



J.M.W. Turner, 'St Benedetto, Looking towards Fusina', Exhibited 1843, © Tate, London 2011

Power of three

Rarely are spectators treated to a celebration of three world-renowned painters in one exhibition – especially artists as distinguished as Turner, Monet and Twombly.

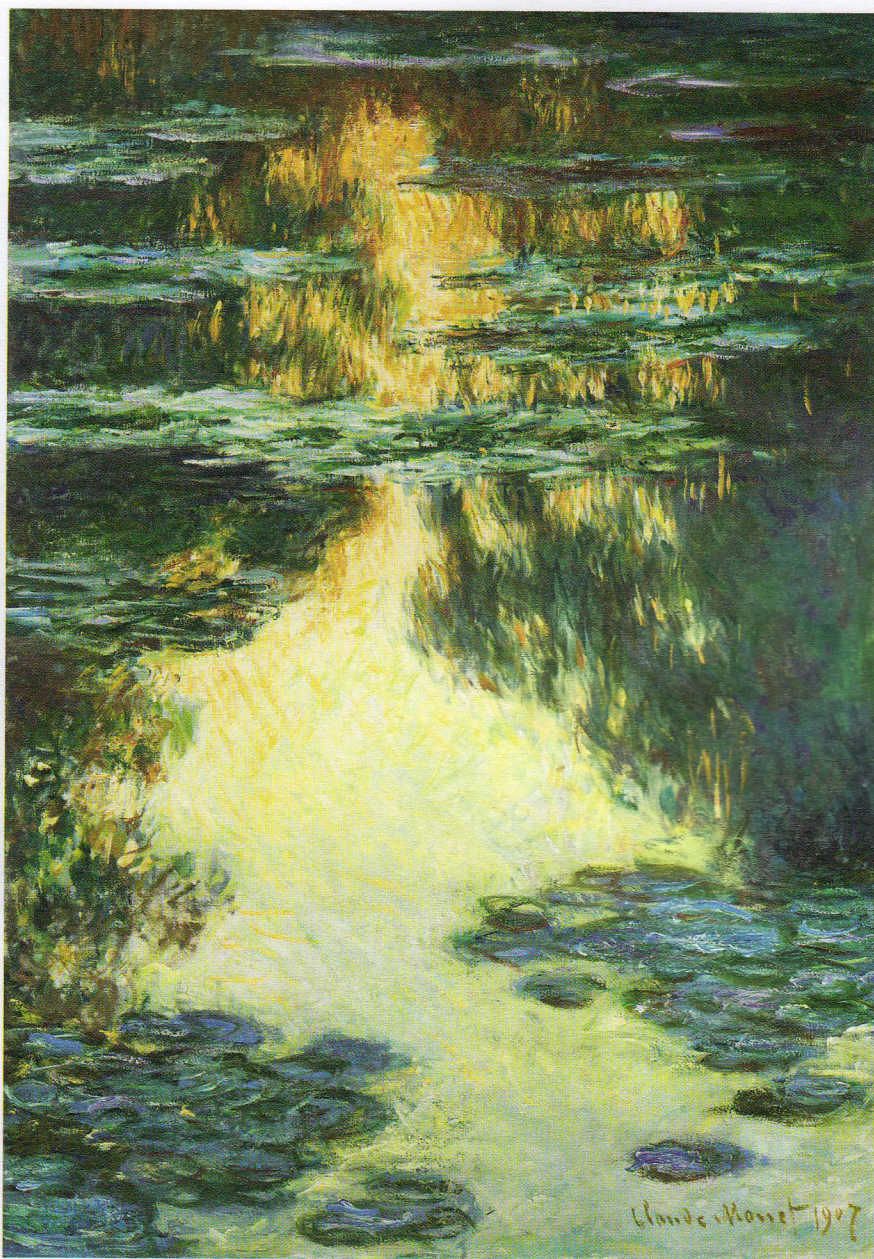
Jo Caird explores the reason behind curator Jeremy Lewison's decision to bring the three artists together

Anyone interested in J. M. W. Turner usually needn't wait very long for the next major exhibition of his work to come round. The same is true of Claude Monet and Cy Twombly. All three artists have been the subject of a number of important international shows in recent years, from J. M.W. Turner at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2008, to last year's Monet at Musée Marmatton in Paris, to Cy Twombly's first Italian retrospective at the Galleria Nazionale dell'Arte Moderna in Rome in 2009.

This month, however, sees the opening of an exhibition that offers a rather more un-

sual opportunity: bridging the years, miles and differences in style that separate these great painters, *Turner, Monet, Twombly* at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, presents them side-by-side in a show that is grand in both scale and ambition.

"What I was interested in", explains the show's curator, Jeremy Lewison, "was looking at continuities across centuries – continuities of interest and approach. It seemed to me that there were fairly obvious similarities between Monet and Turner, but... I wanted there to be a contemporary interest... and it seemed to me



Claude Monet, 'Water-Lilies', 1907, © Gothenburg Museum of Art. Photo: Hossein Sehatlou

that the spirit of Romanticism was still alive in Twombly's work, and therefore you could see this trajectory."

Lewison has been planning the show since 2005, when he was approached by the then-director of the Moderna Museet, Lars Nittve, to put together an exhibition to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Swedish national gallery in 2008. That proved too tight a schedule given the cultural and economic value of the works Lewison was seeking for the show – the British curator, formerly Director of Collections at Tate, describes the "very complex

negotiations" involved in such a process – but *Turner, Monet, Twombly* will be all the better for the extra time dedicated to its creation. On display in Stockholm before travelling to Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and Tate Liverpool next year will be 60 major works from galleries and private collectors around the globe.

The show explores what Lewison calls the "humanistic interest" in the work of these three artists. The work of Turner, Monet and Twombly all addresses, the curator believes, "what it means to be alive in a particular moment". Lewison has focused on the artists' »



Cy Twombly, 'Untitled', 1987, © Cy Twombly

later paintings – in Turner’s case those completed after his first visit to Italy; in Monet’s, those painted following the death of his wife Camille; and in Twombly’s, the pieces that show a return to the subject of myth – as it’s at this point that “these three artists really do become congruent”.

“What we always have to remember is that artists are human beings”, says Lewison. “They have the same concerns, anxieties, elations, that everybody has, but they’re able to express them visually.” For the curator therefore, it’s the preoccupations of old age in particular that “cement the links” between Turner, Monet and Twombly, three artists working in divergent places and times. “Mortality, mourning, loss, physical debility... the resurgence of eroticism” are all explored, he explains, and the show is presented thematically in order to underline the “very strong points of contact” between the artists’ works.

The aims of the exhibition are two-fold.

On the one hand, bringing Turner, Monet and Twombly together, Lewison hopes, “will show people that even the most modern and contemporary art – which is Twombly’s – can actually be approached in quite a similar way to something which we now are able to assimilate very easily – Turner and Monet.” But the show also offers a fresh perspective on artists we think we know and understand. “Turner and Monet”, Lewison says, “have become rather too comfortable for us. I’m trying to unsettle [viewers] and to ask them to see these artists afresh from our 21st-century stand-point”.

In July this year, Twombly died at the age of 83. For Lewison, it is “a great sadness” that the show is opening just a few months too late for the painter to see it. “For a contemporary artist to be shown alongside these two great artists amounts to a huge accolade and I know from talking to him that he was very excited”, the curator explains. Lewison visited Twombly at his home in Italy in the spring and was

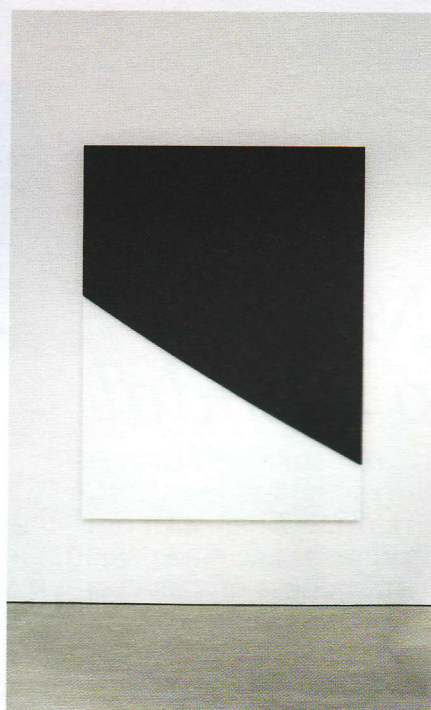
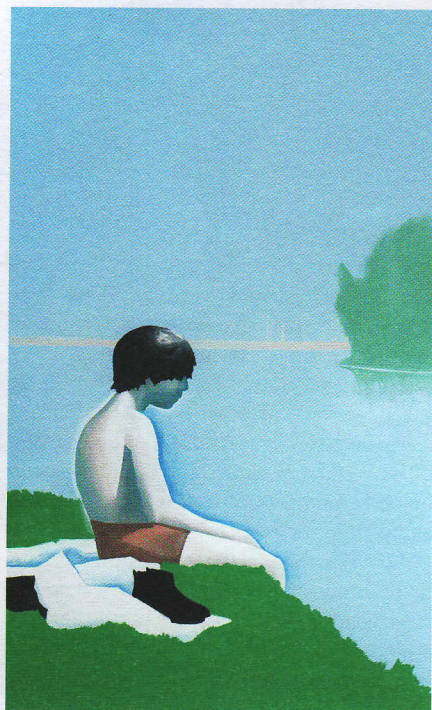
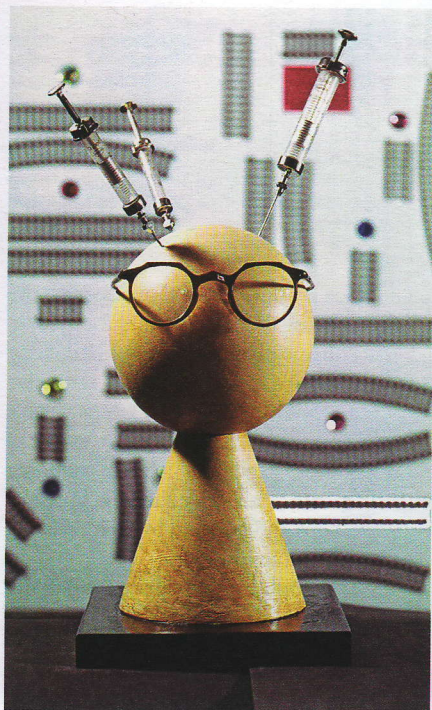
thrilled to learn that his instinctive feeling that the American artist was interested in Turner and Monet was correct: Twombly, it turned out, owned letters written by both painters.

Turner, Monet, Twombly, it should be remembered, says Lewison, is not an “exploration of Twombly being interested in two artists” but rather “an exhibition about three artists and how they approach art and life within the contexts of their own times”. The show, however, as well as offering visitors a fascinating insight into how the historical and the contemporary interconnect in art, is undoubtedly a fitting tribute to one of the greatest artists of our age and a wonderful opportunity to see Twombly’s work in a new light. ■

***Turner, Monet, Twombly: Later Paintings* is running at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden from October 8 to January 15, 2012. www.modernamuseet.se**

FURTHER EXHIBITIONS

There are plenty more worthwhile exhibitions taking place across the European art scene including these gems from Vienna, London and Munich



CURT STENVERT

Stenvert, a key name in the history of the Austrian avant-garde, was one of the young Viennese artists who thrived in a post-World War II era when a new artistic landscape was born through the oppression of the preceding years. He was a successful painter before turning his hand to film-making and sculpture. From 1962 onwards he focussed on art-house films, feature-length films and didactic films, using them as a canvas for his objects, collages and montages. His breakthrough came during his participation in the Venice Biennial in 1966. This exhibition, the first comprehensive retrospective since his last solo show at the same gallery in the 1970s, explores the way Stenvert's art reflected current affairs and sought to shock the viewer into engagement.

Curt Stenvert is running at the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna, Austria from October 5 to January 15, 2012. www.belvedere.at

WILHELM SASNAL

This is the first major UK exhibition of paintings by the acclaimed Polish artist and features over 60 pieces from the last 10 years. Sasnal, who has works in the collections of the Saatchi Gallery and Tate Modern, paints portraits of friends and family, pop cultural icons and scenes from important historical moments, including the Holocaust and the recent Japanese tsunami. One part of his exhibition focuses on the cross-over between film, video, photography and painting, utilising a selection of his acclaimed shorts and feature films to convey the similarities between these styles. His style references Romanticism, realism, pop and abstraction to create a series of works that feel familiar to an informed visual arts audience, yet offer an appealing freshness and vibrancy.

Wilhelm Sasnal is running at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK from October 14 to January 1, 2012. www.whitechapelgallery.org

ELLSWORTH KELLY: BLACK & WHITE

The American artist is known for his role in the 'colour field' movement, a 1960s development within abstract expressionism that saw painters favouring flat, solid colour over the violence of Pollock-esque 'action painting'. Kelly's 'colour field' works are often characterised by their use of single colours and unusually shaped canvases, as well as by their bare imagery. Interestingly though, despite the importance of colour in his paintings, the New Yorker's creative practice involves making black and white versions of his pieces, these works constituting around one third of Kelly's oeuvre. This show, which has come together following extensive input from the artist, is the first retrospective of Kelly's black and white works.

Ellsworth Kelly: Black & White is running at the Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany from October 7 to January 22, 2012. www.hausderkunst.de