

Norham Castle, Sunrise c1845–50

JMW Turner (1775–1851)



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What is the atmosphere of *Norham Castle, Sunrise*?
How does it make you feel?

Can you make out what you are looking at? Look at the blue haze. What could that be? Think about the pattern of colours. Which ones stand out?

The artist has used very loose brush strokes. Try to imagine what it would have looked like if he had been more precise. How would it have affected the atmosphere?

How old was Turner when he painted the picture? He had bad eyesight when he was old. Do you think this may be reflected in his work?

What do you think is unusual about this painting for its time?



after JMW Turner

Norham Castle on the Tweed 1816

The scene depicted is Norham Castle on the River Tweed on the borders of England and Scotland. Turner first drew there in 1797 when he was 22, exhibiting his watercolour drawing in 1798 at the Royal Academy. On a number of occasions, he sketched the scene which was also published for a wider audience (image below). In the painting done in his seventies (image above), he is remembering a scene connected with his youth, seeing it through rose-tinted spectacles, only the rose is blue and pale yellow! The solid forms are seen purely in terms of light and colour. The castle has been reduced to a blue haze, painted so freely that the glaze has dripped down the canvas. If it were not for the cows, the painting would not easily be recognised as landscape.

The fact that it is called *Norham Castle, Sunrise* shows that Turner was trying to capture the mood of a moment in time rather than simply documenting appearance. His emphasis on atmosphere rather than description is analogous to French Impressionism later in the century.

Despite its haziness the scene is still recognisable, and the composition traditional. There is careful recession into the background, with the banks on either side of the painting leading the eye back towards the castle.

The painting is unfinished. It could have been a sketch for a later picture or the beginnings of a painting, that Turner never finished. You can see the artist's fingerprints on the left hand side. Turner would not have exhibited a work of this kind which would have been considered too unfinished for the Royal Academy. Decades later, the Impressionists were criticised for their 'unfinished' paintings. This shows how modern Turner was.

The actual condition of the picture is very good compared to other Turner oil paintings and probably looks very much as it did when it was first completed.