



# nesta

## HOME-ZERO CREATIVE COMMISSION CALL-OUT

### Curatorial and Historical Context

#### PART 1 – SOME RELEVANT PAINTINGS

*This is not meant to be an exhaustive list; these examples are provided as a starting point for teams, who are free to consider the wider collection*

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/search-the-collection>.

#### Climate change

**Painting 1: Hendrick Avercamp, *A Scene on the Ice near a Town*, about 1615 (NG1479):** The Little Ice Age settled over Northern Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Rivers and canals in Holland froze over and people took to the ice for work, leisure – and accidents. Hendrik Avercamp, just starting out as an artist, took to it too. His life's work became the depiction of winter scenes full of incident with the people he knew and had grown up with as his characters



**Painting 2: Hendrick Avercamp, *A Winter Scene with Skaters near a Castle*, about 1608-9 (NG1346):** Avercamp's career began at the time the Little Ice Age hit Northern Europe. He spent his life producing these winter pictures and only rarely left his town of Kampen – though the place in this painting is an imaginary town.



**Painting 3: Claude Monet, *Flood Waters*, 1890 (NG6278):** While this painting shows the same concern with weather effects and atmospheric harmony as Monet's famous series pictures, it was not conceived as part of a series. It is a record of the extensive flood caused by torrential rain that fell in the autumn of 1896, when the Epte burst its banks and overflowed into the meadow next to Monet's property. Obligated to remain close to home, Monet painted the waterlogged landscape that he saw in front of him, including the row of pollarded willows that stood on the edge of the meadow which he had only recently painted bathed in the glorious spring sunshine.



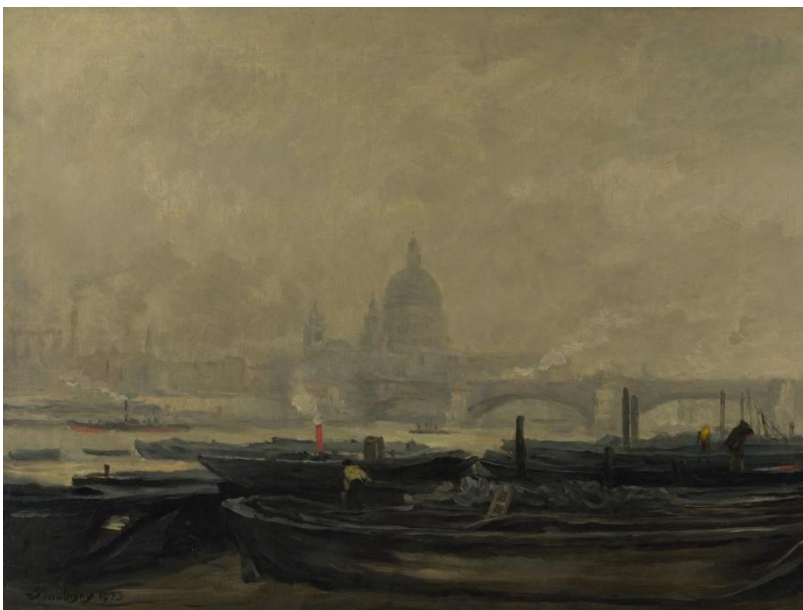
## The industrial revolution and large-scale exploitation of fossil fuels to support cheap energy

**Painting 4: Georges Seurat, *Bathers at Asnières*, 1884 (NG3908):** Numerous men and boys relax on the banks of the Seine at Asnières and Courbevoie, an industrial suburb north-west of central Paris. In the background there is a railway bridge that partly hides a parallel road bridge, as well as the chimneys of the gas plant and factories at Clichy, where some of the men may work.



**Painting 5: Charles-François Daubigny, *St Paul's from the Surrey Side*, about 1870-3 (NG2876):**

The shadowy dome of St Paul's Cathedral is viewed from the south bank of the Thames. The newly built Blackfriars Bridge straddles the river; behind it a train, invisible but for its plume of smoke, passes over Blackfriars Railway Bridge. The leaden sky is being polluted; smoke coming from the train, the chimney on the left and the boats on the river mingles with the clouds.





**Painting 6: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Rain, Steam, and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, 1844**

**(NG538):** A steam engine comes towards us as it crosses the Maidenhead Railway Bridge in the rain. Designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the bridge was completed in 1838. We are looking east towards London as the train heads to the west. Turner lightly brushed in a hare roughly midway along the rail track to represent the speed of the natural world in contrast to the mechanised speed of the engine. Turner frequently painted scenes of contemporary life and was particularly interested in industry and technology. Alongside the hare, Turner emphasises the theme of speed by including two small details. On the river on the left, you can see a small boat and, barely visible near the right edge of the picture, a man drives a horse-drawn plough. Both the boat and the plough are examples of relatively slow, non-mechanised activity. As in *The Fighting Temeraire*, Turner contrasts the pre-industrial with the modern.



**Painting 7: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire*, 1839 (NG524):** Turner's painting shows the final journey of the *Temeraire*, as the ship is towed from Sheerness in Kent along the river Thames to Rotherhithe in south-east London, where it was to be scrapped. The veteran warship had played a distinguished role in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, but by 1838 was over 40 years old and had been sold off by the Admiralty. Turner deliberately altered the construction of the tug, placing its black funnel in front of its mast rather than behind it, allowing a long plume of sooty smoke to blow backwards through the *Temeraire's* masts. This revision heightens the drama of the scene and adds the possible symbolic dimension of steam power over taking sail power.

Also see <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/oct/28/jmw-turner-air-pollution-in-art-rain-steam-and-speed> for a discussion of Turner's paintings, industrialisation and air pollution.

## Images capturing how we lived in our homes

### Painting 8: Quiringh van Brekelenkam, *An Interior, with a Man and a Woman seated by a Fire*, 1653

(NG1329): Van Brekelenkam's interiors are imaginary, and his figures are generally not portraits but represent atmospheric moments in an ideal home. This painting shows a contented couple, husband and wife. The pots and pans are clean and orderly, and she has laid out a lunch of bread, cheese and ham on an immaculate cloth – a simple meal, but there is plenty of it. The man puffs on his pipe and enjoys the heat of the fire. This model couple is also patriotic - a map of the Netherlands hangs next to the fireplace.



Painting 9: Paul Cézanne, *The Stove in the Studio*, about 1865 (NG6509): It evokes the privation of his Bohemian existence in the capital. The scrutiny of everyday objects and simple frontal composition are particularly reminiscent of Chardin's *Copper Cistern*, which Cezanne studied in the Louvre in 1869.



## **PART 2 – HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY**

### **The National Gallery as a private home**

**(a) No. 100 Pall Mall:** this was John Julius Angerstein's London town house. He lived there from the 1790s until his retirement in 1811 when he moved permanently to his suburban villa 'Woodlands' in Blackheath. In an informal way and through a system of ticketing, he let aspiring painters associated with the nearby Royal Academy schools come and study his evolving art collection, including JMW Turner. The National Gallery opened there on 10 May 1824 after Lord Liverpool's government had purchased 38 paintings from Angerstein's collection as the nucleus of a national painting collection. Having initially nowhere to show the collection, the government also paid for the remaining lease on Angerstein's home, which meant that the original National Gallery was in effect a select private collection shown in a London town house. The collection moved into purpose-built accommodation, designed by William Wilkins on Trafalgar Square, in 1838, which was opened to the public by Queen Victoria.

**(b) Wilkins' Building:** Ralph Nicholson Wornum, Keeper and Secretary of the National Gallery from 1855 to 1877, had 14 children, and lived onsite at the National Gallery with his family. Wornum's most important legacy is, arguably, his working diary, preserved in the Gallery's archive. He kept between 13 August 1855 and 21 November 1877 and so it covers the period not only when Eastlake was Director, but also the directorships of Eastlake's two immediate successors, William Boxall and Frederic Burton. The Diary commemorates not only great events in the Gallery's history but also mundane events of daily life of his family living in the bowels of the Gallery's building, having to put up with such unpleasantness as rats and missiles being hurled through their windows by the soldiers in the barracks next door (e.g. entry for 7 December 1863: 'At 10 minutes before 9 a soldier (1st Bat: Coldstream Guards) threw a crust of bread through my bedroom window, smashing the glass and sending it all over the room, at the risk of injury to my wife & child standing near the window – sent complaint to commanding officer'). Ultimately, the risk of fire from the family's living quarters was considered too great for the valuable art collection so the family moved out.

### **Pollution issues at the Gallery**

When the Gallery opened in 1824 and when it moved into its purpose-built Gallery, the Wilkins' Building in 1838, the atmosphere of central London was heavily polluted. Consequently, in 1850 and 1853, the House of Commons appointed committees to examine the effects of this pollution on the Gallery's collection.

Before the introduction of artificial lighting, the Gallery often had to be closed on dark days as there was insufficient natural light for visitors to see the paintings properly. Sir Charles Eastlake, first Director for a decade from 1855 was against the introduction of gas lighting as he feared that chemical emissions were harmful to fragile historical works on display. By contrast, Sir Henry Cole, first Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum (then known as the South Kensington Museum), employed gas lighting which meant he became an early advocate of evening opening for public art galleries and museums. In 1914 the decision to install electricity was taken and by 1935 the whole Gallery was equipped with the new form of artificial lighting.

### **1928 Thames Flood that devastated paintings stored in the Tate Gallery**

Many pictures, including the French 19<sup>th</sup>-century *Allegory* (NG2289), were severely damaged in a flood at the Tate Gallery in 1928. Today much of this painting is covered by paper to hold the paint in place. Black-and-white photographs taken before the flood damage provide a record of the original composition.

## Further Reading

S. Avery-Quash, 'John Julius Angerstein and the development of his art collection at No. 100, Pall Mall, London', in S. Avery-Quash and K. Retford (eds), *The Georgian London Town House: Building, Collecting and Display*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018, pp. 247-66.

S. Avery-Quash, "'The lover of the fine arts is well amused with the choice pictures that adorn the house": John Julius Angerstein's "other" art collection at his suburban villa, 'Woodlands', *Journal of the History of Collections* (published 23 December 2017): fhx055, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhx055>.

S. Avery-Quash, 'Sir Charles Eastlake and conservation at the National Gallery, London', in the series, 'The art of conservation', *The Burlington Magazine*, CLVII (December 2015), pp. 846–54.

J. Padfield, S. Vandyke and D. Carr, 'Improving our Environment', published March 2013.  
<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/improving-our-environment>