spare lines and empty white spaces of the preliminary etchings could well have suggested to Turner images that he might take further, particularly with a tendency towards bright light. Indeed, one of the most discernible characteristics of Turner’s work throughout his career was a continuous ‘desire to re-invigorate his art by reworking the layout and design of earlier pictures, bringing to the new versions the latest benefits of his continuing development’. In 1981 Martin Butlin demonstrated beyond doubt that Norham Castle dated from after 1844, and in their revised edition of the catalogue raisonné of Turner’s work, both Butlin and Joll accepted that the whole late Liber group probably dates to sometime in the mid- to late 1840s. In 1984 Shanes went further to suggest an order in which they were painted, based on the apparent differences in their handling, between 1845 and 1848. He considered Landscape with Walton Bridges, which he preferred to call by the title assigned to the composition of plate thirteen in the original Liber engravings – The Bridge in the Middle Distance (fig. 4) – to be the sixth in the series of nine works certainly derived from Liber compositions, therefore suggesting a date of circa 1846–47. Upon further consideration, however, Shanes moderated this view, deciding that it was dangerous to posit such a creative progression upon the immensely subtle painterly differences between the works, all of which employ extremely soft glazes applied over fairly non-absorbent grounds. Instead he considered it likely that they were all painted at around the same time and suggested that they should probably be view as a cohesive series, given that the entire set is painted on Turner’s favoured three-foot by four-foot format. Very possibly worked on simultaneously, ‘in the late Liber series we can certainly witness the inception of a group of pictures that triumphantly sum up [Turner’s] life’s achievement by renewing images from a set of works in which he had earlier consciously set out to survey the entire range of his art.’

TURNER’S LATE PAINTINGS

Turner is one of those preeminent figures that mark the pages of history – like da Vinci, Darwin, Picasso or Einstein – who changed the way we see and think about the world. An artist rooted in the aesthetic philosophy and culture of his time, perpetually engaged with the art of both his predecessors and contemporaries, he was at the same time possibly the first ‘modern’ painter; he directly inspired the impressionism of the nineteenth century and presaged the abstract expressionism of the twentieth. The development of his art, particularly in the last fifteen years of his life, with its bold application of colour, its
treatment of light and the deconstruction of form, revolutionised the way we perceive the painted image, and
the way we think about what a painting is, or should be. By applying the techniques he perfected in
watercolour to the use of oil, with successive layering of translucent colour thinly applied to the surface,
which imbue his canvases with a rich, hazy light, he gave his works a potency and power that had never been
achieved before, and has seldom since. Every artist who has held a brush in the last 160 years owes a debt to
Turner. His influence is immeasurable. Turner’s late works – the pictures he produced from the 1830s until his
death in 1851 – are considered to be the artist’s supreme achievement. It is upon these pictures that his
artistic significance ultimately rests.
As Professor Sam Smiles has commented, Turner’s ‘setting free of paint’ should be seen not as some rash
reaction to the decrepitude of old age, or the sudden vagaries of an increasingly eccentric visionary, but as a
‘continued development of ideas about painting that he had refined over the course of his career.’¹¹ The
significance of Turner’s achievement was in ‘elaborating a convincing way of representing natural
phenomena in all their complexity’. What his critics ‘attacked as incomprehensible or fantastic should
properly be understood as a further development of a credo he had adopted throughout his career when
attempting to engage with the diversity of material substance and visual perception. Turner’s pictures are
multifaceted and their meanings sometimes elusive primarily because he did not use painting to illustrate a
subject (as was true of so many of his contemporaries), but instead made the best use of what painting can
do as a means of distilling experience and conveying ideas’.¹² The titles of his work and the iconography
within them are merely there to prompt chains of thought and associations within the viewer’s mind, however
they ‘do not exhaust a picture’s meaning; it is in the texture of the painting, the disposition of forms, the
articulation of space, the orchestration of colour and the structures of the painted surface that the meaning is
embodied and from which it will emerge when the viewer is fully engaged with the work’. What is apparent in
all of Turner’s works is ‘the sense of a highly creative mind grappling with the problem of finding a more
adequate way of representing what he knew, drawing on all his technical resources to develop an image rich
enough to accommodate what he had discerned’.¹³
The world which Turner’s late works inhabit is above all dynamic. They present us with an environment that is
mutable, ever changing, ‘where solid forms become tremulous in light, water turns into vapour, diurnal and
seasonal rhythms of light transmogrify the landscape they illuminate. This ever-shifting world is the stage on
which humanity plays out its destiny’. There is no sense in Turner’s final works that his brush was ‘free to be
autonomous, such that subject matter was merely the excuse for a dazzling display of painterly invention’. Far
from it, indeed it was his very ‘understanding of what unrestricted practise would permit’ which gave him
scope to ‘tackle subjects whose complexity could not have been revealed in any other medium’. If there is a
modernist lineage in these last works, it is based not just on the virtuosity of his brushwork, but on the fact
that subsequent generations have recognised in his work an unshakable commitment to the image ‘as an
important contributor to the development of knowledge, articulating truths that were inexpressible in any
other way’.¹⁴

NOTE ON PROVENANCE
Exactly how, and why, the group of late oils that were not included in the artist’s bequest to the nation made it
out of Turner’s Chelsea studio remains unclear. It has always been assumed that most, if not all of them must
have been given to, or were taken by, Sophia Caroline Booth, the artist’s landlady and companion in later
years. In his will of 1846 Turner appointed Sophia co-custodian of his gallery, together with Hannah Danby,
his long-time housekeeper at Queen Anne Street, and artists who called on her after Turner’s death found the
walls of her house in Chelsea at 6 Davis Place (now Cheyne Walk), covered with pictures. Both the Louvre
Landscape with a River and a Bay in the distance (B&J 509) and the Walker Art Gallery Landscape with River
and Distant Mountains (B&J 517) have been rolled up at some stage and Butlin and Joll suggested they may
have formed part of a bundle removed in this way from Turner’s studio, probably by either Sophia or John
Pound, her son from her first marriage to Henry Pound, a mariner who drowned at sea.
Certainly, this painting was one of at least eleven late oils by Turner, and numerous watercolours, that Sophia and John sold at Christie’s in March 1865, where it was bought by the leading London art dealers Thomas Agnew & Sons. Agnew’s sold it to John Mountjoy Smith (1805–1869), together with Landscape: Woman with a Tambourine (fig. 5) – another of the late Liber oils in the Booth/Pound sale which has often been considered a pendant to Landscape with Walton Bridges on account of their similar composition and corresponding yellowy evening light. Smith was part of a dynasty of London dealers and collectors, and already owned Turner’s Approach to Venice (National Gallery of Art, Washington), which he had bought from Agnew’s two years earlier in 1863. Agnew’s bought all three paintings back from his executors in 1870 and the following year sold Landscape with Walton Bridges to John Graham (1797–1886) of Skelmorlie Castle in Ayrshire. Graham was a successful Glasgow textile and port wine merchant, co-founder of the celebrated port house W & J Graham’s of Oporto. A great patron of the Arts, with an outstanding collection of paintings mostly by modern masters, many of the British School, Graham had taken the lease of Skelmorlie Castle, on the eastern shore of the Firth of Clyde, from the Montgomery family in 1852 and commissioned the architect William Railton to carry out extensive refurbishments, including the building of the main mansion house seen today. His collection included a number of other major oil paintings by Turner, including the celebrated early seascape known as Van Goyen, looking out for a subject (now at the Frick Collection, New York); the great Italian landscape entitled Mercury and Argus (now in the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa); and The Wreck Buoy (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). Other artists represented in his collection included David Roberts, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Landseer, J.S. Cotman, Millais, Rossetti and Burne-Jones.

Following his death, the painting again came up for sale at Christie’s, in April 1887, and was once more bought by Thomas Agnew & Sons. The following month they sold it swiftly on to Junius Spencer Morgan, the great American financier and founder of the Morgan banking dynasty. Junius was, by this stage, in his mid-seventies and it seems likely that, as with many of his art purchases in the last years of his life, the picture was bought in conjunction with his more famous son, John Pierpont Morgan – the dominant figure in Anglo-American corporate finance and industrial consolidation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and founder of the bank that still bears his name. J.P. Morgan’s collecting tastes can only be described as encyclopaedic, encompassing virtually the entire range of artistic and human achievement in Western civilization, from antiquity to his own day – and he collected on a vast scale. Many of his books, paintings, clocks and other works of art he loaned or gave to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which he was both President and a major force in establishing, while others he hung in his houses in both New York and London. The majority of his collection of autograph manuscripts and drawings today forms the nucleus of the Pierpont Morgan Library, set up by his son, J.P. Morgan Jr., as a memorial to his father. Together with his contemporary, Andrew William Mellon (1855–1937), J. P. Morgan was probably one of the greatest art collectors in American history. The painting remained in the Morgan family’s private collection for very nearly one hundred years, until it was offered for sale in New York at Sotheby’s in 1982.

1 For a full discussion of this group of late works by Turner see David Blayney Brown’s essay ‘Reflection and Retrospect’, in Late Turner. Painting Set Free, the catalogue to the 2014 Tate Britain exhibition of the same name.


3 A putative eleventh, Landscape with river and distant mountains (B&J 517, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool), may comprise the rudimentary beginnings of a reworking of plate 8 in the Liber Studiorum, entitled The Castle above the Meadows, published in 1808, but this is not a universally accepted view.

4 See Butlin and Joll 1984, nos 520–32.

5 The most famous version of which now hangs at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London.


7 Shanes 1984, p. 288.
Fig. 1
J.M.W. Turner, Norham Castle, Sunrise. Tate Gallery, London

Fig. 2

Fig. 3
J.M.W. Turner, Walton Bridges. Private Collection © Sotheby’s

Fig. 4
C. Turner after J.M.W. Turner, The Bridge in the Middle Distance, 1808. Plate 13 of the Liber Studiorum

Fig. 5

Fig. 6
A famous 1911 cartoon showing John Pierpont Morgan, one of the wealthiest men in the world, with a large magnet in the shape of a dollar sign drawing paintings and works of art from Europe over the Atlantic to America. Bridgeman Images