

ISLINGTON U3A

OUTING TO MARGATE TO VISIT THE TURNER CONTEMPORARY GALLERY,

Tuesday 8th October 2019

30 members travelled by mid-morning train from St Pancras to visit the Turner Prize exhibition in Margate's modern Turner Contemporary Gallery. Many of the members had never previously visited Margate.



Margate was once a prosperous seaside town with many visitors but has declined in the post-war period largely because many holiday makers now prefer package holidays in the sun. Efforts to improve the town economically have centered on the inner Old Town, the re-opening of the Victorian Dreamland fairground, and the Turner Contemporary Gallery, which opened in 2011. Tracey Emin was brought up in Margate and now has a studio there. A good train service and a large sandy beach have also

contributed to Margate's popularity in summer weekends.

The Gallery's successful bid to host the Turner Prize in Margate is part of the regeneration effort. The exhibition is held in alternate years at the Tate or a regional gallery; it is the first time that the venue for the Turner Prize has had a direct connection with JMW Turner as the gallery stands beside the harbour on the site of the lodging house where Turner stayed.



One of the best-known prizes for the visual arts in the world, the Turner Prize aims to promote public debate around new developments in contemporary British art. Established in 1984, the prize is named after JMW Turner (1775-1851). It is awarded to a British artist for an outstanding exhibition or other presentation of their work in the past twelve months. Our U3A group was given a guided tour by the curator, Rowan Geddis. One member commented: "He was very knowledgeable and explained the works in a way that made them

accessible to someone like me with little grasp of conceptual art." We saw Oscar Murillo's 'Collective conscience' – papier-mâché effigies sitting on pew benches. These figures had been brought to Margate by train and wheelchair. Then our guide discussed an audio-visual installation by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, who conducted interviews with former Syrian prisoners and then reproduced the sounds that prisoners heard from their cells together with their words. Tai Shani contributed a large installation which also acted as a performance space, based on a medieval book about virtuous women.

The fourth artist, Helen Cammock, submitted a film called 'The Long Note' exploring the overlooked role that women played in the civil rights movement in Derry at the beginning of the Northern Ireland Troubles. She combines contemporary footage of demonstrations with

interviews with Bernadette Devlin McAliskey. The awards ceremony for the Turner Prize will be shown by BBC on 3 December from Dreamland.

Our second visit was a great contrast to the Turner Prize entrants. Margate Museum is housed in the small building which had been the police station and magistrates court. It was opened for us by volunteers. The contents cover the history of the town from its earliest days with objects, posters and photographs, with a former prison cell displaying the history of Dreamland.



The curators had mounted a display about Margate in Turner's time; he had been at school on the town and subsequently visited often. The U3A members enjoyed this visit and would have liked to spend longer there.

Our visit to Margate ended for some of us with fish and chips on the seafront; the tide was out and the sun shone over the town and the sea. One member wrote "lovely to see the sea again and smell the salt air!" and another said "I thought it was a wonderful outing and enjoyed it thoroughly."