

L O G G H T

F R O M

T A T E

1700s TO NOW

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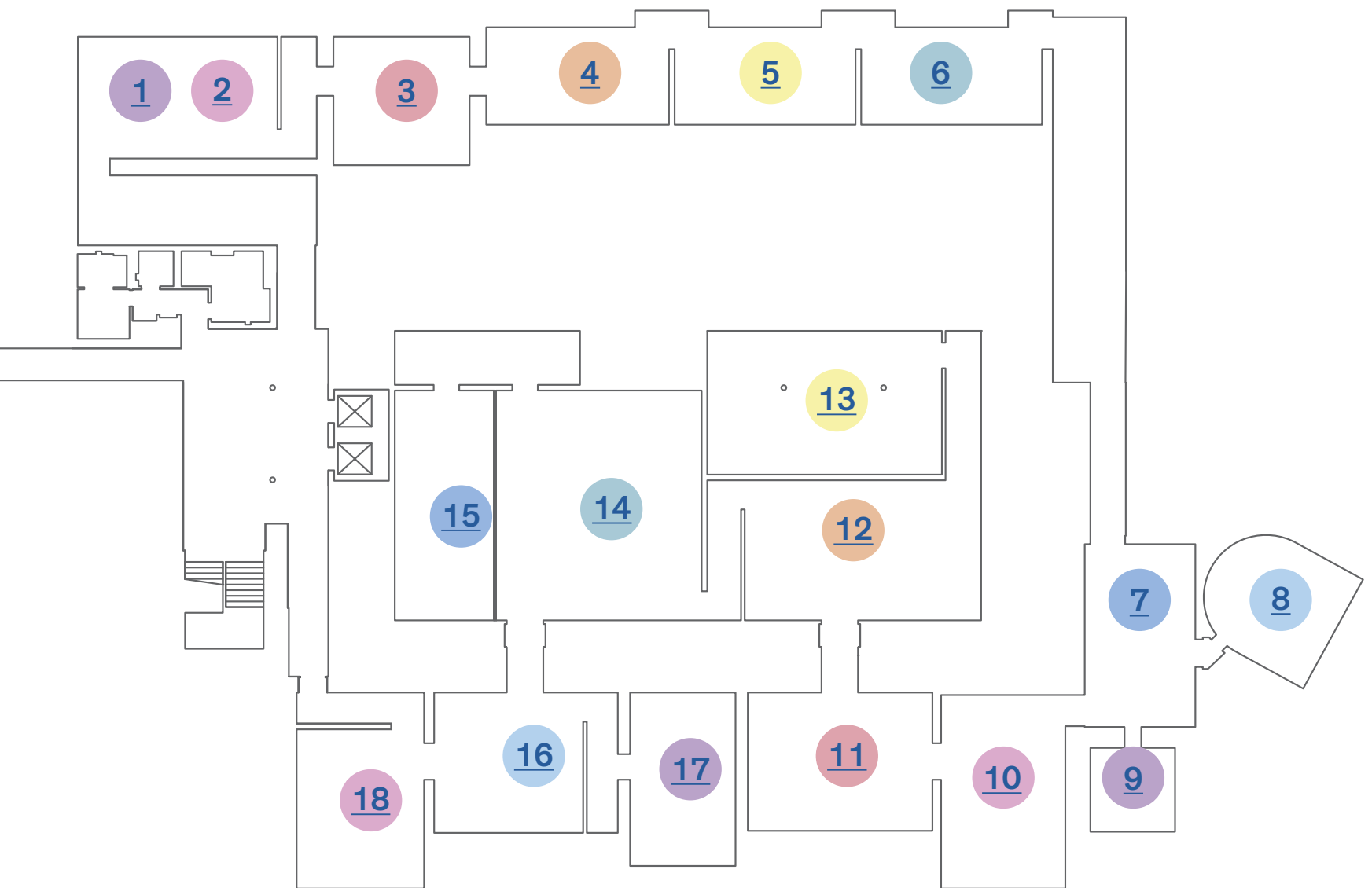
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# LIGHT FROM TATE

1700s TO NOW



# LIGHT FROM TATE

1700s TO NOW

*Light from Tate: 1700s to Now* explores how artists internationally have worked with light in its many changing forms. Beginning in 18th-century Britain, the exhibition extends to the present day, including artists from around the world. Broadly chronological, it also sets works from different historical periods side by side, drawing out connections across time.

From the sublime to the intimate, from the spiritual to the scientific, this exhibition illuminates how light has been refracted through the prism of art in countless ways. The history of light is essentially the history of human perception. Although our understanding of light has developed tremendously over the centuries, this has not diminished its allure. The challenge of capturing this natural phenomenon has continuously spurred artists to develop innovative techniques – whether in oil paint, photography, sculpture or immersive installation. Light is beautiful but impermanent, visible but intangible.

Curated by **Kerryn Greenberg**, former  
Head of International Collection Exhibitions, Tate  
with **Matthew Watts**, Assistant Curator, Tate

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# SPIRITUAL & SUBLIME LIGHT

In the late 18th century, British artists started using light and dark to symbolise religious ideas. According to Judeo-Christian belief, God's first act was to create light. In the Old and New Testaments, light represents goodness and purity. Darkness, meanwhile, signifies destruction and evil. In the late 18th and early 19th century, religious art became popular in Britain. Artists started using light and dark in their painting to represent profound spiritual themes. They often explored the interplay between literal and metaphorical light and dark: flickers of light in the gloom suggesting hope amid suffering. Like these historical works, the power of Anish Kapoor's enveloping sculpture relies on the contrast between the dark of its deep blue interior and the light reflecting from its centre.

# SPIRITUAL & SUBLIME LIGHT

**George Richmond** (1809–1896)  
England

***The Creation of Light*** 1826

tempera, gold and silver on mahogany  
Tate: purchased 1986

George Richmond depicts a key moment from the Judeo-Christian creation story: 'And God made two great lights'. The newly created sun rises dramatically on the right, while a delicate crescent moon shines against the darkness on the left. Depicting God was unconventional in early 19th-century British art. In daring to do so, Richmond was following the example of an older artist, William Blake. To emphasise the sacred nature of the light that falls across the grassy hill, Richmond has applied touches of gold leaf to the blades of grass, another technique he may have learned from Blake.

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# SPIRITUAL & SUBLIME LIGHT

**Anish Kapoor** (born 1954)

India, England

***Untitled*** 1992

wood, fibreglass, pigment

Edmiston Trust Collection

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 1993

The pale plywood exterior of this booth-like sculpture contrasts with its velvety dark interior. As we look into the void, we perceive the effect of infinite darkness created by the dark blue dye pigment, which draws us ever further into the work's ambiguous and vertiginous depths. One of Britain's best-known artists, Anish Kapoor has long been fascinated by the duality between darkness and light. He has described his interest in cavities and voids in terms of a 'sensual uncertainty', gaining access to an unstable series of forces which are both external and internal, physical and unconscious.

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# SPIRITUAL & SUBLIME LIGHT

**Jacob More** (1740–1793)

Scotland, Italy

***The Deluge*** 1787

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased with assistance from Tate Patrons and Tate Members 2008

Jacob More celebrates the beauty and power of nature in this work. It is based on a biblical story in which God unleashes a flood to wash away evil, saving only Noah, his family and a male and female of all the world's animals. The light radiating from the centre of the composition illuminates the figures in the foreground and suggests that all is not lost.

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# SPIRITUAL & SUBLIME LIGHT

**Joseph Mallord William Turner** (1775–1851)

England

***The Angel Standing in the Sun*** exh 1846

oil paint on canvas

Tate: accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

JMW Turner uses atmospheric effects of light to amplify a sombre biblical theme from the Book of Revelation. In the centre, Archangel Michael appears with his flaming sword, heralded by a rainbow, standing for truth and justice on the Day of Judgement, while scenes from the Old Testament of murder and betrayal unfold in the foreground. Adam and Eve weep over the body of Abel to the left, as Judith stands over the headless body of Holofernes to the right. The subject may have been suggested to Turner by the critic John Ruskin, who in 1843 hailed him as ‘the great angel of the Apocalypse’.

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# SCIENCE & LIGHT

The English painter JMW Turner (1775–1851) is widely thought of as the British ‘painter of light’. Turner developed new artistic techniques to capture natural phenomena, evoking the intensity and transience of light. His approach was both intuitive and scientific. He notably drew upon the colour theories of German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), who argued that every colour is a unique combination of light and dark.

Goethe’s ideas profoundly influenced Turner’s teaching and painting. For his students, Turner prepared diagrams showing the reflection and refraction of rays of light and the production of shadows. By applying this knowledge in his own work he was able to capture visual sensations that had never been reproduced in visual art before. In the companion paintings shown in this room – *Light and Colour (Goethe’s Theory) . . .* and *Shade and Darkness – the Evening of the Deluge*, both 1843 – Turner opposes cool and warm colours and light and dark to capture fleeting atmospheric effects and explore contrasting emotional associations. Turner’s commitment to depicting ephemeral atmospheric conditions placed him at the forefront of progressive European painting, inspiring future generations of artists. The Impressionists particularly admired his late works, especially Claude Monet (1840–1926), who studied Turner’s techniques closely.

# SCIENCE & LIGHT

**Joseph Mallord William Turner** (1775–1851)

England

***Diagram: Reflections in a Single Polished Metal Globe and in a Pair of Polished Metal Globes*** circa 1810

Part of *II. Various Perspective Diagrams* 1810–24

oil paint and graphite on paper

Tate: accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bquest 1856

JMW Turner created this diagram to support his fifth lecture delivered in around 1811 at the Royal Academy of Art in London, where he was professor of perspective from 1807 to 1828. Turner introduced his students to reflection and refraction, and their relationship to light and shade. He illustrated these concepts with technical drawings, including polished metal globes and glasses half-filled with water, which he then used to teach his students how to depict light from different sources.

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# SCIENCE & LIGHT

**Joseph Mallord William Turner** (1775–1851)

England

***Lecture Diagram: Reflections in a Transparent  
Globe*** circa 1810

***Lecture Diagram: Reflections and Refractions  
in a Transparent Globe Half-Filled with Water***

circa 1810

Part of *II. Various Perspective Diagrams* 1810–24

oil paint and graphite on paper

Tate: accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

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# SCIENCE & LIGHT

**Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851)**

England

***Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – the Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*** exh 1846

oil paint on canvas

Tate: accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

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# SCIENCE & LIGHT

**Joseph Mallord William Turner** (1775–1851)

England

***Shade and Darkness – the Evening of the Deluge*** exh 1843

oil paint on canvas

Tate: accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

In these paintings, JMW Turner puts the ideas of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (1810) into practice. According to Goethe, 'plus' or warm colours (reds and yellows) were associated with happiness while 'minus' or cold colours (colours close to blue) produced restless and anxious impressions. In *Shade and Darkness – the Evening of the Deluge*, 1843 Turner uses cool colours to depict a biblical scene in which God wipes out most of humanity with a flood. The warmer *Light and Colour*, 1843 is a celebration of the hope that follows this destruction.

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# SCIENCE & LIGHT

**Joseph Mallord William Turner** (1775–1851)

England

***Sun Setting over a Lake*** circa 1840

oil paint on canvas

Tate: accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

JMW Turner refined his techniques during the latter stages of his career, applying oils in transparent glazes and using warm-toned colours to depict pure light. While the topographical details of this painting are hazy and indistinct, the sunset is vividly depicted, lighting up the sky in vibrant reds and oranges, reflected across the water. Turner was preoccupied with depicting nature throughout his life, but as his career progressed, he began to pay less attention to details and focused more on capturing the effects of light and colour.

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# PHYSICS OF LIGHT

*Liquid Reflections*, 1968 is a complex moving sculpture that combines water, Perspex and light to evoke the movement of light particles. Liliane Lijn's kinetic artworks stem from her interest in the relationship between art and science. Like JMW Turner, she applies an imaginative approach to the physics of light and matter. This sculpture is the result of five years of experimentation. Lijn's aim was to capture light and 'keep it alive' within a sculpture. *Liquid Reflections* is one of several modern and contemporary artworks displayed adjacent to historical works in this exhibition. Their inclusion highlights artists' common interest in light across time and the diverse ways this theme has been explored.

Liliane Lijn (born 1939)

United States of America

*Liquid Reflections* 1968

Perspex, metal, water, liquid paraffin,  
motor, electrical components and lamp

Tate: purchased 1973

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# FEAR & REASON

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Europe saw a flourishing of philosophy and science. Artists responded to this 'Age of Enlightenment', addressing new scientific and technological subjects. Joseph Wright of Derby (1734–1797) was influenced by his encounters with British industrialists at the forefront of technological progress. He treated scenes of ordinary human life and the natural world in the same grand and dramatic style. His compositions are structured around strong contrasting effects of light and dark. Mount Vesuvius, which erupted several times throughout the 18th century, gripped his imagination. Although he never personally witnessed the volcano in Italy erupt, he returned repeatedly to the subject.

Enlightenment thinkers promoted reason and order as ideals. Towards the 19th century, artists in Europe and North America began to challenge these values. In their place, they expressed humankind's connection to nature, emphasising the role of emotion in understanding and experiencing the world. John Martin (1789–1854) was one such artist. His paintings portray nature's immense power and unpredictability, aiming to evoke a feeling of the sublime – awe mixed with terror – in the viewer.

# FEAR & REASON

**Joseph Wright of Derby** (1734–1797)  
England

***A Moonlight with a Lighthouse,  
Coast of Tuscany*** 1789

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1949

*A Moonlight with a Lighthouse, Coast of Tuscany*, 1789 is an imagined scene created by Joseph Wright in England, years after his return from Italy. The subject gave Wright an opportunity to compare the differing effects of natural and artificial light sources that had so long fascinated him. In this painting, the luminous moonlight in the night sky is contrasted with the hazy beam of the lighthouse and its reflection in the water. The looming dark mass of the cliff and portentous-looking rocks in the lower left create a sense of melodrama.

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# FEAR & REASON

**Joseph Mallord William Turner** (1775–1851)

England

***Vesuvius in Eruption, with a View over the Islands in the Bay of Naples*** circa 1776–80

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased with assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund, Friends of the Tate Gallery, and Mr John Ritblat 1990

Joseph Wright's close contact with pioneering English industrialists and progressive figures of the British Enlightenment spurred a preoccupation with scientific and technological subjects widely considered unfit for depiction in painting at the time. Besotted with dramatic lighting effects, he used the technique of chiaroscuro to achieve strong contrasts of light and dark. Wright toured Italy between 1773 and 1775 and drew on the experience for the rest of his career. Although he never saw a major eruption at Mount Vesuvius, he was captivated by the idea of its eruption and returned repeatedly to the subject, producing over 30 views of the volcano, which feature the violence of the spewing crater seen in cool moonlight.

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# FEAR & REASON

**John Martin** (1789–1854)

England

***The Destruction of Pompeii  
and Herculaneum*** 1822

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1869

This painting depicts the destruction of two ancient Italian cities, Pompeii and Herculaneum. Both were wiped out when Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE. Herculaneum is in the distance to the left, smothered with lava. Pompeii is laid out in more detail, closer to the foreground. Mount Vesuvius is shown in the early stages of the eruption, the glow of lava colouring the whole landscape a vivid red, while the sky appears to convulse with billowing ash clouds and lightning. A contemporary viewer remarked that John Martin was less interested in showing the terror of his figures, than in ‘producing powerful contrasts by every reflection of light’.

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# FEAR & REASON

**Formerly attributed to John Martin** (1789–1854)  
England

***The Fallen Angels Entering Pandemonium,  
from Paradise Lost, Book 1*** circa 1841

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1943

In the first half of the 19th century, the English painter John Martin did much to popularise highly Romantic subjects, which expressed the sublime, apocalyptic forces of nature and the helplessness of humanity to combat God's will. His large-scale paintings, depicting dramatic natural events and religious subjects, were popular spectacles in their own day. Given his commercial success, it is perhaps unsurprising that some of his contemporaries began to pursue similar themes. Similarities in style and subject resulted in paintings by other artists, including *The Fallen Angels Entering Pandemonium*, circa 1841, from John Milton's 1667 epic poem *Paradise Lost*, Book 1 by an unknown artist.

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# NATURAL LIGHT

John Constable (1776–1837) created close studies of nature and the changing effects of the sky. Together with JMW Turner, he transformed the genre of landscape painting in England. Constable's pictures, which aimed for truthful rather than idealised representations of nature, revolutionised landscape painting. Seeking to capture fleeting meteorological phenomena, Constable produced numerous preparatory oil sketches directly from nature, which later informed the canvases painted in his studio.

Constable's late monumental paintings reinforced his reputation as one of Britain's greatest landscape artists, alongside his rival, Turner. In the last decade of his life, he devoted great effort to creating a series of prints based on works from across his career. In the text he wrote to accompany these prints, Constable presented himself as 'an innovator' who had transformed visual art by adding to it 'qualities of Nature unknown to it before'. Younger artist John Linnell (1792–1882) became a prominent competitor of Constable. He aimed to record the world around him as accurately as possible, paying careful attention to the effects of light.

# NATURAL LIGHT

**John Constable** (1776–1837)

England

***Harwich Lighthouse*** exh circa 1820

oil paint on canvas

Tate: presented by Miss Isabel Constable as the gift of Maria Louisa, Isabel and Lionel Bicknell Constable 1888

A single drawing, made on location in the port of Harwich, Essex, south-east England, provided the starting point for this small coastal scene *Harwich Lighthouse*, one of at least three versions the artist made of the subject. In this masterful study of light and shadow, the wooden lighthouse and its environs are bathed in bright sunlight as the dark shadows cast by overhead clouds blow inland. Flecks of white oil paint map the play of light on the sea – a distinctive technical device that John Constable regularly employed to create the illusion of light hitting water. These flecks were disparagingly referred to by the artist's critics as 'Constable's snow'.

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# NATURAL LIGHT

**Aaron Penley** (1807–1870)

England

***Cloud Study I*** circa 1860s

***Cloud Study II*** circa 1860s

watercolours

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki purchased 1977

Animated sketches, produced outdoors, formed the starting point for many highly finished landscape paintings in the Victorian period. The private watercolour sketches made by drawing master Aaron Penley during his summer sketching tours were much admired for their freshness, long after his more conventional finished paintings had fallen out of fashion. These two cloud studies demonstrate Penley's rapid sketching technique, in which light-filled cloud mass is indicated by bare expanses of white paper with their texture and forms defined by the lightest of grey washes.

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# NATURAL LIGHT

**John Constable** (1776–1837)

England

**David Lucas** (1802–1881)

England

***Various Subjects of Landscape,  
Characteristic of English Scenery  
(‘English Landscape’) 1830–45***

mezzotints on paper

Tate: purchased 1985

From 1829 until his death in 1837, John Constable devoted much of his time and energy to printmaking. Intended to encapsulate his life’s work, the series *Various Subjects of Landscape, Characteristic of English Scenery (‘English Landscape’)*, comprising 22 prints, was published between 1830 and 1832. Constable chose the engraving technique of mezzotint for its rich, velvety blacks and soft gradations of tone. The subjects of Constable’s mezzotints were selected primarily for their inclement weather. Working with the professional printmaker David Lucas (1802–1881), he explored extreme contrasts of light and dark, depicting the dramatic effects of changing light on the landscape in unprecedented ways.

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# NATURAL LIGHT

**John Constable** (1776–1837)

England

**David Lucas** (1802–1881)

England

***Various Subjects of Landscape,  
Characteristic of English Scenery  
(‘English Landscape’) 1830–45***

mezzotints on paper

Tate: purchased 1985

Top row, left to right:

***A Heath*** published 1831

***A Mill*** published 1830

***Old Sarum (first plate)*** published 1830

***Summer, Afternoon – After a Shower*** published 1831

***Weymouth Bay, Dorsetshire*** published 1830

***A Seabeach*** published 1830

***The Glebe Farm*** published 1832

***Stoke by Neyland, Suffolk*** published 1830

# NATURAL LIGHT

**John Constable** (1776–1837)

England

**David Lucas** (1802–1881)

England

***Various Subjects of Landscape,  
Characteristic of English Scenery  
(‘English Landscape’) 1830–45***

mezzotints on paper

Tate: purchased 1985

Bottom row, left to right:

***A Dell, Helmingham Park, Suffolk*** published 1830

***Mill Stream*** published 1831

***River Stour, Suffolk*** published 1831

***A Lock on the Stour, Suffolk*** published 1831

***Noon*** published 1831

***Summer Morning*** published 1831

***Spring*** published 1832

***Yarmouth, Norfolk*** published 1832

# NATURAL LIGHT

**John Linnell** (1792–1882)

England

***Landscape (The Windmill)*** 1844–45

oil paint on canvas

Tate: presented by Robert Vernon 1847

John Linnell was a prolific landscape painter, and one of the 19th century's most commercially successful artists. As a pioneer of the new observational landscape painting that emerged in Britain in the early 1800s, he sought to record the world around him as accurately as possible, following the advice of his teacher John Varley (1778–1842) to 'go to nature for everything'. Here, Linnell shows sunlight hitting a bank of cumulonimbus clouds, illuminating their billowing white forms; below, their dark, brooding undersides threaten rain, covering the fields and hills to the rear of the scene with a blanket of shadow.

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# IMPRESSIONISM

In later 19th-century Europe, many artists reacted to rapid technological and societal change with a renewed interest in the natural world. Artists such as John Brett (1831–1902) captured the effects and emotive qualities of light. His meticulous depiction of sunlight on the sea built on ideas promoted by the Pre-Raphaelites earlier in the century. With the group of French artists known as Impressionists, light became a subject in itself. Claude Monet (1840–1926), Camille Pissarro (1830–1930), Alfred Sisley (1839–1899) and others ventured into the countryside to paint outdoors. These artists worked in nature to record the fleeting effects of light, atmosphere and movement, finishing their works outside. This was very unusual at a time when most landscape artists just made sketches *en plein air* and returned to their studios to develop them into carefully finished works.

The Impressionists broke from illusionistic traditions, emphasising the paint on the surface of the canvas, flattening perspective and cropping their compositions in striking ways. The original group of Impressionists was active between 1860 and 1900. Their radical new approach attracted a wide following, revolutionising approaches to painting in Europe and North America into the 20th century. In New Zealand, James Nairn (1859–1904), John Madden (1856–1923) and Frances Hodgkins (1869–1947) were among the many artists who adopted Impressionist techniques.

# IMPRESSIONISM

**Claude Monet** (1840–1926)

France

***Poplars on the Epte (Les Peupliers au bord de l'Epte)*** 1891

oil paint on canvas

Tate: presented by the Art Fund 1926

One of the most important artists of his generation, Claude Monet was a leading figure of Impressionism, a movement named after his small canvas *Impression, Sunrise*, 1872 (Musée Marmottan-Monet, Paris). Such works aimed to capture fleeting moments, evoking the atmosphere and light of a scene. In 1891, Claude Monet painted *Poplars on the Epte*, one of 23 pictures depicting a row of tall trees lining the sinuous River Epte near his home in Normandy, northern France. Eleven of them show this view, which was painted from his specially adapted flat-bottomed boat. After learning that the trees were to be felled, Monet paid for them to be left standing long enough for him to complete the series. The sketchy brushwork of this composition, which was Monet's favourite, suggests that the painting was executed at speed and with great spontaneity.

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# IMPRESSIONISM

**Claude Monet** (1840–1926)

France

***Japanese Bridge (Le pont japonais)*** 1891

oil paint on canvas

Tate: presented by the Art Fund 1926

Working directly from nature, Claude Monet's studies of light and its changing effect on the landscape led to ever-larger canvases late in his career, in which his subject matter increasingly took second place to the formal qualities of paint, a development that paved the way for 20th-century abstraction. *Japanese Bridge*, 1918–24 shows the arched footbridge over the lily pond at Monet's garden in Giverny, with its trellis of wisteria trailing down towards the water. At the time when this painting was made Monet was struggling with cataracts. Unable in these years to depict the subtle effects of light, he especially relied on light to distinguish solid forms.

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# IMPRESSIONISM

**Claude Monet** (1840–1926)

France

***The Seine at Port-Villez***  
***(La Seine à Port-Villez)*** 1894

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1953

In the 1890s Monet painted multiple versions of the same subject under different lighting conditions. *The Seine at Port-Villez*, 1894, one of many paintings of the River Seine near his Giverny home in northern France, typifies this approach. Here, physical detail is kept to a minimum and the painting's surface is covered with small, individual brushstrokes, which together capture the morning mist and the variations of light on the water. Although the painting is inscribed 1885, its style places it in the 1890s, and early records indicate that the artist himself dated it erroneously years later.

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# IMPRESSIONISM

**John Brett** (1831–1902)

England

***The British Channel Seen from  
the Dorsetshire Cliffs*** 1894

oil paint on canvas

Tate: presented by Mrs Brett 1902

In his early career, John Brett, who was associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement, established himself as a painter of brightly lit, highly detailed landscapes and in later years, he turned his attention to seascapes and coastal views, inspired by the paintings of John Constable. This seascape is based on detailed notes, sketches and studies Brett made while sailing around England's south-west coast in the summer of 1870. The painting's subject is the effect of light on the open channel; the richly coloured blue water reflects the soft rays emanating from the unseen sun. Brett took great care in his study of the sky and sea in order to reproduce the interplay of light on water as faithfully as possible.

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# IMPRESSIONISM

**Alfred Sisley** (1839–1899)

France

***The Path to the Old Ferry at By***  
***(Le Chemin du vieux bac à By)*** 1880

oil paint on canvas

Tate: bequeathed by Montague Shearman through the Contemporary Art Society 1940

The village of By, close to Alfred Sisley's home at Moret-sur-Loing, had a ferry service to Champagne, on the opposite bank of the river. Sisley painted the approach to the ferry from the riverside path several times, after he moved to the area in 1880. The scene is illuminated by a warm summer light that showcases Sisley's skill in painting water. At the river's edge, three washerwomen are busy at work, while nearby a small group of figures stand around in conversation.

# IMPRESSIONISM

**Alfred Sisley** (1839–1899)

France

***The Small Meadows in Spring***  
***(Les Petits Prés au printemps)*** 1880

oil paint on canvas

Tate: presented by a body of subscribers in memory of Roger Fry 1936

Born in Paris to English parents, Alfred Sisley was a founding member of the Impressionist group and from the 1860s onwards regularly painted out of doors (*en plein air*) alone or with fellow Impressionists. Ever sensitive to the effects of light on the landscape, Sisley wrote in the 1880s that ‘objects must be portrayed in their particular context, and they must, especially, be bathed in light, as is the case in nature’. We see this principle at work in this meadow scene, where crisp light strikes the spindly trees, casting shadows across a wooded path along the Seine, near the former commune of Moret-sur-Loing in north-central France.

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# LATE IMPRESSIONISM & YAYOI KUSAMA

Taking Impressionism as a departure point, the painters Georges Seurat (1859–1891) and Albert Dubois-Pillet (1846–1890) sought to achieve even greater luminosity by rigorously dissecting the picture plane into a field of tiny separate dots of pure colour. Together with Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) and Paul Signac (1863–1935), they pioneered a technique they called ‘divisionism’, now better known as ‘pointillism’. They became known collectively as the ‘Neo-Impressionists’

Over a century later, an interest in light and its transient effects underpins the creation of *The Passing Winter*, 2005, a viewing device by contemporary artist Yayoi Kusama. Despite its solid form, its appearance undergoes constant change in response to varying environmental conditions: the reflected dots within the box take on different colours depending on the colour of the surrounding room, and the reflections alter in brightness depending on light conditions.

# LATE IMPRESSIONISM & YAYOI KUSAMA

**Albert Dubois-Pillet** (1846–1890)

France

***The Lock (Paysage à l'Ecluse)*** 1886–87

oil paint on canvas

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2022

Beguiled by a new theory – that the eye contains colour receptors sensitive to the ‘primary colours of light’ green, red and violet – Albert Dubois-Pillet reduced his images into tiny units of these hues, in the belief that the eye would then reconstitute them with greater radiance than could be achieved from physically mixing paint on a palette. In this experimental early painting showing a lock on canal, a multitude of small dots melds together to produce an effect of shimmering forms in early morning light.

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# LATE IMPRESSIONISM & YAYOI KUSAMA

**Camille Pissarro** (1830–1903)

France

***The Pilots' Jetty, Le Havre, Morning, Cloudy and Misty Weather (Anse des pilotes, Le Havre, matin, temps gris, brumeux)*** 1903

oil paint on canvas

Tate: presented by Lucien Pissarro, the artist's son 1948

Camille Pissarro was a prominent member of the Impressionists. Although his style changed over his long career, the play of light on the natural and built environment remained an enduring concern. Painted shortly before his death, *The Pilots' Jetty, Le Havre, Morning, Cloudy and Misty Weather*, 1903 captures the play of overcast morning light on the choppy water at Le Havre, a harbour town in Normandy, northwest France. Crowds of people mill around the jetty, watching the sailing boats. Pissarro suffered from an eye condition that made it painful to work in direct sun. He therefore painted this and 17 other views from the sheltered balcony of the Hôtel Continental, which overlooked the harbour in three directions.

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# LATE IMPRESSIONISM & YAYOI KUSAMA

**Armand Guillaumin** (1841–1927)

France

***Moret-sur-Loing*** 1902

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1936

Like his fellow French Impressionists attracted to the former French commune of Moret-sur-Loing, Armand Guillaumin was fascinated by the effects of changing light and weather conditions on this beautiful riverside location. Guillaumin was highly regarded by his peers, such as Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) and Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), who studied and sometimes borrowed from his work. This radiant vista of Moret, facing the town's bridge and church, is one of several that Guillaumin made from the same position at different times of the day.

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# LATE IMPRESSIONISM & YAYOI KUSAMA

**Philip Wilson Steer** (1860–1942)

England

***Figures on the Beach, Walberswick***    circa 1888–89

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1947

With small, hatched brushstrokes, Philip Steer has worked quickly and spontaneously to evoke the mood of a bright summer's day on the beach at Walberswick, Suffolk, one of his favourite painting spots. Like Claude Monet (1840–1926), Steer worked in the open air, but paid as much attention to the figures as he did to their setting. In the 1880s he exhibited at the Paris Salon and was a leading figure in the Impressionist movement in England. His paintings were deemed uncompromisingly avant-garde and were derided in London. Steer later dismissed his French influences, turning to a style derived from JMW Turner and John Constable.

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# LATE IMPRESSIONISM & YAYOI KUSAMA

**Philip Wilson Steer** (1860–1942)

England

***A Procession of Yachts*** 1892–93

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1922

Having studied in Paris in the 1880s, the British painter Philip Steer was greatly influenced by Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist techniques, in particular the divisionism developed by Georges Seurat (1859–1891), Albert Dubois-Pillet (1846–1890) and Paul Signac (1863–1935) who, inspired by optical theory, painted with tiny dabs of colour to suggest the effects of light. The small, bright dashes seen across the surface of *A Procession of Yachts*, 1892–93 show Steer's incorporation of their novel techniques into his work. Begun during a visit to the Isle of Wight off the south coast of England in 1892, the painting depicts a gathering of schooners, with sails raised, shining in the bright sunlight. Their glittering reflections in the sparkling water create an impression of movement.

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# LATE IMPRESSIONISM & YAYOI KUSAMA

**Yayoi Kusama** (born 1929)  
Japan

***The Passing Winter*** 2005

mirror and glass

Tate: purchased with funds provided by the Asia Pacific Acquisitions Committee 2008

A mirrored cube positioned at eye level invites viewers to peer through circular holes on each of its sides. Yayoi Kusama is interested in the behaviour of light when it bounces off a reflective surface, and what this does to our perception of space. Peering inside the cube, we see multiple reflections, giving the illusion of infinite space. The appearance of the sculpture's interior varies in relation to external conditions, such as the light levels in the room and the surrounding objects and colours, including other viewers engaging with the work.

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# RECONFIGURING LIGHT

Since the early 1990s, David Batchelor has been concerned with the way that colour and light are experienced in the urban environment. As his sculptures remind us, colour can only be perceived thanks to the presence of reflected light, the wavelength of which determines its hue. In 1997, Batchelor began exploring the artificiality of commercially produced colours by setting panels of glossy acrylic onto small, wheeled dollies, typically used in warehouses and factories, which he dubbed 'monochromobiles' – monochromes on wheels. *I Love King's Cross and King's Cross Loves Me, 8*, 2002–07 comprises six such dollies found on streets around his London studio, and features bright orange, red, yellow, violet, mauve and apricot panels, which appear shiny and lustrous under artificial gallery light. Inspired by the urban environment, Batchelor ensures that his light and colours are not perceived as transcendental, but rather as rooted in everyday experiences.

David Batchelor (born 1955)

Scotland

*I Love King's Cross and King's Cross Loves Me, 8* 2002–07

steel, rubber and acrylic sheets

Tate: presented by Tate Patrons 2009

# RECONFIGURING LIGHT

**David Batchelor** (born 1955)  
Scotland

***Studio Visit*** 2009

video  
4:23 min

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# INTERIOR LIGHT

The works in this room record undramatic manifestations of light in interior settings, exploring its subtle influence on how we experience the world. One of the most astute observers of interior light in the early 20th century was Danish artist, Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864–1916). Although he produced numerous landscapes and intimate portraits, it is his meditative domestic interiors for which he is best known. Hammershøi's canvases are characterised by a restricted, predominantly grey palette, coupled with a reverent handling of light that saw him compared to the Dutch Baroque master Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675).

William Rothenstein (1872–1945) was similarly concerned with portraying domestic environments. In his portraits of family and friends, he bestows as much attention on the interior spaces as he does to the figures who occupy them. Both artists took great care in accurately portraying light, from the highlights on the figures' hair, skin and clothing in Rothenstein's paintings, to the effects of light and shadow on the walls and floor of Hammershøi's home.

# INTERIOR LIGHT

**Sir William Rothenstein** (1872–1945)

England

***Mother and Child*** 1903

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1988

In 1900, William Rothenstein began painting portraits of family and friends in domestic settings. In *Mother and Child*, 1903, Rothenstein's wife, Alice, appears seated with her back to the window as their infant son, John, stands on her lap, illuminated by diffuse sunlight which floods their Hampstead home. The intimate scene is both a celebration of motherhood, and a masterful study of light and shadow. The soft daylight entering from a window, the pronounced contrasts of light and dark, and the pervading stillness reflect the influence of the 17th-century Dutch master Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), an artist much admired at the New English Art Club, to which Rothenstein belonged.

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# INTERIOR LIGHT

**Vilhelm Hammershøi** (1864–1916)

Denmark

***Interior, Sunlight on the Floor*** 1906

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1930

Vilhelm Hammershøi made numerous paintings of his home at 30 Strandgade, in the Christianshavn district of Copenhagen, a location that became his most iconic subject. The painting *Interior, Sunlight on the Floor*, 1906 depicts a room in the sparse apartment, where sunlight pours through a window and spills onto the floor below. Hammershøi admired the stately features of the 1630s building, especially its large windows that let in the soft and atmospheric light of northern Europe. In this composition the artist's wife Ada was originally positioned between the table and the back wall to the left of the window. However, a previous owner of the painting disliked this arrangement and folded the canvas over, removing the figure altogether.

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# INTERIOR LIGHT

**Vilhelm Hammershøi** (1864–1916)

Denmark

***Interior*** 1899

oil paint on canvas

Tate: presented in memory of Leonard Borwick by his friends through the Art Fund 1926

As with the French Impressionists, Vilhelm Hammershøi painted the same locations multiple times at different times of day, recording subtle changes to light and weather conditions. Many of his interiors depict empty rooms and focus upon the tranquil effect of light falling upon pale doors, walls and simple furnishings. Some, such as *Interior*, 1899, feature the artist's wife, Ada, who is usually shown from behind, her presence drawing viewers into the space.

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# LIGHTPLAY

The Bauhaus design school in 1920s Germany produced two of the most influential pioneers in light and colour of the 1920s: László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) and Josef Albers (1888–1976). Profoundly experimental in its ethos, the Bauhaus sought to produce functional and aesthetically pleasing objects for the masses and to dissolve distinctions between artists and artisans. Before attending its celebrated technical workshops, all students were required to undertake a six-month foundational course in the principles of light and colour, taught by Moholy-Nagy and Albers.

Moholy-Nagy hailed photography and film as bringing a new 'culture of light' into art and saw photographic experimentation overtaking even the most innovative aspects of painting. He celebrated photography's ability to transform the appearance of reality – whether structure or texture – into pure light phenomena. Moholy-Nagy influenced a generation of students through his encouragement of unfamiliar perspectives and angles, close-up details, use of light and shadow, and experimentation with multiple exposure.

# LIGHTPLAY

**László Moholy-Nagy** (1895–1946)

Hungary, United States of America

***Lightplay Black-White-Grey***  
***(Lichtspiel Schwarz-Weiss-Grau)*** 1933

16 mm film transferred to video (black and white, silent)

5:17 min

Van Abbemuseum: acquired 1975

László Moholy-Nagy came to consider light his primary medium – and its effects in motion inspired him to extend his experiment into sculpture and film, such as his *Light Prop for an Electric Stage*, 1930, an electrically powered kinetic sculpture made from glass and metal. When in motion, its many reflective and translucent surfaces interact with coloured lights to create moving light displays. With its fluctuating play of light, shadow and reflection, the rotating device is the subject of many of Moholy-Nagy's photographs and is recorded in the film *Lightplay Black-White-Grey (Lichtspiel Schwarz-Weiss-Grau)*, 1933.

# LIGHTPLAY

**Iwao Yamawaki** (1898–1987)

Japan

***Untitled (Composition with Eggs and String, Bauhaus)*** 1930–32

***Untitled (Interior, Bauhaus, Dessau)*** 1930–32

photographs, gelatin silver prints on paper

Tate: purchased with funds provided by the Asia Pacific Acquisitions Committee 2010

***Set of Bowls*** 1930–32

photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate: presented by Jacqui Brantjes and Daniel Pittack 2012

Iwao Yamawaki trained as an architect in Japan, then in 1931 travelled to Germany to study at the Bauhaus art school in Dessau. There he became heavily influenced by László Moholy-Nagy's idea that photography could open up new ways of seeing the world. In these photographs, made at the Bauhaus, Yamawaki harnessed light to make the familiar seem strange, transforming ordinary objects into studies of light, shadow and form.

# LIGHTPLAY

**Edmund Collein** (1906–1992)

Germany

***Untitled (Paper Material Study, Josef Albers' Preliminary Course, Bauhaus Dessau)*** circa 1927–30

***Untitled (Material Study by Owtti Berger, Josef Albers' Preliminary Course, Bauhaus Dessau)*** circa 1927

photograph, gelatin silver print on paper

Tate: purchased with funds provided by the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2012

The increasing availability of affordable and easy-to-use cameras led to an explosion of photography at the Bauhaus in Dessau (1925–32). At first, photography was intended for documentary or promotional purposes, but its experimental possibilities were quickly recognised by Bauhaus students. Edmund Collein was an East German architect and urban planner who took classes in material studies with Josef Albers (1888–1976), in which students were challenged to design innovative spatial structures using everyday materials. These photographic records of student works are all that survive of Collein's Bauhaus years.

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# LIGHTPLAY

**Stefan Themerson** (1910–1988)

Poland, England

Clockwise from upper left:

***Untitled*** 1930 {printed later}

***Untitled*** 1928 {printed later}

***Untitled*** 1928–29 {printed later}

photographs, gelatin silver prints on paper

Tate: purchased with funds provided by the Russia and Eastern Europe Acquisitions Committee 2016

In 1928 Stefan Themerson developed a number of darkroom techniques for creating abstract images. The most notable was the photogram, in which objects are placed directly onto photosensitive paper that is then exposed to light. Made without a camera, the resulting images reverse the tonal values of lens-based photography – the greater the opacity of an object, the lighter its trace appears in the print. Themerson and his wife, fellow artist Franciszka Themerson (1907–1988), developed another type of image using a ‘trick table’, whereby a glass surface was covered with tracing paper under which the artist could lie and photograph the ghostly effects of objects and lights being moved across the surface.

# LIGHTPLAY

**György Kepes** (1906–2001)

Hungary, United States of America

***Light Reflection***

***(Puddles on Pavement)*** circa 1947

***Light Reflection*** 1941

photographs, gelatin silver prints on paper

Tate: purchased with funds provided by the Russia and Eastern European Acquisitions Committee and the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2013

György Kepes was a Hungarian-born photographer, painter, designer, teacher and writer, who trained in the Berlin studio of László Moholy-Nagy in the 1920s. He later moved to the United States of America to run the Color and Light Department at the recently founded New Bauhaus in Chicago, established by Moholy-Nagy in 1937. There Kepes developed photogram prints, that he called 'photo-drawings', by applying paint to a glass plate which he then treated as a negative. Kepes's photograms refer to the natural and man-made world in multiple ways, engaging with geometric forms, mechanical components, found objects and organic fragments.

# LIGHTPLAY

**György Kepes** (1906–2001)

Hungary, United States of America

***Circles and Dots*** circa 1939–40

***Blobs 3*** 1939–40

photographs, gelatin silver prints on paper

Tate: purchased with funds provided by the Russia and Eastern European Acquisitions Committee and the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2013

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# LIGHTPLAY

**György Kepes** (1906–2001)

Hungary, United States of America

***Structure Photogram*** circa 1939–40

***Branches*** 1939–40

photographs, gelatin silver prints on paper

Tate: purchased with funds provided by the Russia and Eastern European Acquisitions Committee and the Photography Acquisitions Committee 2013

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# LIGHTPLAY

**Hanaya Kanbee** (1903–1991)

Japan

Anticlockwise from top left:

***Light A*** 1930 {printed 1970s}

***Light B*** 1930 {printed 1970s}

***Light C*** 1930 {printed 1970s}

photographs, gelatin silver prints on paper

Tate: presented anonymously 2015

Hanaya Kanbee co-founded the Ashiva Camera Club in 1930, which became the leading avant-garde photography group in Japan until it disbanded in 1942. Many of Kanbee's experiments engaged with – and in some cases anticipated – Bauhaus, Dada and Surrealist practices. Kanbee experimented with long exposure techniques, in which a camera's shutter is left open for a much longer duration than normal so that the paths of moving objects are recorded as blurs and smears. Kanbee originally produced his *Light* series as ferrotypes, also known as tintypes. One of the earliest photographic processes, a ferrotype is made by exposing a negative image onto a thin iron plate. The plate is then blackened with paint, lacquer or enamel and coated with photographic emulsion. The dark background lends the print the appearance of a positive image.

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# LIGHTPLAY

**Luigi Veronesi** (1908–1998)

Italy

***Photo n.145*** 1940 {printed 1970s}

***Kinetic Study*** 1941

***Photo n.152*** 1940 {printed 1970s}

photographs, gelatin silver prints on paper

Tate: accepted under the Cultural Gifts Scheme by HM Government from Massimo Prelz Oltramonti and allocated to Tate 2015

Luigi Veronesi was central to the development of experimental photography in Italy during the 1930s and 40s. He wanted to take the medium in a new direction – away from documentary and reportage. Inspired by László Moholy-Nagy's photographic experiments, Veronesi began exploring the possibilities of the photogram. In this technique, a sheet of photosensitive paper is covered with objects and then exposed to light. Fascinated by the aesthetic possibilities of this process, he experimented with many different objects. Their configurations of lines, dots and spirals make it difficult to decipher the original sources.

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# LIGHTPLAY

**Luigi Veronesi** (1908–1998)

Italy

***Construction*** 1941

***Untitled (Spiral)*** 1938

photographs, gelatin silver prints on paper

Tate: accepted under the Cultural Gifts Scheme by HM Government from Massimo Prez Oltramonti and allocated to Tate 2015

In the late 1930s Luigi Veronese applied the lessons in abstraction and geometry he had learned from painting and graphic design to photography. *Construction*, 1941 and *Untitled (Spiral)*, 1938 are results of this approach.

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# COLOUR PLAY

Born into a family of craftsmen, the highly versatile artist Josef Albers was recruited to the Bauhaus by its founder Walter Gropius (1883–1969) in 1923. From that point Albers began a process of exploring the creative possibilities of light which he continued after his emigration to the United States of America, first at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and later at Yale University. Convinced that the ability to accurately perceive differences in light requires training, Albers gave his students various exercises to help them distinguish between different degrees of lightness and to recognise what he called the ‘discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect’. Albers called colour the ‘most relative medium in art’, noting that what we perceive as colour is really light of different wavelengths and intensities. His *Homage to the Square* paintings, created from late 1949, comprise several coloured squares nesting within each other. In 1963, Albers published the summation of his chromatic theories in the book *Interaction of Color*, but the *Homage to the Square* project went on, culminating in over 2000 paintings by his death in 1976.

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# COLOUR PLAY

**Josef Albers** (1888–1976)

Germany, United States of America

***Study for Homage to the Square: Beaming*** 1963

***Study for Homage to the Square*** 1964

oil paint on fibreboard

Tate: presented by Mrs Anni Albers, the artist's widow and the Josef Albers Foundation 1978

***Study for Homage to the Square:***

***Departing in Yellow*** 1964

oil paint on fibreboard

Tate: purchased 1965

Josef Albers is best known for this series of paintings, in which he explored the basic elements that make up an image – line, contour, lightness and colour. At the Bauhaus, he taught his students to represent objects by using lines rather than shading and argued that scientific studies of colour had little practical value for the artist, as we rarely perceive colour as absolute. Instead, Albers argued that colour is relative: as colours interact with one another, our experience of them shifts.

# COLOUR PLAY

**László Moholy-Nagy** (1895–1946)

Hungary, United States of America

***K VII*** 1922

oil paint and graphite on canvas

Tate: purchased 1961

Like other Bauhaus teachers, László Moholy-Nagy firmly believed in art's potential as a force for positive social reform. He was inspired by Russian constructivism, making art that reflected and engaged with the modern industrial world. His utopian vision was characterised by an emphasis on transparency and light, reflected in paintings such as *K VII*, 1922. The abstract composition is constructed from a series of overlapping rectangles that appear to float on top of one another. Transparent elements seem to filter an unseen light source, achieving a subtle effect of illumination.

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# COLOUR PLAY

**Josef Albers** (1888–1976)

Germany, United States of America

***Homage to the Square*** 1958

oil paint on fibreboard

JB Gibbs Trust Collection

After the forced closure of the Bauhaus in Dessau by the Nazi government in 1933, Josef Albers was invited to teach at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, where he set the arts curriculum and taught Bauhaus colour theory. Towards the end of his time there, in 1949, Albers began his famous *Homage to the Square* series of paintings. Restricting himself to the motif of a square within squares, Albers explored how colour juxtapositions infinitely affect perceptions of hue and value, creating hovering (retinal) after-images, whereas proportions and colour influence the sense of a form's distance or closeness.

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# COLOUR PLAY

**Josef Albers** (1888–1976)

Germany, United States of America

***Homage to the Square: Renewed Growth*** 1965

oil paint on masonite

on loan from a private collection

Josef Albers mostly used a palette knife to apply oil colours direct from the tube onto squares of masonite, an inexpensive pressed fibreboard that he preferred to canvas (because of its hard surface) and which he prepared with a white ground. He often noted the names of the colours he used on the backs of his panels. His straight lines are hand painted and retain an organic quality. His distinctive compositions, which are unique, have been likened to the music of Bach in their seemingly endless variations upon a central theme.

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# COLOUR PLAY

**Josef Albers** (1888–1976)

Germany, United States of America

***WL5-II*** 1966

aluminium plate lithograph on Arches paper  
on loan from the collection of Gary Langsford

Josef Albers valued the print as a distinctive realm of artistic production and over his long career he utilised many techniques, from etching and woodcut to silk screen-printing and lithography. *WL5-II*, developed in 1966 from his *Homage to the Square* project, retains the motif of nested squares but introduces a white line to separate fields of colour, muting the vibrations of juxtaposed greys of different values (light intensity).

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# COLOUR PLAY

**Josef Albers** (1888–1976)

Germany, United States of America

***WL5-XIV*** 1966

aluminium plate lithograph on Arches paper  
on loan from the collection of Gary Langsford

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# COLOUR PLAY

**Josef Albers** (1888–1976)

Germany, United States of America

***Golden Gate*** 1965

screenprint

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 1975

Following the success of a 1962 portfolio of screenprints on the theme of *Homage to the Square*, Albers embarked on a second series of 10 prints in a portfolio entitled *Homage to the Square: Soft-Edge Hard Edge*, in an edition of 250. He worked once again with Norman Ives and Sewell Sillman, specialist publishers of silkscreen prints based in New Haven, where Albers lived. Albers regarded Ives and Sillman as collaborators, because of their ‘intensive’ and imaginative approach to ‘solving the multiple challenges in design and colour’.

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# COLOUR PLAY

**Josef Albers** (1888–1976)

Germany, United States of America

***Homage to the Square I – S L XX 111 b*** 1966

screenprint

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 1975

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# LIGHT EFFECTS

Olafur Eliasson challenges the viewer to explore the psychological and associative potential of colour as it materialises in the presence of light. Referring to his 2003 work *Yellow versus Purple*, Eliasson has observed that:

Colour doesn't exist in itself, only when looked at. The glass disk in this work has been treated so that light passing through it appears yellow, and light bouncing off it appears purple. The fact the 'colour', uniquely, only materialises when light bounces off it into our retina indicates that analysing colours is in fact analysing ourselves.

Olafur Eliasson (born 1967)

Denmark

*Yellow versus Purple* 2003

glass, steel cable, motor, floodlight and tripod

Tate: purchased using funds provided by the 2003

Outset/Frieze Art Fair Fund to benefit the Tate Collection 2003

# SOUND OF LIGHT

In 1975 Lis Rhodes composed *Light Music*, a 'score' comprising drawings that were printed onto filmstrip and which form abstract patterns of black and white lines onscreen. As the bands of light and dark pass through the projector they are 'read' as audio, creating an intense soundtrack and forging a direct relationship between what we see and what we hear. The room is also filled with haze, giving the crossing projection beams a sculptural quality and encouraging us to move through and interact with the light beams. This is an early example of expanded cinema, in which viewers are both spectators and participants.

Lis Rhodes (born 1942)

England

*Light Music* 1975

film, 16 mm, 2 projections, black and white,  
and sound (stereo) and smoke machine, 25 min

Tate: presented by Tate Members 2012

# LIGHT & MOVEMENT

The works in this room use colour in different ways to create impressions of light and movement. Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) wanted his art to go beyond straightforward representation, giving viewers a more participatory experience, like listening to music. He aimed to create a sense of movement in his work and saw colour as an essential tool in this. These same principles can be seen in *Morceau Accrochant*, 2004, a hanging mobile installation by Pae White (born 1963), which the artist has described as ‘an exploration of movement contained’. Bridget Riley (born 1931) is an abstract painter who uses basic forms and colour to explore the nature of perception. Riley works the dynamics of her paintings through the use of contrast, pitching tones and hues of colour ‘against the structure of the formal movement’. This has been described as her ‘visual music’.

# LIGHT & MOVEMENT

**Wassily Kandinsky** (1866–1944)

Russia, France

***Swinging*** 1925

oil paint on board

Tate: purchased 1979

A founder of the avant-garde artist groups Phalanx and Der Blaue Reiter, Wassily Kandinsky was an international figure by the time he began teaching for the Bauhaus school in Germany between 1921 and 1933. Kandinsky believed painting should aim to be as abstract as music, and he worked to create art that was free from all references to the material world. For him, colour was essential in liberating art from representation. By stripping away the details of recognisable motifs, he left calligraphic lines as structuring devices within his compositions. *Swinging*, 1925 epitomises this approach. Kandinsky conceived of his art as an alternative pathway to a spiritual realm, made more powerful by not being tied to the observed world.

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# LIGHT & MOVEMENT

**Bridget Riley** (born 1931)  
England

***Nataraja*** 1993

oil paint on canvas

Tate: purchased 1994

In 1959 the divisionist paintings of French Post-Impressionist artist Georges Seurat (1859–1891) offered Bridget Riley a new understanding of colour and perception and emboldened her to work differently. In the 1960s she produced abstract paintings based on repeated geometric patterns that created a sense of movement through optical illusion. She then turned to colour in the early 1970s. A visit to Egypt in 1986 resulted in a new chromatic intensity. In *Nataraja*, 1993, the surface is divided vertically and diagonally, creating a formidable complexity of colour relationships. The title refers to Bridget Riley's interest in Hindu mythology and art. Shiva, the great Hindu god, dances a *Nataraja*, the Cosmic Dance of Creation and Destruction, standing on Ignorance and Innocence. *Nataraja* thus relates to notions of rhythm and counter-rhythm, which are central elements in this painting.

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# LIGHT & MOVEMENT

**Pae White** (born 1963)  
United States of America

***Morceau Accrochant*** 1993

paper and thread

Tate: purchased using funds provided by the 2004 Outset/Frieze Art Fair Fund to benefit the Tate Collection 2005

Pae White is known for her large-scale, mixed-media installations that, although they frequently change in size and form, share a common concern for the ephemeral and forgotten aspects of everyday life. *Morceau Accrochant*, 2004 is a hanging mobile installation consisting of 482 strands of thread and screenprinted paper suspended from the ceiling to create a three-dimensional volume of dense colour; an experience the artist has called 'an exploration of movement contained'.

# INTO THE LIGHT

James Turrell, an avid pilot, works directly with light and space to create artworks that engage with atmospheric conditions. Having trained in perceptual psychology, Turrell began experimenting with light as a pure medium in the mid-1960s. In his *Shallow Space Constructions*, Turrell combines architecture, sculpture, light and space to completely envelop the viewer in a coloured atmosphere. *Raemar, Blue*, 1969 is one of the earliest and most significant of these. This immersive spatial environment plays with our experience of perception and the effect of light in space. Blue light radiates from fluorescent tubes placed behind a partition that consequently appears to float at the back of the gallery space.

James Turrell (born 1943)

United States of America

*Raemar, Blue* 1969

fluorescent light

Tate: presented by the Tate Americas Foundation,  
partial purchase and partial gift of Doris J Lockhart 2013

# ADAPTIVE LIGHT

The invention and popularisation of electric light was an essential characteristic of modernity that revolutionised life in the 20th century. Today, modern illumination in the form of interior and exterior lighting, colourful street signage and advertising billboards illuminate our towns and cities 24 hours a day. In 1963, American artist Dan Flavin (1933–1996) began working with fluorescent lighting tubes to create sculptures and installations exploring the visual effects of such technology. Flavin's neutral geometric forms, use of serialisation and reliance on industrially produced materials have often been associated with the rational aesthetics of the minimalism movement. However, Flavin referred to his work as 'maximalist', given the balance between his works' economy of means and visual exuberance. Around the same time, Peter Sedgley (born 1930) began to project programmed sequences of coloured light onto painted surfaces, creating pulsing colour transformations and the illusion of movement. Sedgley maintains that artists must 'utilise light to explore new landscapes, and in doing so, extend the practice of sculpture and painting'.

# ADAPTIVE LIGHT

**Dan Flavin** (1933–1996)

United States of America

***'monument' for V. Tatlin*** 1966–69

fluorescent tubes and metal

Tate: purchased 1971

Dan Flavin's arrangements of fluorescent lights engage with their surrounding architectural space not only by illuminating it, but by altering how one perceives it. While influenced by his Catholic upbringing, Flavin always rejected interpretations of his work as spiritual. Rather, many of his works refer to significant figures of 20th-century art. This is a homage to Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953). Flavin described it as a 'monument' partly as a joke, aware of the disparity between its modest materials and the traditional grandeur of monumental sculpture.

# ADAPTIVE LIGHT

**Peter Sedgley** (born 1930)  
England

***Colour Cycle III*** 1970

acrylic paint on canvas  
Tate: purchased 1970

Peter Sedgley was an architect and Royal Air Force radar technician before becoming an artist to devote himself to explorations of colour and light. One of his early projects involved investigating the colour theories of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and Bauhaus artist Paul Klee (1879–1940). *Colour Cycle III*, 1970 was part of this series of what he later referred to as *Target Paintings*. Here a canvas is painted with concentric circles of different colours. Viewed in a darkened space, the work is lit by lights of changing colour in a programmed sequence, creating a dialogue between coloured light and painted surface, an interaction that radically transforms what the naked eye perceives.

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# SEARCHING LIGHT

After training as a painter, artist Tacita Dean began making films in 1992, producing works characterised by long takes and an exploration of narrative, memory and history. Filmed at a lighthouse in northern England, this work consists of seven shots that alternate between the rotating lighthouse bulbs and footage looking out to sea. Dean was inspired by the haunting story of Donald Crowhurst (1932–1969), a British amateur sailor who died while attempting a solo voyage around the world. Crowhurst's mysterious fate captured the imagination of a generation and has inspired books, documentaries and, most recently, a feature film starring Colin Firth (*The Mercy*, 2017). The 'disappearance' referred to in Dean's title can be seen as a reference both to Crowhurst's death and to the sinking sun the film records.

Tacita Dean (born 1965)

England

*Disappearance at Sea* 1996

film, 16 mm, projection, colour and sound, 14 min

Tate: purchased 1998

# EXPANSIVE LIGHT

In these works, light becomes a way to explore the expansiveness and fragility of the universe, and our place within it. Vija Celmins (born 1938) depicts familiar subjects – the sea, sky, galaxy and desert. But her treatment renders them strange. She creates her images with an obsessive attention to detail in a reduced palette of grey tones: the surface textures of the natural world completely fill the picture plane. Viewed from a distance, these works are imbued with a sense of emptiness – it is difficult to situate ourselves in relation to the enormity of what is depicted. But on close inspection it is easy to become immersed in the minute detail and the artist's ability to distil light from dark.

*Stardust Particle*, 2014 by Olafur Eliasson (born 1967) is a hanging sculpture that changes appearance depending on the lighting conditions and position of the viewer. The panes of partially reflective filter glass catch the light and reflect the surroundings. Conceived for the artist's first solo exhibition in 2014–15, Eliasson relates *Stardust Particle* to notions of contact and social inclusion, stating that 'Contact is about your ability to reach out, connect ... for me, contact is where inclusion begins.'



# EXPANSIVE LIGHT

**Vija Celmins** (born 1938)  
Latvia, United States of America

Clockwise from left:

***Sky*** 1975

***Galaxy*** 1975

***Desert*** 1975

***Ocean*** 1975

lithographs on paper

Tate: purchased with assistance from the American Fund for the Tate Gallery, courtesy of the Judith Rothschild Foundation 1999

These four lithographs from 1975 by Vija Celmins derive from a series of meticulous pencil drawings that the artist made in the 1970s. Rendered with exacting detail in a reduced palette of grey tones, each shows an aspect of the natural environment under different lighting conditions. *Sky* depicts cumulus clouds drifting in a bright daylight, while *Galaxy* (the only image to depict light sources) shows a night sky illuminated by millions of burning stars, each one as powerful as our own sun yet millions of miles from earth. *Ocean* captures the light falling and glinting on the churning Pacific Ocean. In *Desert*, strong shadows enliven the stony ground of the Mojave Desert in south-eastern California.

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# EXPANSIVE LIGHT

**Olafur Eliasson** (born 1967)

Denmark

***Stardust Particle*** 2014

stainless steel, glass, motor and spotlight

Tate: presented by the artist in honour of Sir Nicholas Serota 2018

Light and colour have remained cornerstones of Eliasson's practice, as both media and subject matter. Initially it was the artistic and scientific properties of light and colour that were his primary interest; from 2003 onwards, however, he became more concerned with their psychological and physical effects – at their simplest, how light and colour can manipulate how one feels in a particular environment. His sculptures and large-scale installations use light to alter the experience of space and architecture. For *Stardust Particle*, 2014, Eliasson embedded a large, spherical polyhedron made of partially reflective glass into a larger, steel-frame polyhedron. The crystalline structure evokes the form of a greatly enlarged stardust particle – a remnant of an exploded star.

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