

Language through Art: An ESL Enrichment Curriculum (Beginning) Information for Teaching

Modern Rome—Campo Vaccino

Joseph Mallord William Turner
(English, 1775-1851)
1839
Oil on canvas
36 1/8 x 48 1/4 in.
2011.6



Background Information

Ten years after his final journey to Rome, Turner envisioned the Eternal City through a veil of memory. Churches and ancient monuments in and around the Roman Forum seem to dissolve in iridescent light shed by a moon rising at left and a sun setting behind the Capitoline Hill at right. Amidst these splendors, the city's inhabitants carry on with their daily activities. The picture's rainbow-like palette and shimmering light effects exemplify Turner at his most accomplished. The painting is in a remarkable state of preservation and remains untouched since it left Turner's hands.

About the Artist

Joseph Mallord William Turner (English, 1775-1851)

Turner's father, a barber and wigmaker, realized his son's artistic talents early on, asserting that "my son is going to be a painter." Before enrolling in the Royal Academy, Turner gained some drawing experience in the offices of several of London's leading architects. He first exhibited watercolors of architectural subjects, and then experimented with scenes from literature and scenery designs for operatic productions.

In his early twenties, Turner's focus changed to historical landscapes. These large-scale paintings became increasingly divorced from nature and featured the loose, luminous brushwork and abstract conceptions for which he became known.