Public access description

This is one of two paintings by Turner depicting the Royal Yacht Club races at the Isle of Wight. They were painted for the architect John Nash, who lived in East Cowes Castle, which can be seen in the background. The critic John Ruskin believed this to be 'one of the highest pieces of intellectual art existing'.
note as anticipating the present work in that 'although the exhibited titles give prominence to "East Cowes Castle", the castle itself plays an extremely minor role in the finished compositions'. They also draw attention to the figures just discernible in the background, which are sketched in the manner of Watteau, as in the 1822 painting "What You Will!

The companion painting 'East Cowes Castle, the Seat of J Nash, Esq., the Regatta Beating to Windward', also exhibited at the RA in 1828, is now in the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana (see Butlin and Joll p135, cat no 242, repr pl 262). Preparatory oil sketches made on his visit to Cowes are in the Tate Gallery (Butlin and Joll pp142-5, cat nos 260-8); three relate to the present work, and Reynolds suggests two were painted directly on the spot. There is a small (33.1 X 49.2 cm/13 X 19? ins) picture, 'Yachting at Cowes', in the Auckland City Art Gallery, New Zealand, supposedly signed and dated 1835, with a similar composition; Butlin and Joll doubt its authenticity (repr Connoisseur March 1959, p91).

Reynolds deals at length with the physical condition of the present work.

Historical context note

JMW Turner was born Covent Garden, London, 23 April 1775, son of a barber. Entered RA Schools 1789. In a long and exceptionally distinguished career, exhibited 259 works at the RA between 1790 and 1850 and 17 at the BI 1806-1846, predominantly landscapes, sometimes with historical themes. Generally considered the greatest painter in the history of British art. Died Chelsea, London, 19 December 1851 and buried in St Paul's Cathedral. Bequeathed his extensive collection of oil paintings and watercolours to the nation, now principally housed in the Clore wing of the Tate Gallery.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O80862/east-cowes-castle-oil-painting-turner-joseph-mallord/