



▲ JMW Turner at the Royal Academy. (DIAPHANA)



▲ Painting at home, father cutting wo

# Bringing Turner to life

**DANS LA LUMIERE.** Quand un grand réalisateur anglais s'attelle au portrait d'un des plus célèbres peintres britanniques et qu'il choisit un acteur d'exception (Timothy Spall, récompensé à Cannes cette année) pour l'incarner, le résultat ne peut qu'être spectaculaire et passionnant. Nous avons joint Mike Leigh par téléphone. Il a très aimablement accepté de répondre à nos questions sur *Mr. Turner*, dans les salles le 3 décembre prochain.

## VOCABLE

BY RONAN LANCELOT

RENCONTRE AVEC  
MIKE LEIGH  
réalisateur

Bringing Turner to life  
Turner ressuscité

to consider envisager / to get, got, got familiar with se familiariser avec, apprendre à connaître/apprécier

**VOCABLE:** Of all the artists, why choose Turner? **MIKE:**

I didn't decide to make a film about an artist, and then choose Turner. I looked at Turner and I thought, well, what about a film about Turner. I mean I didn't consider any other artists, and I had no other intention of making a film about an artist; but he is a great artist; there hasn't been a film about him, and when I started to get familiar, up to a point, with his work I... I love his work, I knew nothing about the man. Once I started to investigate and research Turner the personality, I began to realise that the extraordinary tension between this eccentric and conflicted and complex guy, and this work, this epic, sublime work, was fascinating.

**2. VOCABLE:** There's a lot of literature around Turner and his work! **MIKE:** Yes, well, as I'm sure you've

experienced, you observe and you absorb and then you distil it into something which, obviously, is not a documentary and it's very much an evocation. This is all about director of photography Dick Pope's work and collaboration. The look of the film, the whole feel, the atmosphere, the palette of the film, and how our visual discipline was very much part and parcel of my conception of the narrative and the dynamics of the film.

**3. VOCABLE:** Did you build the film around Turner's paintings? **MIKE:** No, not really, because I think that would be difficult to do. In fact, it wouldn't get us anywhere. If it's built around anything, it's built around the biographical shape, the chronology of the last 26 years of his life. The paintings come into it, but the feel of the paintings looks





the yard. (DIAPHANA)



▲ A walk with Mrs Booth. (DIAPHANA)

after itself, because his life was about the paintings. One didn't need to worry about the paintings, they were going to come into it, you know?

**4. VOCABE:** Why Turner's last 26 years? Why not his whole life? **MIKE:** Well, he became more and more radical, obviously, in his work, which, of course, alienated, confused and bemused a lot of people. The relationship with his father, the period after his father died; the relationship with Mrs Booth... that period included a whole bunch of particular dramatisable events. To do a biopic of the whole of his life would be, I think, long-winded and tedious and, in any case, would involve ridiculous things like finding a small fat boy who looked like Timothy Spall and could paint and draw, which I think would be deeply irritating. So, on the whole, just to drop anchor... I mean 26 years is a long time to cover, you know?

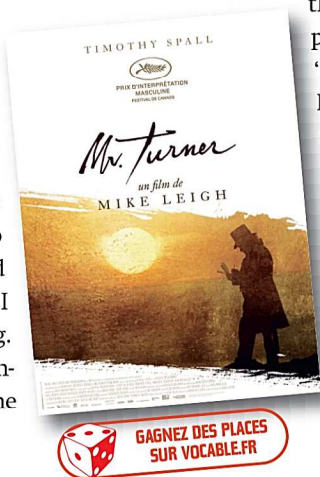
**5. VOCABE:** Did Timothy Spall come to mind right away? **MIKE:** Yes. I didn't think of anybody else, pending his agreement to do it, yes. Yes. And he delivered an amazing performance.

**6. VOCABE:** When did you see a Turner painting for the first time? **MIKE:** It's a very good question and I realise I don't know the exact answer. What I do know is this: by the time I must have been 14 or something, I could tell you all about Picasso and Braque, or the impressionists or even,

dare I say it, Salvador Dali, who I thought was fun. I've maybe reformed my view of that, but I thought Turner, Constable, landscape painting, biscuit tins and chocolate boxes really boring. I don't think he was really on my radar. But in my early 20s, I went to art school, and you couldn't be at a London art school in the '60s without starting to go to the galleries and to look at and understand, appreciate and eventually love Turner really, and I certainly did. I think he's an extraordinary painter so, somewhere in the '60s I started to get it really, but I can't tell you the single moment of revelation when I looked at a Turner, and the penny dropped. If there is such a species of humanity that doesn't like Turner, it's because they're probably not looking at it; they're just looking at it in a very, very un-enquiring way and not seeing what's actually there, but actually seeing, as I probably

did as a young teenager, the chocolate box lids and boring landscapes. Obviously, anyone that really looks will see something very extraordinary, whatever the painting or drawing.

**7. VOCABE:** Why is it called Mr. Turner, and not Turner? **MIKE:** It is precisely because it's actually a portrait of a guy, a bloke, a man... a vulnerable, real, less-than-perfect person like you and me, who happens to do something extraordinary.



GAGNEZ DES PLACES SUR VOCABE.FR

conflicted ambivalent, contrasté / guy type, homme / epic grandiose.

**2. obviously** de toute évidence / feel ambiance, caractère / to be part and parcel (of) faire partie intégrante (de) / narrative histoire, scénario.

**3. shape** forme, ici modèle / to come, came, come into ici faire partie de / the feel... looks after itself l'impression, l'atmosphère (des tableaux) se suffit à elle-même / to worry about se préoccuper de.

**4. to alienate** éloigner / to confuse rendre perplexe, intriguer / to bemuse déconcerter / bunch groupe, ensemble, ici série / biopic film biographique / long-winded interminable / tedious fastidieux / to involve impliquer / on the whole dans l'ensemble, ici pour finir / to drop anchor jeter l'ancre, ici choisir un point de départ.

**5. right away** immédiatement / pending dans l'attente de / to deliver livrer, offrir / amazing incroyable, extraordinaire / performance interprétation.

**6. to dare** oser / to reform revoir / Constable peintre paysagiste britannique (1776-1837) / boring ennuyeux, lassant / biscuit tins and chocolate boxes ici reproductions de tableaux de paysage décorant les boîtes (métalliques) de biscuits ou de chocolats / to be on one's radar ici faire partie de ses préoccupations/centres d'intérêt / eventually à terme, enfin / to get (it) ici comprendre / the penny dropped ça a fait tilt, j'ai compris / un-enquiring peu curieux / actually vraiment / lid couvercle, dessus.

**7. bloke** gars, type / less-than-perfect ici (tout simplement) normal, ordinaire.





# À LA UNE

**8. steam** vapeur / **speed** vitesse / **to be ahead of one's time** être en avance sur son temps, ici un précurseur / **unknowingly** sans le savoir/vouloir / **definitely** sans l'ombre d'un doute / **to inform** ici influencer, façonner, inspirer / **to conduct** mener, entamer / **to come, came, come across** ici découvrir.

**9. leading** éminent / **to portray** dépeindre / **to take, took, taken exception to** trouver à redire à / **to screen** projeter / **statement** déclaration, jugement / **thoroughly** dans le détail / **to cosset** dorloter, choyer / **to spoil, spoiled or spoilt** gâter / **spoilt brat** enfant gâté / **prig** petit saint / **to feed, fed, fed into** alimenter, ici influencer.

**10. to be fed up with** en avoir assez/marre de / **to shoot, shot, shot** tourner (film) / **to be gagging for (sthing)** mourir d'envie de (faire/avoir qch).

**11. to look forward to** attendre avec impatience, se réjouir d'avance.

## AN EXHIBITION

**devoted (to)** ici dédié, consacré (à) / **to turn heads** faire sensation / **late** défunt / **to set, set, set free** libérer / **related** associé, apparenté / **oil** (peinture à l')huile / **watercolor (US)= watercolour (GB)** aquarelle / **spectacles** lunettes / **death mask** masque mortuaire (moulé).

Sur la partie **ADVANCED** du CD de conversation, écoutez notre entretien avec Mike Leigh. Sur la partie **BASIC** du même CD, on parle de lui avec le peintre Colin Gna, l'un de ses plus vieux amis.

Découvrez le reportage vidéo sur le site [www.vocable.fr](http://www.vocable.fr) et testez votre compréhension



Timothy Spall and Mike Leigh on the set. (DIAPHANA)

**8. VOCABE:** Turner's Train, steam and speed painting is all about modernity? Was he ahead of his time? **MIKE:** Absolutely, and he loved new things; he was fascinated by technology and there's no question that he, unknowingly, was definitely anticipating the impressionists, and the Cubists... and 20<sup>th</sup> century art in general. Photography fascinated him, he could see what it would do for painting; how it would inform the way painting would go, but he'd already conducted the revolution before he ever came across photography. He was already painting in the way that other painters later would because of photography. He was already there.

**9. VOCABE:** Can you tell us about how the leading English art critic of the Victorian era John Ruskin is portrayed in this film? **MIKE:** In fact, a distinguished French film critic apparently took exception to the portrait of Ruskin, when it was screened in Cannes because he thought it was a general statement about critics in general, which it isn't. It's a portrait of Ruskin and that's all it is. Ruskin was, and we researched him very thoroughly, of course, a very curious customer. His parents cosseted him and spoilt him and he never met any other children; he was very much a spoilt brat, and very precocious, and something of a prig. All that fed into our portrait of him.

**10. VOCABE:** After all these years of research, aren't you fed up with Turner? **MIKE:** I'm not, and I think

it's great. I must say at the point when we stopped shooting the film, which is about 15 months ago — at that point in time, I just remember saying, "I'm gagging for 20<sup>th</sup> century art. I really want... I don't want to see any more 19<sup>th</sup> century art of any kind," but no, I feel much enriched by the experience, to be perfectly honest.

**11. VOCABE:** What are your next projects? **MIKE:** I make these films, as you may know, where we develop them through the process of making them, so we are going to make a film in 2016. I can't really tell you anything about it, but I will look forward to talking to you when I've made it. ●

## An exhibition

A show at the Tate Britain devoted to the fertile last years of British artist J.M.W. Turner is turning heads in London. "Late Turner: Painting Set Free" covers the years 1835 to 1851, when Mr. Turner died at age 76. The show, which runs through Jan. 25, has 177 artworks and related objects. That includes 63 of Mr. Turner's oil paintings and rich examples of his watercolor works on paper — as well as his palette, spectacles and death mask.