

# COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Joseph Mallord William Turner  
(London 1775 – 1851)

*View of Givet, on the Meuse, South of Dinant*

Watercolour and gouache with pen and red ink on blue paper  
13.9 x 19.4 cm. (5 ½ x 7 ¾ in.)

Provenance:

Agnew's, Manchester;

Purchased by a Private Collection in 1968;

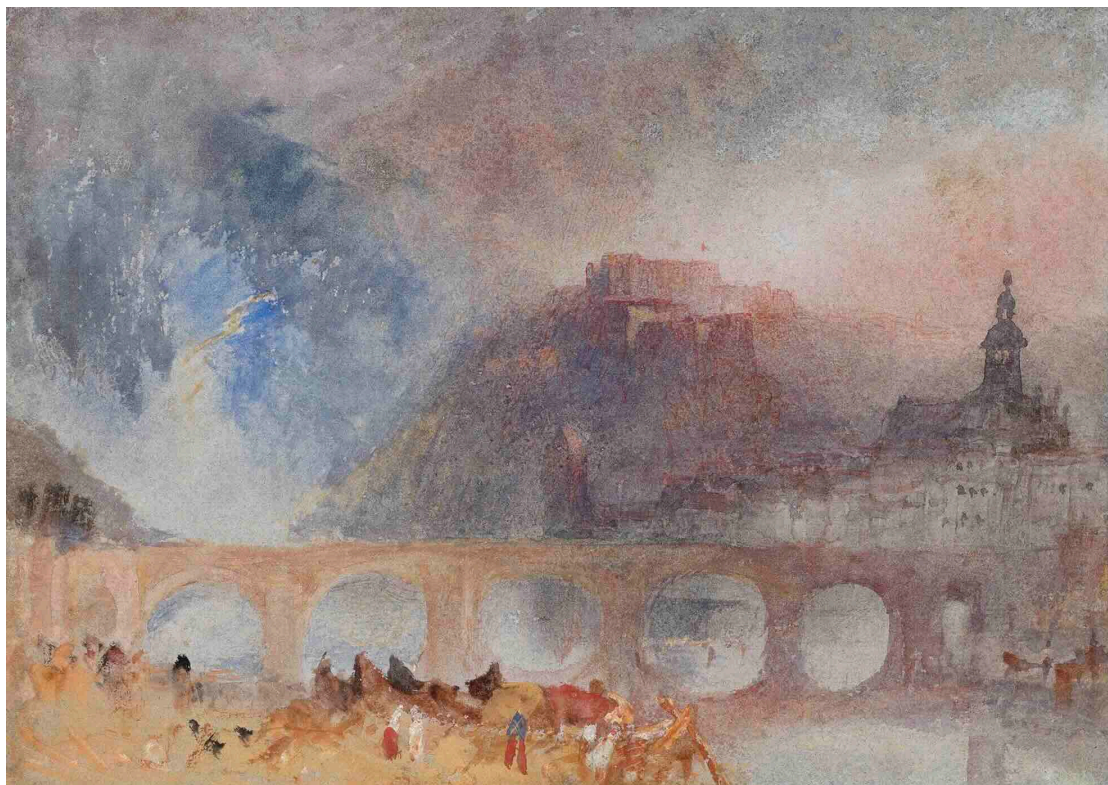
Thence by descent until;

Sotheby's, London, 4 December 2009, lot 180;

Where acquired, Private Collection, London.

Literature:

C. Powell, 'An Exciting New French River Scene: "Givet on the Meuse, South of Dinant"',  
*Turner Society News*, no. 110, December 2008, p. 19-21.



J.M.W. Turner's vibrant and energetic *View of Givet*, a strategically important French town on the river Meuse, close to the Belgian border, dates to 1839. Prior to the Sotheby's sale in 2008, this important gouache was unknown. Only three 1839 gouaches had hitherto been associated with French towns: a distant view of Givet from the north, in a private collection (fig. 1); a view of Mézières, in Tate Britain (fig. 2); and a view of Sedan, also in Tate Britain.<sup>1</sup> The discovery of the present sheet marks a 'superb addition'<sup>2</sup> to this small collection of French subject and, as Cecilia Powell notes, 'gives one reason to hope that further scenes in this series will come to light.'<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 1, J.M.W. Turner, *View of Givet from the South*, 1839, watercolour, Private Collection

In this boldly expressive and exceptionally well-preserved work, Turner views a dusky Givet from upstream, beyond the town's Napoleonic bridge, commanded by the French Emperor to aid troop crossings. A group of figures, including a soldier, are visible in the foreground, with a small group of boats to their right, moored on the opposite bank of the Meuse. Looming large, Charlemont fortress, constructed by the Emperor Charles V, reigns over the town from the crags of a vertiginous promontory. Below it, behind the mid-section of the bridge, stands the brick-built Tour Victoire. Near the edge of the composition, the belltower and roofline of the church of Saint Victoire rise clear of the town. To the left of the fortress, Turner has introduced a dramatic storm, revelling, as he did throughout his career, in the awesome power of nature.

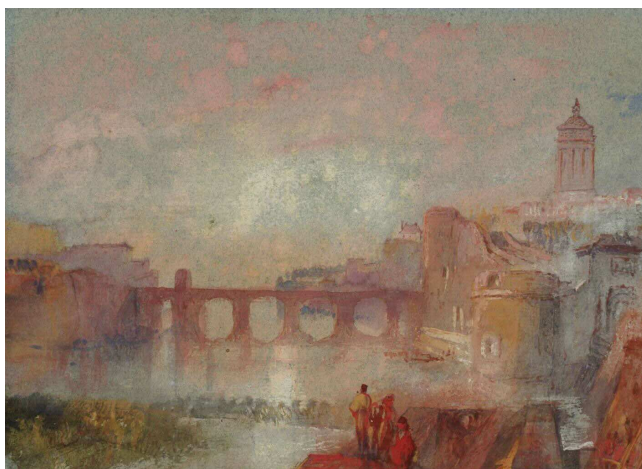


Fig. 2, J.M.W. Turner, *Mézières, with the Pont de Pierre and Church of Notre Dame*, 1839, watercolour, 13.9 x 19.3 cm, Tate Britain

<sup>1</sup> Tate Britain, D24731.

<sup>2</sup> C. Powell, 'An Exciting New French River Scene: "Givet on the Meuse, South of Dinant"', *Turner Society News*, no. 110, December 2008, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

The watercolour has been executed with a sense of urgency, a feeling heightened by the blue-grey storm and the shard of lightning which streaks through its middle. The solid forms of day shift and blur as Turner, through the prism of light and colour, explores the ever-changing atmospheric effects of his surroundings. A miniature tour de force, with a confident, even exuberant, application of colours, the *View of Givet* demonstrates Turner's technical virtuosity and his eye for the dramatic. He goes beyond simply recording Givet's topography, placing the town instead at the centre of a highly charged scene.

Four preparatory sketches for this view are in the Turner Bequest at Tate Britain, in the *Givet, Mézières, Verdun, Metz, Luxembourg and Trèves Sketchbook*.<sup>4</sup> In the sketch labelled 5a (fig. 3), Turner has concentrated on the profile of the fortress, Tour Victoire and Church of Saint Hilaire. In the sheets labelled 4a and 7a, he has sketched the view with the bridge behind him. On the page 6 sketch, Turner draws from near the present viewpoint and includes the boats moored to the bank.

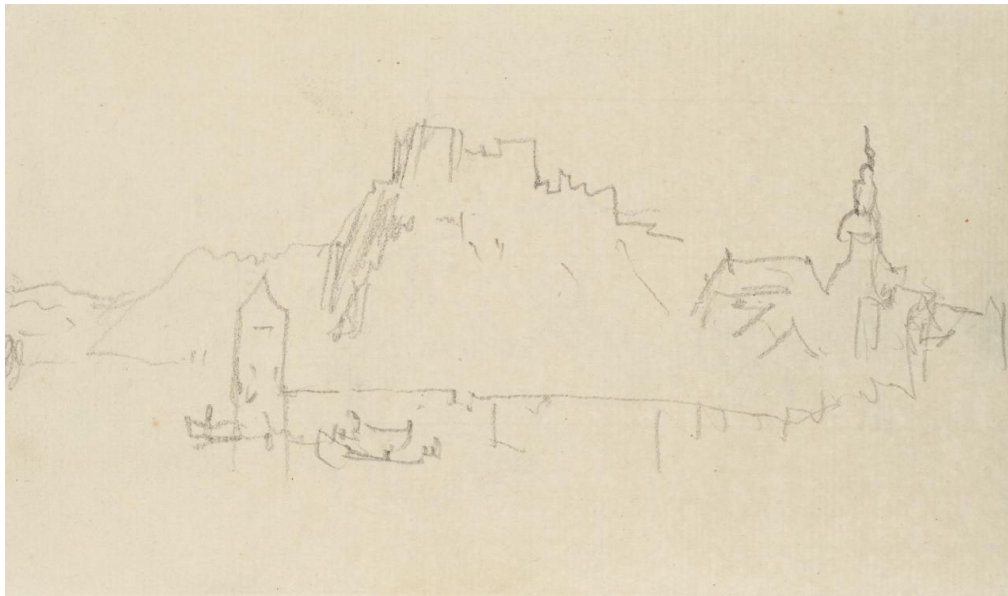


Fig. 3, J.M.W. Turner, *The Tour Victoire, Charlemont Fortress and Saint-Hilaire, Givet, Looking Upstream*, 1839, pencil on paper, Tate Britain

The sheet of blue paper used in the *View of Givet* was examined at the time of the 2008 sale by Peter Bower, the distinguished Turner paper historian. He established that it was made from two blue and one white rag, with the addition of some hemp. The torn rather than cut edges show that this was one of four sheets in the middle of an imperial sheet.

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<sup>4</sup> Tate Britain, Turner Bequest CCLXXXVIII.