

The background of the cover is a reproduction of the painting 'The Ten O'Clock' by James McNeill Whistler. It depicts a woman in a dark, patterned dress with a vibrant red shawl, seated and looking down at a framed picture she is holding. The picture shows a landscape with a blue sky and a yellow sun. The setting is an interior with a staircase and a window in the background.

'THE TEN O'CLOCK'

James McNeill Whistler and his Art World



OLD SHIPPING CLIPPERS
TO LET EVERY DAY.
GLASGOW IMPERIAL
CHARGES & PETROLEUM

BLACK LION W

Whistler: 1859



'THE TEN O'CLOCK'

*James McNeill Whistler
and his Art World*

THE JOURNAL OF THE WHISTLER SOCIETY
NUMBER 2. 2020



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[cover]
*Caprice in Purple and Gold-
The Golden Screen*, 1864.
Oil on wood panel, 50.1 x 68.5 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, DC.
Exhibited at the Royal Academy 1865.
(detail)

[front endpaper]
Black Lion Wharf, 1859.
Etching, 15.3 x 22.9 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York .
Exhibited at the Royal Academy 1860.

[title page]
Edward Poynter (1836–1919),
Portrait of Whistler, 1858.
Pencil on paper, 18.6 x 13.2 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, DC.
(actual size)

[rear endpaper]
Old Putney Bridge, 1879.
Etching and drypoint. State 7/7.
Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville.
The last work by Whistler exhibited at the
Royal Academy 1879.

CONTENTS

7	<i>INTRODUCTION</i> – <i>Martin Riley</i>	<i>TWO PATRONS:</i>
11	<i>PREFACE</i> – <i>Charles Saumarez Smith</i>	49 Frederick Richards Leyland: The 'Liverpool Medici' – <i>Devon Cox</i>
13	<i>MODERN ARTIST:</i> The 'Heroism of Modern Life': Whistler's 'Piano Picture' – <i>Simon Wartnaby</i>	57 William Cleverley Alexander: Interior harmonies at Aubrey House – <i>Jeremy Musson</i>
21	The Elusive Honour: James McNeill Whistler and The Royal Academy – <i>Daniel E. Sutherland</i>	<i>A TEST FOR TASTE:</i> 65 Whistler at the National Gallery – <i>Charles Saumarez Smith</i>
29	Radical Chelsea: Whistler, Mazzini and Emilie Venturi. – <i>Justin McCann</i>	<i>REVIEWS:</i> 75 'Edward Burne-Jones', Tate Britain – <i>Thomas Hughes</i>
35	Whistler's Master Printer, Auguste Delâtre – <i>Donato Esposito</i>	77 'The Great Spectacle: 250 Years of the Summer Exhibition', The Royal Academy, London – <i>Simon Wartnaby</i>
41	The Butterfly Behind the Man: Whistler's monogram – <i>Polina Atabekian</i>	



Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904),
Homage to Delacroix, 1864.
 Oil on canvas, 160 x 250 cm.
 Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

1. Louis Edmond Duranty
2. Henri Fantin-Latour
3. Jules Champfleury
4. Charles Baudelaire
5. Louis Cordier
6. Alphonse Legros
7. James Whistler
8. Édouard Manet
9. Félix Bracquemond
10. Albert de Balleroy

INTRODUCTION

Martin Riley
Chairman, Whistler Society

THE SECOND VOLUME OF THE WHISTLER SOCIETY'S JOURNAL, 'THE TEN O'CLOCK', FOCUSES ON WHISTLER THE 'MODERN ARTIST' AND HIS EARLY CAREER, UP TO THE 1870S.

THE PREFACE TO THE JOURNAL RAISES THE QUESTION WHY THERE ARE NO WHISTLERS AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY. THE ESSAYS COVER VARIOUS ASPECTS OF WHISTLER'S EARLY YEARS INCLUDING HIS NON-ELECTION TO THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS IN 1867. ALSO INCLUDED ARE ILLUSTRATIONS OF NINE OF THE SIXTEEN PAINTINGS THAT WHISTLER SUBMITTED AND WERE ACCEPTED BY THE ROYAL ACADEMY, BETWEEN 1859 AND 1879, FOR THEIR PRESTIGIOUS ANNUAL EXHIBITIONS. THE FINAL ARTICLE SETS OUT THE STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WHISTLER PAINTINGS AFTER THEY WERE DONATED TO THE NATIONAL GALLERY IN LONDON. IN CONCLUSION THERE ARE REVIEWS OF TWO RECENT EXHIBITIONS.

THE THIRD VOLUME, PLANNED FOR NEXT YEAR, WILL FOCUS ON WHISTLER AS AN 'INTERNATIONAL ARTIST' AFTER 1880; INCLUDING HIS CONNECTION WITH PARIS WHERE HE LIVED IN THE 1890S, AND HIS CLOSE FRIENDSHIP AND CORRESPONDENCE WITH STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ, WHO TRANSLATED WHISTLER'S 'TEN O'CLOCK' LECTURE.





Portrait of the Artist, 1878.
Chalk and pastel on brown paper
on card, 16.9 x 12.7 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, DC.

PREFACE

Charles Saumarez Smith
Honorary Patron, Whistler Society

WHY ARE THERE NO WHISTLERS IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY? HOW IS IT THAT AN ARTIST OF SUCH SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CANON OF LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ART IS MISSING FROM BRITAIN'S MOST IMPORTANT COLLECTION OF OLD MASTER PAINTINGS? WHAT DOES IT TELL ONE ABOUT THE FORMATION OF TASTE IN BRITAIN IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY THAT WHISTLER, WHO FIGURES SO PROMINENTLY IN NARRATIVES OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY ART, IS ABSENT FROM THE WALLS OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY, WHICH IS ORGANISED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO GIVE A DEFINITIVE ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORY OF WESTERN EUROPEAN PAINTING UP UNTIL THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY?

I WAS ENCOURAGED TO ASK THESE QUESTIONS WHEN, AS DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY, I GAVE THE WHISTLER CENTENARY LECTURE AT THE HUNTERIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY ON THE ANNIVERSARY DAY OF HIS DEATH 11 JULY 2003. AN EXTRACT FROM THE LECTURE HAS NOW BEEN ADAPTED FOR THIS JOURNAL AS A TEST FOR TASTE.

SINCE THE LECTURE, THE GALLERY HAS BROADENED ITS REMIT AND, IN 2014, BOUGHT THE FIRST PAINTING BY AN AMERICAN ARTIST, *MEN OF DOCKS* (1912) BY GEORGE BELLOWS; IT WAS ALSO ALLOCATED IN LIEU OF INHERITANCE TAX A PAINTING BY JOHN SINGER SARGENT, *WINEGLASSES* (c.1875), IN 2018. I HOPE THAT THESE CHANGES MIGHT MEAN THAT WHISTLER COULD, LIKE SARGENT, BE RECOGNISED BY THE NATIONAL GALLERY AS AN INTERNATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT ARTIST AND HIS WORK ONE DAY ADDED TO THE PERMANENT COLLECTION.





MODERN ARTIST

-
- 13 The 'Heroism of Modern Life': Whistler's 'Piano Picture'
– *Simon Wartnaby*
-
- 21 The Elusive Honour: James McNeill Whistler and the Royal Academy
– *Daniel E. Sutherland*
-
- 29 Radical Chelsea: Whistler, Mazzini and Emilie Venturi.
– *Justin McCann*
-
- 35 Whistler's Master Printer, Auguste Delâtre
– *Donato Esposito*
-
- 41 The Butterfly Behind the Man: Whistler's monogram
– *Polina Atabekian*

Wapping on Thames, 1860–64.
Oil on canvas, 72 x 101.8 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
Exhibited at the Royal Academy 1864.

THE 'HEROISM OF MODERN LIFE'

Whistler's 'Piano Picture'

SIMON WARTNABY

Whistler was 24 when he completed his first major oil painting, *At the Piano*, 1858–59, (Taft Museum, Cincinnati), an astonishing and daring performance of modernity for its French-inspired realism and domestic subject matter. It was the outcome of three years of artistic study in Paris, where he had much admired the realism of Gustave Courbet, who had set out his aim of 'translating the customs, ideas and appearance of his epoch' in

his *Realist manifesto* (1855). Similar ideas of the 'heroism of modern life' had been advanced by the influential Parisian writer and critic Charles Baudelaire in his essay *The Salon of 1846* (1846). For Whistler the subject of his painting included a close, significant and emotional content with the family Christmas of 1858. I will discuss the site of the painting, the family involved, their home and the music room, and music culture. The intention is to provide a context for understanding the 'heroism of modern life' in the painting that Whistler referred to as the 'Piano Picture'.

The subject of Whistler's painting is his half-sister, Deborah Deleno Haden (1825–1909), who is seen engrossed in playing the grand piano in the music room of the family home, 62 Sloane Street, London, while her daughter Annie (1848–1937) looks on intently. The picture came about after Whistler's stay with the Hadens' for Christmas 1858. Whistler describes what happened after the visit in a letter to Deborah, sometime between his return to Paris on 12 January 1859 and the end of the month, in which he says: 'I'm working hard and my stay in London with you and Seymour has done me an immense good in "my art" ... I have prepared sketches for two pictures and have drawn one of them in on the canvass [sic], all from Nature tell Seymour.' The sketch that he says he has drawn on the canvas is most likely to have been the 'Piano Picture' which he completed in Paris by May 1859 when it was submitted to the Paris Salon. The painting was rejected by the Salon, and shown at the studio of his friend Francois



At the Piano, 1858–59.
Oil on canvas, 67.0 x 90.5 cm.
Taft Museum, Cincinnati, OH.
Exhibited at the Royal Academy 1860.



Annie, 1858/59.
Pencil on card, 17.3 x 11.2 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, DC.



Bonvin. The following year he submitted the painting to the Royal Academy summer exhibition and it was accepted. This was Whistler's first triumph and had been praised by *The Times* critic who referred to the 'powerful effect obtained by the simplest and sombrest colours' and concluded that it was 'the most vigorous piece of colouring' in the exhibition.

The painting embodies the significance of Whistler's emotional closeness to Deborah and her family when he stayed with them for Christmas in 1858. She was fond of her younger step-brother especially when the family were growing up in St Petersburg between 1843 and 1847, and encouraged his interest in art. In 1847 she married the surgeon Francis Seymour Haden (1818–1910) and they moved into 62 Sloane Street. The following year they invited Whistler to spend Christmas with them, and while staying there Seymour encouraged the boy's interest in art and took him to galleries, museums, print shops, and lectures, and they talked about art and drew together. It was following this stay that Whistler told his parents he wanted to be an artist. Ten years later Whistler was invited to stay again for Christmas 1858. It was on this occasion that Seymour was helping Whistler to publish in London

[above]
123, Sloane Street, London.
Google Street View.

[above left]
62, Sloane Street, London.
Photograph, 1956.
City of London: London
Metropolitan Archives.

his 'French Set' etchings that he had just completed. Seymour had also invited Auguste Delâtre (who had printed the 'French Set' for Whistler) so that he could teach them both the techniques of printing etchings on the press that Seymour had just installed in his study.

The Hadens' house in Sloane Street was actually where Seymour had been born and where his father Charles Thomas Haden (1786–1824) had practised as a doctor. It was a middle class end-of-terrace house on the corner of Hans Street, built in the 1780s. It was part of a speculative development of houses on the Cadogan estate, designed by the architect Henry Holland, that stretched from

Knightsbridge southwards to Sloane Square. A panoramic view of the surrounding area can be seen in Seymour's etching *Out of Study Window* (1859) taken from his study on the top floor. This was a city that experienced spectacular growth in wealth and population in the nineteenth century, from about one million people in 1800 to three million in 1860.

The plain Georgian brick terraces of Sloane Street were old fashioned by 1858 in comparison with the new Italianate stucco mansions being built in South Kensington and Bayswater. However, Sloane Street was still a fashionable area especially for the middle-class professionals such as the Hadens. The house was deep and narrow, with tall, high-ceilinged rooms, fitted carpets and servants. Originally of three storeys with a basement and attic, and built in a 'creamy' brick, it looked similar to No. 123, the only original house now surviving in Sloane Street. By the time the Hadens' lived there it had been extended to incorporate consulting rooms on the ground floor, and had enough room to accommodate a family of four children as well as guests and servants. In the 1861 census there were four servants: housemaid, cook, nursemaid, and a footman, who probably lived in the mews house which had been built at the rear. The music room might have been located on the ground floor at the rear. As can be seen from a 1956 photograph of the house, subsequent alterations were made after the Hadens had left, including additional floors and relocation of the entrance from the front of the house on Sloane Street to the side, on Hans



[above top]
Seymour Haden (1818–1910),
Out of Study Window, 1859.
Etching and dry point.
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY.

[above]
Ordnance Survey, London
(First Edition) XLIII (City of Westminster)
surveyed 1869, published 1878, detail.

Street. The house was demolished c.1971 to make way for the Danish Embassy.

For the Whistler family the passion for music had been a feature of their life in St Petersburg. Whistler's mother, Anna, mentions her husband Major George Washington Whistler and her stepdaughter Deborah playing duets together on harp and piano, and in a letter describes 'the harmony of the thrilling notes her taper fingers will draw from piano or harp.' Whistler depicts Deborah in his 'Piano Picture' engrossed in her playing the family grand piano, and doing so with such familiarity that she did not need sheet music. She



had learnt to play the piano as a girl, and was competent enough for her to be invited to perform at Frederic Leighton's musical soirées, and Anna Whistler, also mentions her accompanying the famous virtuoso violinist Henryk Wieniawski at Lady Denbigh's soirée in South Kensington for the King of Hanover in 1876. In the painting Deborah is discreetly and fashionably dressed in a black crinoline, and Annie in white. The fashion for the crinoline in women's dress reached its apogee in the 1850s and can be seen in contemporary photographs such as those by Seymour's friend Clementina, Lady Hawarden (1822–65) at Princes Gardens in South Kensington. Seymour also came from a family with a musical background, his mother having been a musician, and he can be seen playing a cello in a drawing by Whistler of c.1855 (*Seymour Haden playing the cello* (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC)).

Music-making in middle-class homes was often a common feature of family life in the nineteenth century and would probably have been encouraged by Deborah and Seymour. Apart from the classical repertoire, Whistler's mother says in 1864 the Hadens' 'Sunday evening exercises are bible & sacred music'. In the painting there is further evidence of a cello and a violin case underneath the piano, perhaps Seymour's cello or that of another member of the family. The oldest child Annie certainly enjoyed singing, and her step grandmother, Anna Whistler, mentions in 1876 that Annie starred in a private performance of Offenbach's operetta *Blue Beard*. Annie's brother Arthur (1852–1910) was to become an enthusiastic violinist, although his father insisted he qualified as surgeon before becoming a professional musician, composer and conductor in Dundee and marrying a soprano singer. There is no record of the musical accomplishments of his two brothers, Francis (1850–1918), who after Oxford

[above]
A proposed panorama of the Music Room at 62 Sloane Street.

From left to right: *At the Piano*, 1858–59; *Reading by Lamplight*, 1859 (etching, reversed); *Harmony in Green and Rose - The Music Room*, 1860–61; and Edward John Poynter, *Whistler drawing Poynter*, 1860 (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC).



Reading by Lamplight, 1859.
Etching. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

University had a successful colonial career in the government of the British Colony of Natal; and Harry (1855–77), who died of dysentery in Australia.

The site of the 'Piano Picture' is the music room, which can be more closely examined in a series of pictures Whistler completed around this time. Apart from music, other cultural leisure activities also took place in the room, including reading, as can be seen in the etching, *The Music Room* (1859), where Seymour reads a newspaper and Deborah a book. Another activity was the appreciation of art in the form of the prints displayed on the walls and the picture propped up under the pier glass, perhaps waiting to be looked at more closely and to be hung, when the right spot can be found for it. There also appears to be an appreciation of ceramics, with the possibly Chinese blue-and-white shallow bowl displayed in the painting on a table behind Deborah in the 'Piano Picture' and the neoclassical porcelain vase, perhaps of Parisian manufacture, seen under the pier glass mirror in *Harmony in Green and Rose: The Music Room*, 1860–61 (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC). The room is decorated in a plain mid-nineteenth-century fashion with cream-coloured walls and light green dado. There are two large prints in broad molded gilt frames hanging on the wall behind the grand piano. Whistler has included in the 'Piano Picture' reflections on the glazed prints of gilt picture frames on the opposite wall, and these pictures can be seen in *The Music Room*. Sitting close by the window in this painting is Annie, in white, while nearby stands Isabella Boott (a relative of Seymour), and in the pier glass can be seen a reflection of Deborah. Prominent in both the 'Piano Picture' and *The Music Room* is a display of conspicuous consumption in the form of a luxurious deep red-coloured fitted carpet and, in *The Music Room*,



[opposite]
*Harmony in Green and Rose -
 The Music Room, 1860–61.*
 Oil on canvas, 95.5 x 70.8 cm.
 Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
 Institution, Washington, DC.

lavish multi-coloured chintz fabric curtains. Both fabrics and carpets had by the 1850s become more affordable for the middle class, using newly developed power looms to mass produce fabrics and carpets, while the introduction of artificial dyes allowed the use of much brighter colours. The chintz fabric has also been used to drape the fireplace, suggesting the scene is set in the summertime, and next to the fireplace a bell push indicates the latent presence of servants. The painting also shows us the improvements in nineteenth-century lighting, as candles were replaced by the considerably more efficient Argand oil lamps, an example of which can be seen behind Annie, on its tall stand. In Whistler's etching, *The Music Room* (1859), a table oil lamp with its reflective shade is used to illuminate the room, rather than the candelabra in front of the pier glass mirror.

The piano had become the most important instrument for music-making in middle-class homes from the 1830s, and learning to play was often expected to be part of a child's education. One of the main centres for piano-making in Europe was London where by the end of the nineteenth century there were 454 manufacturers. A well-known maker was Broadwood, which was busiest in the 1850s, when they were manufacturing 2,500 instruments annually, and exporting pianos across Europe including St Petersburg and Moscow.

The Haden's grand piano as depicted in Whistler's painting has a richly figured rosewood case, and was probably the Whistler family piano that had been shipped to Deborah from St Petersburg in 1849 after her father's death. It had been acquired in St Petersburg and its maker is not known, nor its subsequent history. Whistler gives it a prominent central position, which is unusual in contemporary paintings. There are examples such as *A Chelsea Interior, 1857–58* (National Trust), by Robert Scott Tait, (exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858) which shows in the near left-hand side an old-fashioned square piano that Thomas Carlyle had inherited from his mother in 1842. A second example is the prominent modern upright piano in the foreground of Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience, 1853* (Tate Britain, London) which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858.

The 'Piano Picture' is Whistler's first major painting and daringly demonstrates Baudelaire's 'heroism of modern life' and Courbet's French realism. The subject is an expression of Whistler's personal closeness and human warmth for the Haden family, and their importance for his art. It is set in the music room of the Haden's middle class home in fashionable Sloane Street and displays their preoccupations of wealth and taste, their music-making and leisure activities. This is the luxury and conspicuous consumption of a comfortable family in the wealthy mid-nineteenth-century metropolis of London. The painting also became Whistler's first success, at the Royal Academy summer exhibition of 1860, and that success played a part in his decision to move to London, where he would live the rest of his life.

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 and an architectural historian.*

THE ELUSIVE HONOUR

James McNeill Whistler and the Royal Academy

DANIEL E. SUTHERLAND

James McNeill Whistler received many official honours during his life. His exhibited work and several paintings, most notably the portraits of his mother and Thomas Carlyle, were purchased by great museums. He won numerous medals and accolades, was made an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Munich (1888) and awarded the Cross of St Michael of Bavaria (1889). He became an Officier of the Légion d'honneur (1892), and, toward the end of his life, received an honorary doctorate from the University of Glasgow (1903). Whistler, who took more than ordinary delight in any public recognition of his genius, relished the attention. His childish glee amused friends, even if each honour could only momentarily relieve his deep-rooted insecurities or satisfy his insistent craving for fame.

Despite all that, one honour, the most important one in his eyes, eluded him: election to the Royal Academy of Arts. By the time of his death, few people questioned the quality of Whistler's work. Yes, many of his paintings had been controversial. The nocturnes, most certainly, drew frowns from traditionalists. Even the portrait of his mother was initially rejected by the selection committee of the Academy for the annual summer exhibition in 1872. Still, these objectionable works did not come until the 1870s, well past the time, for reasons that will become clear, he might have become an Academician.

The first painting Whistler exhibited at the Academy, *At the Piano*, 1858–59 (Taft Museum, Cincinnati), won nearly universal praise. John Everett Millais, himself elected an Associate of the Academy seven years earlier, called it 'the finest piece of colour that has been on the walls of the Royal Academy for years.' George Frederic Watts, whose own work had little in common with Whistler's 'realism', described *At the Piano* as 'the most perfect thing he had ever seen.' It might be noted, too, that 48% of the works submitted for exhibition in 1860 were accepted, a sign that the Academy had determined to be more selective. Between 1861 and 1867, Whistler exhibited fifteen more paintings at the Royal Academy, including such exquisite works as *The Last of Old Westminster*, 1862 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*, 1865 (Tate Britain, London), not to mention ten etchings.

So what went wrong? Given the Academy's rules, it is difficult to tell when Whistler first became eligible for election as one of the twenty Associates,



Symphony in White, No. 3, 1867.
Oil on canvas, 52.0 x 76.5 cm.
Barber Institute of Fine Arts,
University of Birmingham.
Royal Academy, Summer Exhibition 1867.



Sea and Rain, 1865.

Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 72.7 cm.

Museum of Art, University
of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

Royal Academy, Summer Exhibition, 1867.

a necessary first step to becoming an Academician. Before 1867, artists who had exhibited in the summer show could nominate themselves by 'inscribing their names on the Books of the Academy.' They would then be considered for election should any vacancies occur due to death, retirement or promotion. That made 1861 the earliest that Whistler could have been eligible. Unfortunately, before 1867, we have no way of knowing who the candidates might have been, only the results of each election. This is because all ballots, or 'marked lists' as they were called, were destroyed after the election, and the minutes of the Academy's General Assembly recorded only the names of candidates who had received votes. Neither do the 'Books of the Academy' exist.

Whistler was not elected in 1861. As it was, 1861 was a tough year for newcomers. An unusually large number of five Associates were elected, including three painters and two sculptors, but they were all well-established in their professions, their average age being 42. No minimum age was required for election, as seen, for example, in the selection of Millais at age 24 (Whistler turned 27 in 1861). However, at least in the 1860s, experience did seem to matter. No vacancies occurred in 1862, and in 1863, Whistler's first realistic chance of election, experience again won out. The Academy's records, which are the principal source for this article, show that Whistler was not among the ten men who received votes that year, and that the painter Henry LeJeune, aged 44, was elected to fill the single vacancy. Besides longevity, another consideration, unspoken but clearly in play, was whether a candidate had been a student in one of the Academy's schools, and so trained in accepted academic practices and theories. That too benefitted LeJeune, just as it would always hinder Whistler.

The following year, 1864, should have brought Whistler luck. There were three vacancies, and he had exhibited *The Last of Old Westminster*, 1862 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) in 1863. Nonetheless, he was not one of the ten men who received votes across the three elections. The winners that year were painters Philip H. Calderon and Frederic Leighton, and sculptor Edward B. Stephens. Experience was not as much a factor as in the past, for while Stephens was 49, Calderon was a year younger than Whistler, and Leighton just four years his senior. However, both Calderon and Stephens had studied in the Academy schools, and Leighton (as well as Calderon) had benefited from instruction at James M. Leigh's private art school, which stressed 'classical' tenets.

The years 1865 to 1866 were tumultuous ones for the Royal Academy. A Royal Commission on the Fine Arts had been established in 1863, and in 1865 had proposed a number of reforms to make the Academy 'more useful in promoting Art and in improving and developing public taste.' One of its recommendations could have helped Whistler's chances of being elected, was that the Commission wanted the Academy to expand membership by adding eight new Academicians (to a total of 50) and twenty new Associates (to a total of 40). The Academy opposed the increase in Academicians but agreed to maintain the current number of Associates as a minimum, with an understanding that the maximum would be 'indefinite'.

That set the stage for the dramatic 1866 election, in which six vacancies were to be filled. Nineteen different men received votes on one or more of the six ballots. Whistler was not among them, but there is some question as to whether he had even been listed. Because several changes recommended by the Royal Commission in the structure and operation of the Academy were still being debated, the custom of signing the 'Book of the Academy' had been suspended in 1865, and it is unclear whether the names considered for election in 1866 came from the 1864 registry or if candidates were required to register anew. If the latter, Whistler would have been left out, as he was in the midst of his famous Chilean adventure.

Had Whistler been present in London, it is difficult to judge how he would have fared against the competition that year. The successful candidates in 1866 were the painters Henry T. Wells, Erskine Nicol, John Pettie and William F. Yeames; sculptor Joseph Durham; and architect George Edmund Street. Durham was the oldest of the lot, having been born in 1814, and his extremely popular work included busts of Queen Victoria and Jenny Lind, and the statue of Prince Albert that graced the 'Memorial to the Exhibition of 1851' (1863) in South Kensington. The painters were closer to Whistler in age, two of them being about a decade older, with the other two—Yeames and Pettie—born, like Whistler, in the 1830s. However, despite not having attended the Academy's schools, all painted in the 'finished' classical style cherished by the Academy and chose subjects from the approved historical-genre canon.

That said, they also shared some tantalising similarities with Whistler. Yeames had been born in Russia, the son of a British consul, and like Whistler, spent part of his youth in that country. He went on to study art in Germany, England and Italy before becoming associated with London's St John's Wood clique of artists. One of its leaders, Philip Calderon ARA, doubtless lobbied for Whistler's election, as did Frederick Goodall, another one of the St John's Wood group, and an Academician since 1863. John Pettie, born in 1839, was a Scot who had studied with William Q. Orchardson and William McTaggart, two painters who would become friends and admirers of Whistler. Pettie also studied with John MacWhirter, who had been an Associate since 1839. Nicol, the oldest of the painters, born in 1825, was also a Scot, and already an Academician of the Royal Scottish Academy. His connection to Whistler was Sir William Allen, with whom he had studied, and who had, decades earlier, praised Whistler's boyhood drawings on a visit to the family near St Petersburg. '[Y]our little boy has uncommon genius' Allen had told Anna Whistler, who proudly recorded his remarks in her diary, 'but do not urge him beyond his inclination.' Finally, H. T. Wells, born in 1828, had been trained in the academic style by James Leigh in London and Thomas Couture in Paris, and a brother-in-law of the watercolour artist George Price Boyce, whom Whistler knew through the Pre-Raphaelites.

However, 1866 also brought another rule change, one that allows us to trace Whistler's Academy fortunes with more certainty. In March, shortly before that year's election, the Academy announced that future candidates for



Grey and Silver - Old Battersea Reach, 1863.
Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 68.6 cm.
Art Institute of Chicago.
Royal Academy, Summer Exhibition, 1867.

Associate membership could no longer nominate themselves. Instead, they would be nominated and seconded by current members, either Associates or Academicians. Only then could candidates sign the register in acknowledgement of their nomination.

Whistler returned home from Chile just in time. Indeed, he probably benefited from a decision to extend the nomination period from November to mid-December, as he was among the last candidates to enrol for the 1867 election. Having obtained the sponsorship of painters John Frederick Lewis (1804–76) and John Callcott Horsley (1817–1903), Whistler signed the Nominations Book on 15 December 1866, the same day as Edward John Poynter, one of his fellow students from the 1850s in Paris. Other friends or future friends of Whistler nominated that year included Orchardson, Marcus Stone, G. F. Watts, Holman Hunt, and Valentine Prinsep. Both Orchardson and Prinsep had received some support (a vote each) in 1866.

In the election that followed, on 31 January 1867, Edward Armitage and Watts became the new Associates. A dozen other candidates received at least one vote, including Hunt (who ranked third), Stone, Orchardson, and George D. Leslie, who would later write a history of the Academy. Whistler received no votes, not even from Lewis or Horsley. He doubtless found that embarrassing, but at least he was now on the Academy’s rolls, for once nominated under the new rules, a candidate remained eligible for all future elections as long as his sponsors continued to endorse him. Whistler, relieved simply to be back in London, went about his business, or nearly so.

The remainder of 1867 was one of the most tumultuous years in Whistler’s life. Privately, he suffered one of the periodic crises of confidence that marked his career. In this instance, he renounced the artistic influence on his painting of Gustave Courbet, which left Whistler in an uncharted region between Realism and the Impressionism to come. He would even try Albert Moore’s brand of Classicism for two years, but to no avail. More publicly, and more ominously, he had a violent confrontation with his brother-in-law Francis Seymour Haden, which, in turn, led to a byzantine series of events that allowed Haden to engineer Whistler’s expulsion from the Burlington Fine Art Club.

Surprisingly, it was those last two widely publicised episodes, rather than any change in artistic philosophy, that ended Whistler’s chances of being elected to the Royal Academy. His clash with Haden created a severe divide between the Whistler and Haden families. As it happened, Horsley, one of his two sponsors within the Academy, was a brother-in-law of Haden having married Rosamund Haden in 1854. Not surprisingly, Horsley withdrew his sponsorship on 20 December 1867, one week after Whistler was found to be ‘not a fit person’ for membership in the



John Frederick Lewis RA (1805–1876).
Reproduced in *Illustrated London News*, 1865.



John Callcott Horsley RA (1817–1903).
Reproduced in *Recollections of a Royal Academician*, J. C. Horsley, J. Murray, London, 1903.

Burlington Fine Art Club. When no other Academician stepped forward to replace Horsley, Whistler’s name was removed from the rolls.

Oddly though, Whistler was apparently not informed of Horsley’s defection or that he required a new sponsor. Sometime in the early to mid-1870s, Whistler wrote a draft letter to the Academy expressing surprise that his name had been ‘withdrawn from the list of Candidates’. ‘May I ask by what authority was this outrage practiced upon me as an aspirant?’ he queried in his best sardonic tone. ‘For the last odd number of years I have been hourly expecting to be enrolled among the members of your august body—Whereas doubtless for just so many years has my name been withheld from the ballot.’ Whistler may never have sent the letter. Certainly the Royal Academy does not have a letter from Whistler; but the draft alone shows that he had not abandoned hopes of election, nor wanted it any less.

Whistler’s friends thought he could have been elected in later years had he only ‘behaved himself.’ Orchardson, Prinsep, Stone, and Hunt, not to mention such friends and associates as Edwin A. Abbey, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Joseph E. Boehm, George H. Boughton, Edward Burne-Jones, George Clausen, Luke Fildes, Alfred Gilbert, Augustus John, John Lavery, Charles Ricketts, John Singer Sargent, Charles H. Shannon, James J. Shannon, Walter Sickert, and George A. Storey eventually were elected to the Academy, and none of them was more talented than Whistler. Indeed, the theoretical chances of being elected increased sharply in 1878, when the number of Associates was increased to thirty. Unfortunately, that was also the year of the Ruskin trial and the birth of Whistler’s reputation as an obstreperous rebel, not the sort of chap embraced by the Academy. He last exhibited at the Academy in 1879, with a single etching, *Old Putney Bridge*. In the 1880s, he led a full-fledged challenge to the authority of the Academy as president of the Society of British Artists (1886–88), a challenge he renewed a decade later as president of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers (1898–1903).

Of course, behaving himself had never been Whistler’s strong point, but in the end, it may not have been the revolutionary nature of his art or his controversial image that cost him the title of Royal Academician so much as a family feud. When John Millais was asked in later years why Whistler had been passed over for election, he could only look away, seemingly embarrassed by the question.

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RADICAL CHELSEA

Whistler, Mazzini and Emilie Venturi

JUSTIN McCANN

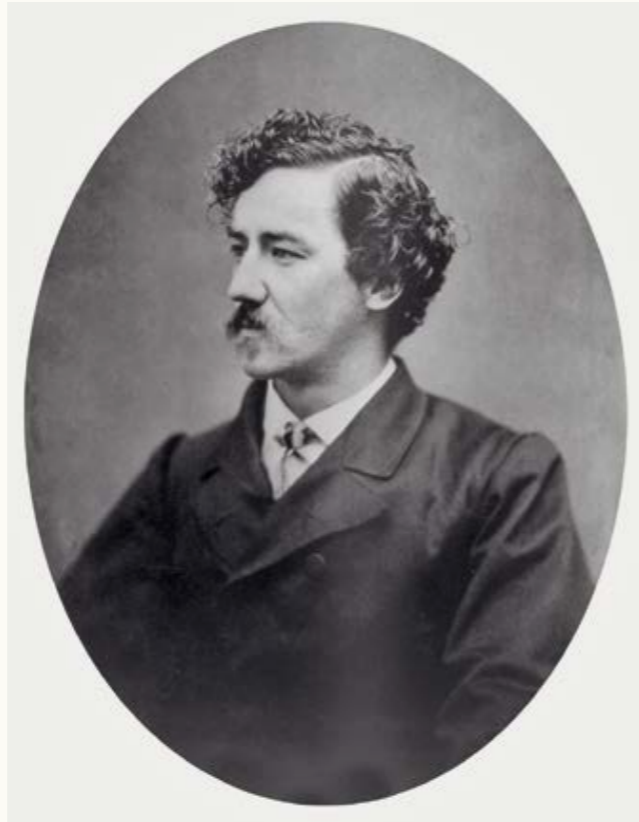
Whistler probably met the Italian nationalist and revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72) at the house of Emilie Ashurst Venturi (1819/20?–93). Whistler was a regular guest at her home in Chelsea in the 1860s, and she at his. At the time, Mazzini, a leading figure in the *Risorgimento*, was living in exile in England. Since the 1840s he had been friends with Venturi and her radical father William Henry Ashurst (1792–1855), a London solicitor who had co-founded the Society of the Friends of Italy in 1851.

Support for Italian nationalism was popular among Whistler's artistic circle and with political progressives and reformers throughout London. Italy had been proclaimed a unified kingdom in 1861, but Mazzini sought to establish a republic, and kept fighting for it from London and on return trips to his native country. A fundraising campaign was launched in 1867 to support the republican cause, which Whistler contributed to, and it may have been at this time that he met Mazzini. Venturi gave more to the cause than just financial donations. She had become Mazzini's literary and financial secretary in London in the late 1840s and had travelled to Italy in 1848 to support the republican movement in person. After visits she would write to family and friends (including Whistler's mother) with news of Mazzini.

Venturi was not only committed to Mazzini, but to the arts as well. She championed Whistler and acquired several of his works including the painting *Chelsea in Ice*, 1864/67 (Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville). Whistler had also given her three pastel drawings: *The Thames*, 1872/75 (Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, Bloomington), *Winter landscape*, 1875 (private collection), and *A Snowy landscape*, 1875 (whereabouts unknown). One of these, *The Thames*, gives a nocturnal view of the river at Chelsea, which provides a similar view to that of Battersea in *Chelsea in Ice*. A long-time Chelsea resident, this was her stretch of the river. An admirer of the avant-garde in art and poetry, the tonal and veiled qualities of both works would have appealed to her cosmopolitan and progressive sensibilities. In



Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72),
photograph, 1860.



James McNeil Whistler, c.1865.
Unknown photographer.
Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Emilie Venturi as a young woman,
probably drawn by George Richmond,
published in E. F. Richards, *Mazzini's
Letters to an English Family*, vol. I,
John Lane, 1920.



[above top]
Chelsea in Ice, 1864/67.
 Oil on canvas, 45.1 x 61.0 cm.
 Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville.

[above middle]
Winter landscape, 1875.
 Chalk and pastel on paper,
 11.2 x 28 cm.
 Private collection.

[left]
The Thames, 1872/75.
 Chalk and pastel on paper, 17.8 x 27.4 cm.
 Eskenazi Museum of Art,
 Indiana University, Bloomington.

art history terms, she is perhaps best known for introducing Thomas Carlyle to Whistler in 1872, but her life was far more significant than this one introduction.

Who was Emilie Venturi and how did she, Mazzini, Carlyle, and Whistler – a seemingly disparate group of radicals, artists, and intellectuals – connect with one another? In the late summer of 1872 Venturi escorted Carlyle to Whistler's studio. Once there they viewed *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1: Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, 1871 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), which had just returned from its showing at the Royal Academy. Standing before the portrait, Venturi highlighted the merits of the painting for Carlyle. He liked the simplicity of it, Whistler recalled, and 'seemed to feel in it a certain fitness of things, as Madame Venturi meant he should.' By this time Venturi and Whistler had become quite close. The two had met in the 1860s through the poet Algernon Swinburne, who was also passionate about Italian nationalism, and whom Venturi held in special affection. She supported and nurtured the lives of artists and poets who bucked convention and used their art to liberate people from what she viewed as tired or oppressive aesthetic, moral, and political norms. She referred to Whistler and Swinburne as two of her 'distinguished offspring'. Venturi quickly fell in with Whistler and his mother, and knew his portrait of her very well, even before its exhibition. Venturi had received an early glimpse of the portrait while it was still being painted. Anna McNeill Whistler wrote to her friend James Gamble in April 1872 describing Venturi as 'A neighbour & true friend ... , dear kind Madame Venturi' and her regard for Whistler: 'She has a high appreciation of Jemie's talents.'



Richard Josey, after Whistler's Portrait of Thomas Carlyle, 1878 mezzotint.

It is possible that Venturi had already acquired *Chelsea in Ice* by this date, and perhaps she had even shown the painting to Carlyle.

During a daylong visit on Easter Tuesday 1872 she shared with Anna how another artist had lauded her portrait for its 'holy expression'. By the early 1870s, Venturi was a strong supporter of Whistler and her high regard for the artist and the portrait of his mother must have persuaded Carlyle to sit for him. The aesthetics of portraiture were probably not the only topic of conversation that day between the three of them. In March of that year Mazzini had passed away. Anna remarked in her letter to Gamble that Venturi 'is wearing Crape [sic] now for Mazzini,' a sign of mourning.

Venturi's father was a radical and activist who supported every progressive political cause from anti-slavery to Chartism and gender equality. The Ashursts cultivated a social circle of other radicals at their home in Muswell Hill in north London. Emilie's father encouraged her and her siblings to participate in this intellectual milieu. He instilled in his daughter a desire for justice and independence, and encouraged her to flout conventions. Her 'passion for liberty,' as she put it, extended not only to the freedom and equality of others but to a life lived on her own terms, in defiance of middle-class Victorian morality. One scholar described Venturi as a 'cosmopolitan,

cigar smoking, divorcee’. She had remarried in 1861 to Carlo Venturi, a revolutionary from Venice, who died in 1866. Living life in an unconventional manner for a woman of the period, she was a persuasive political campaigner, writer, and aesthete, which, no doubt, bonded her to Whistler.

In 1844 the Ashurst family included Mazzini in their political circle, when he was already quite popular among intellectuals in London. Following news in July that the British government had spied on Mazzini, and that the Foreign Secretary had been opening Mazzini’s mail, the family invited him to dinner as a sign of solidarity. Mazzini quickly became not just a regular visitor to the Ashursts, but an extended member of the family. With the foundation of the Society of the Friends of Italy in 1851 they became actively involved with the assistance of Italian refugees in London.

Mazzini had also become close to Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, meeting the couple in 1837. Mazzini visited their Chelsea home routinely, sparring with Carlyle over political theory. While the two disagreed over the practicalities of radical politics, they were both romantic idealists and avowed sceptics of utilitarianism – one of the dominant philosophies of the Victorian period – who formed a personal bond both through their agreements and disagreements. Carlyle respected Mazzini’s passion, integrity, and intelligence. He described the revolutionary as a man of ‘genius and virtue, a man of sterling veracity, humanity, and nobleness of mind; one of those rare men, numerable, unfortunately, but as units in this world, who are worthy to be called martyr souls; who, in silence, piously in their daily life, understand and practice what is meant by that.’ One of their mutual friends said of Carlyle, ‘No man did he reverence more than Mazzini.’ When Mazzini passed away in 1872, Carlyle was deeply saddened, recollecting to a friend the humble way he had lived and the manner in which he held and expressed his beliefs: ‘A more beautiful person I never beheld.’ A relief sculpture of Mazzini and Carlyle is set above a window on the façade of 15 Cheyne Walk in Chelsea honouring their friendship, erected by the radical MP Lord Courtney (1832–1918).

The Carlyles also circulated with the Ashurst family and once Venturi settled in Chelsea she saw the couple more often, growing particularly close to Jane. Following Jane’s death in 1866, Venturi and Carlyle spent more time together, going for walks around Chelsea. Perhaps on their walk to Whistler’s studio months after Mazzini’s passing the two spoke of him. Maybe during their visit with Whistler the three shared memories or touched upon Italian news. The three, after all, had been brought together by both art and by Mazzini.

Italian nationalism was not the only cause to which Venturi was committed. She was also a dedicated campaigner for women’s rights and against the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864. This legislation was extremely divisive and helped galvanize the feminist movement in Britain. In an attempt to prevent the spread of venereal disease in the army, the Act legalised prostitution in certain areas around army posts and mandated that prostitutes register with law enforcement. A special branch of the police



Carlyle Cottage, 318 Kings Road. Emilie Venturi’s house, opposite Paultons Square. Kensington and Chelsea Local Studies & Archives.



Carlyle Cottage, garden facade. Kensington and Chelsea Local Studies & Archives.

patrolled these areas, and if women were suspected of prostitution they were routinely examined for venereal disease. The women were often working class, detained for long periods, and had no rights while in custody awaiting examination. The Act placed no requirement or burden on men, who were neither detained nor examined. Venturi was one of the signatories of a manifesto, written and published on New Year’s Day 1870, that launched a campaign to repeal the act. She joined the executive committee of the Ladies National Association, which organised a campaign against the act, and edited the leading repeal periodical, *The Shield*, from 1871 to 1886. She was a leader among a chorus of reformers who saw this legislation for what it was: the removal of the personal rights and dignity of women, and a terrible injustice.

The year 1872 was momentous for Venturi. Following Mazzini’s death, she had become his literary executor, having already published several writings on him including

‘Religious Republicanism: Joseph Mazzini as a Religious Teacher’ which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* (1871). She had also started writing his biography, *Joseph Mazzini: A Memoir by E.A.V.*, which was eventually published in 1875. At the same time she continued to champion Whistler’s work. Having always respected him for his aesthetic convictions, wit, personal style, and non-traditional way of living. She had even told Swinburne that she hoped Whistler would return to his ‘evil ways’ after Anna had moved to Hastings in 1875.

Venturi was an adept organiser and campaigner, a gifted writer and networker. She brought Whistler and Aestheticism more broadly into the radical politics of the period. He has generally been regarded as the epitome of the transatlantic artist of the nineteenth century: the expatriate American who lived in Paris and London for his entire career, and had patrons

on both sides of the ocean. In addition to following the money and business interests of his collectors, following their politics also enriches our understanding of Whistler. This is not to claim that Whistler shared any sympathy with Venturi’s feminism or that Italian nationalism and Mazzini influenced his artistic practice, but this connection does deepen and add nuance to both the international and the local context of his immediate social and artistic circle. It allows for the political action of Venturi and Mazzini to be in direct conversation with the cultural politics of Aestheticism. Venturi’s radicalism in politics found an aesthetic home in Whistler and his art. When he received an inscribed copy of Mazzini’s *Duties of Man* from the author himself, Whistler wrote back in esteem and respect. Mazzini’s vision of the nation was deeply romantic and spiritual. It was an unsystematic set of ideas that defined his politics and for which he was willing to fight. An agitator and insurrectionist more than a theoretician, his poetic and pugnacious approach to nation-building, in writing and in person, was done with a style and a tone that Whistler could respect and perhaps even use as a model in the pursuit of his own, more personal revolution in art.

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[opposite]
Auguste Delâtre, 1858/59.
Etching. Freer Gallery of Art,
Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, DC.

WHISTLER'S MASTER PRINTER

Auguste Delâtre

DONATO ESPOSITO

The intaglio printer Auguste Delâtre (1822–1907) was already highly regarded and personally known in British print circles when in mid-1871 he relocated from Paris to London after the destruction of his home and workshop following the Franco-Prussian War. He stayed in London until 1876. The American art dealer Samuel Putnam Avery recounted in his diary the fateful day of Delâtre's imminent departure for London on 6 July 1871: 'Called on Delatre printer of Etchings [...] Shop & house partly destroyed by Prussian and Commune bombs, is removing to London bought sett [sic] of his own etchings and others.'

Delâtre had been associated with the Société des Aquafortistes (founded 1862) in Paris, which had been modelled on the lines of the Etching Club (founded 1838) in London. He had professional contacts in London and had regularly visited the British capital the previous decade, including to advise on the incorporation of etching into the curriculum at the National Art Training School at the South Kensington Museum. Also, he had visited in November 1858 and January 1859, when he printed several plates for the Etching Club under the encouragement of Whistler's brother-in-law, Francis Seymour Haden.

In the 1860s, Delâtre's stature grew and was routinely remarked upon in both French and British art circles. In 1864, for example the critic Philippe Burty, writing in the influential *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, described him as the 'printer par excellence' of etchings. The artist, critic and author Philip Gilbert Hamerton, writing in his *Etching and Etchers* in 1868, was full of unqualified praise for Delâtre:

'It happened some years ago that one or two artists who etched, discovered a journeyman printer who printed their works with such taste and judgement that they declared the proofs were as much his work as theirs. Such a man could not be lost sight of, and he soon knew where to find his printer. M. Delâtre, formerly the workman in question, has now a considerable *atelier* ... No-one in Europe that I know, prints etchings with so much *expression*.'

The filmy veil of ink that Delâtre liked to employ in his printing of etchings broke free from the standardisation common at the time, thereby making each impression unique. He subverted the idea of the multiple which had underpinned

much of European printmaking up to that time. Hamerton sometimes thought this inky veil was overdone: 'His fault is towards overprinting, so that he hardly can print simply, even when the plate demands it ... Delâtre is, on the whole, the most intelligent printer of etchings living'. However, not everyone agreed on the decisive interventions of printers such as Delâtre. In 1866, at the conclusion of a long article on etching by Haden, he conceded that though Delâtre was 'an excellent printer', any creative additions by way of a 'hint here, or smudge there' was beyond his bounds and was unwelcomed.

Delâtre was not without friendly faces either in his new home in Britain. There he joined the expatriates Whistler and Alphonse Legros, the latter having relocated permanently to London in 1863, where he made a considerable impact. Delâtre and Whistler had known each other in Paris since at least 1858, when he helped Whistler to proof the young American's celebrated suite of etchings, the 'French Set', *Douze Eaux-Fortes d'après Nature*. The etchings were first printed in an edition of twenty, at the premises of Edmond Gosselin in rue St Jacques, Paris, in November 1858. A few weeks later the plates were taken to London and printed in an edition of 50 under Delâtre's direction, with the assistance of Whistler and Haden. During the printing of the 'French Set', Whistler depicted Delâtre in an etched portrait with a respectful dedication in the plate: 'Homage/à Mme Delatre'. Legros later etched a portrait of Delâtre (dating from his *sojourn* in London in the early 1870s), looking more staid but still betraying the thoughtfulness captured by Whistler. The deep affection Whistler had for his fellow artist is evidenced by a handwritten personal dedication on a copy of the etching *The Storm*, (1861) now in the British Museum: 'A mon ami Delâtre/Whistler'. Whistler maintained his relationship with Delâtre into the 1890s.

The enterprising couple Edwin and Ruth Edwards, who had first met Delâtre in 1861, helped him to re-establish his printing business from Paris to Soho, at 7 Lower James Street, Golden Square, and later at 23 Howland Street, Fitzroy Square. He repaid this kindness by dedicating a portfolio of prints in 1873 to Edwin Edwards: *Six pointes-sèches*. In this, as in an earlier portfolio issued in 1871, he explored his enthusiasm for *retroussage*. The 1873 portfolio contained a drypoint, variously called *Solitude* or *Les Cerfs*, according to Henri Beraldi. Here Delâtre used plate tone, a film of ink deliberately left unwiped, to create a night effect in the sky, with a heavier plate tone to suggest shadow on the land, and the moon wiped clean.



[above top]
Alphonse Legros (1837–1911),
Portrait de M. Auguste Delâtre, 1870s.
Etching. British Museum.

[above]
The Title Page for *Douze Eaux
Fortes d'après Nature*, 1858.
Etching. Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York.



Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904),
Un Morceau de Schumann, 1866.
Published by Cadart & Luquet,
Printed by Auguste Delâtre.
Etching. British Museum.

The year after Delâtre’s move to London in 1871 was perhaps his most important when he began to make himself visible on a number of fronts. Delâtre etched his own trade-card to advertise his abilities as both a printer and printmaker. He also received press coverage, such as a notice in the *Illustrated London News*: ‘M. A. Delatre, famous as a printer of etchings, late of Paris, has set up his presses at Lower James-street, Golden-square, where also he proposes to give instruction in etching’. These private lessons in printmaking to a burgeoning middle class, which was deeply interested in etching and its expressive possibilities, capitalised on the popular revival of the medium at the time. He also took it upon himself in 1872 to send to the weekly periodical the *Athenaeum* a ‘collection of specimens of his skill in printing from etched plates.’ Commenting on the etchings, the *Athenaeum* said, ‘M. Delâtre has employed several kinds of papers, with different textures and surfaces, adopting in each case that which seemed fittest to the artist’s work.’

Most importantly Delâtre’s own etchings were shown at the first ‘black and white’ exhibition held in 1872 at the Dudley Gallery, located on Piccadilly. He was one of several French artists exhibiting, including Paul Rajon and Félix Bracquemond, who had been hosted in England by Edwin and Ruth Edwards. Contemporary critics perceived the Dudley shows as a defining feature of the displays of monochrome work. At the inaugural exhibition Delâtre included an unspecified number of prints, grouped together in the catalogue under no.187 and no.231, with both groups described as ‘*Etchings — drypoint*’ and priced at two pounds and eight pounds respectively. His work did not pass unnoticed in the press, and the critic of *The Era* noted among the vast array that the ‘drypoint etchings of M. Delâtre are also worthy of notice’. *The Art Journal* also singled him out, together with other Frenchmen: ‘Etchings are certainly less numerous than we expected ... there is, however, much that is surpassingly fine in those of Rajon (193), M. A. Delâtre (187)’.

With that success, Delâtre exhibited frequently in London over the next four years. He contributed prints and drawings annually to the Dudley’s ‘black and white’ shows, and in 1874, showed a painting, *Avant l’orage*. He also exhibited two prints of Paris at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1872, *Environs of Paris*, and in 1873 *Paris: vue prise près le fort de Bicêtre*. Delâtre worked for the print publisher Jane Nosedá of 109 Strand, and in 1873 printed 100 copies of John Postle Heseltine’s *Thirteen Etchings from Nature* on Japan paper.



[opposite top]
Auguste Delâtre (1822–1907),
Trade-card for Auguste Delâtre, 1870s.
Etching, British Museum.



[opposite middle]
John Postle Heseltine (1843–1929),
Hambledon Brickfields. From *Thirteen Etchings*, printed by Auguste Delâtre,
published Mrs Jane Nosedá, 1869.
British Museum.



[opposite bottom]
Auguste Delâtre (1822–1907),
View of London with Big Ben, 1871.
Etching and drypoint, British Museum.

Delâtre’s second trade-card, designed by an associate of Whistler, Percy Thomas, dates from the latter period of Delâtre’s time in London when he had moved to 23 Howland Street, near Fitzroy Square. The engaging portrait proudly declares his profession as ‘printer’ and shows him in profile in his studio wiping a copperplate, the arm of the print press just visible behind him. The letterhead for Delâtre, etched by his friend Georges Pilotell, is evidence of Delâtre’s further commercial branding while in London. Pilotell’s address in London is also known to have been 23 Howland Street in 1875, from a surviving letter from him to the director of the British Museum, offering the institution a gift of a group of his drypoint portraits. Pilotell and Delâtre must therefore have been close, but more about the former remains to be uncovered. The cascade of prints emerging from the printing press include work by Delâtre himself, De Nittis, Méryon, Millet, Tissot, Lalanne, Ribot, Jongkind, and Legros (including the latter’s *The Gust of Wind*, shown at the Dudley Gallery in 1875).

The British Museum purchased a group of etchings by Delâtre in 1872, including a view of London. One of Delâtre’s largest prints, *Les Cerfs*, is related to a print first issued in 1873 in the portfolio of six drypoints dedicated to Edwin Edwards, and is possibly the print shown at the Dudley Gallery’s 1875 ‘black and white’ exhibition ‘*Solitude — drypoint*, 5 guineas’. The exhibition continued to garner Delâtre positive criticism from publications such as *The Graphic* which said ‘France still holds a prominent place in these exhibitions. There are no etchings here so masterly in their several styles as the plates of Jacquemart, Lalanne, Rajon, Lalange, Roybet, Ballin, Delâtre, De Neuville, Flameng, Waltner, Taiée, and Mongin’.

Delâtre returned to Paris in 1876, but the lasting contacts he made and cemented in the five fruitful years he spent in London had a positive and lasting effect on the British print scene. Notice of his death in Paris in 1907 was reported in the *London Morning Post*: ‘Delâtre was the modern pioneer of his art, which he raised to the level of etching as it existed in the time of Rembrandt.’ It was a bold suggestion to compare Delâtre with Rembrandt, the towering influence for etchers in both France and Britain at the time. The French émigré artist James Tissot also made this connection when claiming that Delâtre had discovered the secret of the Dutch artist’s printing techniques ‘in his studies from Rembrandt’. Thus Delâtre was cemented, in both life and death, to the nineteenth century’s printmaking great, Rembrandt.

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THE BUTTERFLY BEHIND THE MAN

Whistler's monogram

POLINA ATABEKIAN

The lepidopterous monogram of James McNeill Whistler first made its appearance in *Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony*, 1864–73 (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC), however, the ‘butterfly’ may have been added later, possibly for an exhibition. Since then the miniature detail has sparked a massive interest across Whistler’s community. The aim of this essay is to investigate the famous butterfly signature that made its perch on Whistler paintings, drawings, etchings and correspondence, and its development, in both design and meaning, over time.

The rather large signature that preceded the butterfly can be seen in *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine*, 1863–65 (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC). Rossetti’s first attempt to sell the painting was unsuccessful, due to the collector’s objection to the large ‘Courbet-like’ signature. He then suggested to Whistler that if he were to change the signature, the collector would agree to the purchase. After being met with a furious reaction from Whistler, the painting was eventually sold to a different collector. Nonetheless, it must have prompted Whistler to think about whether such a large signature had a negative effect on the painting. Perhaps he considered using his initials instead. The initials J.W. were eventually transformed to form a butterfly – the ‘J’ became the torso, and the ‘W’ became the wings. It is unclear what exactly inspired Whistler to opt for the famous butterfly form, perhaps it was his mother, Anna Matilda Whistler, who had called him a ‘butterfly’ when he was younger.

In *Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony*, the first painting where the Whistler monogram appears, the ‘butterfly’ or more like a dragonfly, and with similarities to the stylized anthemion used by his friend Albert Moore (1841–93), Whistler positioned the insect within an oblong frame of the same colour as one of the model’s kimonos, resembling the signatures found in Japanese woodblock prints that could have served as inspiration. A further example of this format can be found in the *Nocturne in Blue and Silver*, 1871–72 (Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge).

Art historian Grischka Petri suggests that the emergence of the butterfly signature had to do with the artist’s tactical marketing. A detail that would bring none other than its maker to mind fell perfectly in line with Whistler’s ambitions to establish his unique public image. Together with the musical titles for his pieces, the

[opposite]
*Variations in Flesh Colour and Green -
 The Balcony*, 1864–1873.
 Oil on wood panel, 61.4 × 48.5 cm.
 Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
 Institution, Washington, DC.
 Exhibited at the Royal Academy 1870.



Albert Joseph Moore (1841–1893).
A Musician, c.1867. Oil on canvas,
 28.6 x 38.7 cm. Yale Center for
 British Art, Newhaven.

Note: Moore's stylised anthemion signature
 on the top rail (left) of the bench.



Arrangement en couleur chair et noir:
Portrait de Théodore Duret, 1883/85.
 Oil on canvas, 193.4 x 90.8 cm.
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

butterfly signature provided a perfect artistic solution for the art market. One might say that a butterfly only becomes a butterfly at the final stage of its metamorphosis, but not Whistler's. The design of the butterfly would change over the following 30 years. What started out as a dragonfly gradually transformed itself, rather dramatically, to acquire antennae, veins, and eventually a tail. In the *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle*, 1872/73 (Glasgow Museums / Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum), the butterfly is shown to have been freed from its previous rectangular confinement and acquired a more convincing butterfly shape. But just how freely did the butterfly soar? His friends Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell suggested,

'It was introduced as a note of colour, as important in the picture as anything else and at times it was put in almost at the first painting to judge the effect, scraped out with the whole thing, put in again somewhere else, this repeated again and again until he got it right. We have seen many an unfinished picture with the most wonderfully finished butterfly, because it was where Whistler wanted it.'

The butterfly became a significant detail, and Whistler's emphasis on where it was placed further confirms Petri's suggestion of its marketing function – it needed to be *seen*. Ten years after the initial appearance of the butterfly signature, in *Arrangement en couleur chair et noir: Portrait de Théodore Duret*, 1883–85 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), the butterfly signature is executed in red, in a slight contrast to the overall tone of the painting. However, in *A Grey Note: Village Street*, 1884 (The Hunterian, University of Glasgow), the signature is shown intricately incorporated and in tone with the painting. While both of these images served to market the artist in one way or another, the higher saturation of the signature on the portrait of Théodore Duret could imply the artist's intention to attract more commissioned portraits, whilst using the signature as both

a trademark and advertisement simultaneously.

Was signing the painting with the butterfly simply about the marketing? An easier, recognisable way to sign a painting? Or did the butterfly carry within its wings a more intrinsic, sentimental meaning? Mortimer Menpes, one of Whistler's faithful followers described his time with Whistler:

'he [Whistler] taught me what was meant by artistic placing and balance. Indeed, Whistler very rarely placed his butterfly on a picture without

first saying to me, “Now, Menpes, where do you think the butterfly is going this time?” It used to be a little joke between us, and after some months of habit I was invariably able to put my finger on the spot where the butterfly should be placed to create the balance of the picture.’

It seems that Whistler’s butterfly was a detail, the intricacies of which the artist was willing to share, and his involvement of other artists working beside him shows a sentimental side to this delicate creature. Some went as far as to say that Whistler had begun to identify himself with the butterfly signature. Several scholars referred to Whistler as the butterfly in discussing his life during the 1870s or in books regarding Whistler’s correspondence or design, perhaps as an allusion to the artist’s character, or the state of his career at that moment in time. But did Whistler see just himself behind the butterfly? When he married Beatrice Godwin (née Philip) in 1888, his signature changed. The butterfly alighted on top of a trefoil styled to resemble her maiden name initials ‘BP’. In a letter to journalist and author Gertrude Elizabeth Campbell, Whistler spoke about the trefoil detail ‘For You know the Trixie is my ‘Luck’ - - and see how well the trefoil and the butterfly belong.’ On their honeymoon, Whistler had taught ‘Trixie’ how to etch, and as the years went by she had worked alongside him. The etching *View from the chateau walls, Loches*, (1888), is the only known work on which both Whistler and Beatrice collaborated, and is signed with the trefoil butterfly. Even after Beatrice’s death, Whistler continued to use the trefoil in his signature format.

In later butterflies, the trefoil was always present, in the simplest of butterflies as well as those more defined with wings and antennae. One could say the butterfly was no longer about recognising the work as a Whistler, but rather recognising Whistler within it. However, these fascinating creatures were no longer used just to sign his paintings. In fact, a large proportion of his correspondence dating from after 1874 was signed with this monogram, but something was different: the fluttering butterfly that graced us with its presence across his paintings had grown a mischievous stinging tail in *The Gold Scab*, 1879 (California Palace of The Legion of Honor, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco). The appearance of the stinger was a direct result of his falling out with Frederick Leyland, over payment for the Peacock Room. Whistler sought his vengeance for what he thought to be Leyland’s parsimony in paying for the art work.

In an 1888 letter to Whistler, the journalist and art critic Marion Henry Spielmann protested, ‘Were I too, my dear Whistler, the airy happy thing you are - the butterfly basking in the sunshine of life - flitting daintily & jauntily about



View from the chateau walls, Loches, 1888.
James McNeill Whistler and Beatrice Whistler, Etching, The Hunterian, University of Glasgow.



Butterfly, drawn for publication in 1890.
Pencil with white paint on card.
Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

for very joy & stinging for very malice, I too might sail along with you ... till you ... were done with me.’ It seems that this stinging detail on the butterfly perfectly conveyed the artist’s personality in the eyes of his peers and enemies of the 1880s and 1890s. The question remains whether this parallel was created by his surroundings and appropriated by Whistler, or deliberately implemented by the artist himself.

The artist’s correspondence, particularly with members of the press, became the natural habitat for the stinging-tailed butterfly, ready to strike at any moment. Over the course of 40 years, Whistler compiled the correspondence between himself and the press, and he did not hesitate to refer back to what he considered to be audacious claims towards his work. A sampling of these was published in his book *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890), in which Whistler was able to justify his aesthetic goals whilst uncovering the crude intentions of the critics and others who doubted him. The omnipresence of the butterfly within the work is described by the Pennells:

‘They danced, laughed, mocked, stung, defied, triumphed, dropped wings over the farthing damages, spread them to fly across the Channel, and expressed every word and almost every thought.’ The butterfly in this case is augmented, the wings and antennae as well as the stinging tail bent and twisted to convey a certain mood. Making its perch across the pages next to the artist’s reflections on a particular letter, Whistler fluttered into the margins and exposed the philistines, a predecessor of a present-day Twitter thread. Revisiting Petri’s theory of marketing intent behind the butterfly, it is possible that by signing his letters the same way he signed his paintings, the artist was building brand recognition of all things Whistler.

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The essay is based on an article she posted April 2019 on the blog James McNeill Whistler and his art, <https://jmcnwhistler.wordpress.com>.



TWO PATRONS

- 49 Frederick Richards Leyland:
The 'Liverpool Medici'
– *Devon Cox*
- 57 William Cleverley Alexander:
Interior harmonies at
Aubrey House
– *Jeremy Musson*

*Purple and Rose - The Lange Leizen
of the Six Mark, 1864.*
Oil on canvas, 93.3 x 61.3 cm.
Philadelphia Museum of Art.
Exhibited at the Royal Academy 1864.
(detail)

FREDERICK RICHARDS LEYLAND

The 'Liverpool Medici'

DEVON COX

The friendship between the artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler and his patron, Frederick Richards Leyland (1831–92), was one of the closest between artist and patron of the late-Victorian era. However, it was also one of the most caustic. From the ashes of its disintegration came one of

the most iconic works of interior design and decoration of the late nineteenth century in Britain, the famous *Harmony in Blue and Gold. Peacock Room*, 1876–77 (Freer Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC) for Leyland's dining room at 49 Prince's Gate, London. An avant-garde work of decorative art was born, a controversial creation that led to a bitter separation, and had devastating consequences for both men.

Shortly after the fallout over the Peacock Room in 1876, Whistler is reported by Mortimer Menpes to have told Leyland (whom he called 'the Liverpool Medici'): 'I have made you famous. My work will live when you are forgotten. Still, perchance, in the dim ages to come you will be remembered as the proprietor of the Peacock Room.' Unfortunately for Leyland, Whistler's prophecy came true. Whenever the name Leyland is mentioned, it often has a negative connection with the room or the controversy that followed. This is unfair to a man who would become one of the great patrons of Victorian art of his generation. Indeed, Leyland's patronage and friendship was invaluable to the career of artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82);

Leyland was an important friend to the Whistler, and supported artists such as Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98) and Albert Moore (1841–93). His patronage of contemporary artists extended to Ford Madox Brown, John Everett Millais, G. F. Watts, William Lindsay Windus, Alphonse Legros, Frederick Sandys and William Morris.

Leyland's collection contained important examples of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Movement art and his house at Princes Gate was a showcase of Victorian interior design. He was also a collector of Renaissance art and had



Peacock Room, c.1890.
Photograph Henry Dixon & Son.



49 Prince's Gate, rear view from Prince's Gardens. The dining room on the ground floor with terrace. Google Street View.

several paintings by Botticelli. What makes him even more remarkable is the fact that he achieved all of this despite his lower middle class roots in Victorian Liverpool. In many ways Leyland epitomises the different forces at play in the art world, and indeed in society at large.

Not a great deal is known about the childhood of Frederick Richards Leyland. He was born on 30 September 1831, the first of three sons, and his father was a bookkeeper who is said to have either deserted his family or died, in the late 1830s. His mother worked at an eating house in Chapel Street, in the heart of the merchant district of Liverpool close to the John Bibby shipping company offices. In 1844 she persuaded Bibby to apprentice her thirteen year old son, who was then a student at the Mechanics' Institute school in Liverpool. Leyland demonstrated skills not only as a shrewd businessman, but as a quick intellect, teaching himself both French and Italian. He rose through the ranks from bookkeeper to clerk at Bibby, to become a general manager. The company with its steamships was successfully trading in the Mediterranean and in 1861 Leyland was made a partner in the firm. He was so successful that in 1873 he bought out the family partners, and founded the Leyland Line, with steamships in the transatlantic trade.

From the early 1860s onwards, Leyland was a rising star. His wealth was such that he could afford to enjoy the life of a self-made Victorian gentleman. In 1867 he could afford to lease, as a country house, the historic Speke Hall, a sizable half-timbered Tudor house, some seven miles south-east of Liverpool. A year later he acquired 23 Queens Gate, in the new fashionable Kensington. Leyland also enjoyed cultural pursuits, had an appreciation of literature, and was a talented pianist. Above all this, he cultivated a discerning passion for art.

In 1866, Leyland met Rossetti through a Liverpool merchant friend, the collector John Miller, and commissioned *Lady Lilith*, 1867–68, altered 1872–73 (Delaware Art Museum), the first of five Rossetti 'stunners' that Leyland acquired. This marked the start of a close friendship with the artist which was to last until his death in 1882. Indeed, it was through Rossetti that Leyland developed connections with many of the avant-garde artists whose works he would collect, including the American painter-etcher Whistler in 1867.

Whistler was born in 1834, making him three years younger than Leyland. Just as Leyland's career was developing in 1859, Whistler moved from Paris to London. In 1863 the artist leased 7 Lindsey Row, (now 101 Cheyne Walk) in Chelsea, near Rossetti at Tudor House, 16 Cheyne Walk, and among his circle of artists and poets that included Algernon Charles Swinburne, George Meredith and Simeon Solomon.

Leyland played a crucial role in the life and career of Whistler. A cursory glance at the artist's correspondence reveals how much time he spent at Speke Hall in Liverpool, becoming close to Leyland, his wife, and children. As Whistler's mother put it in a letter of 3 June 1872 to her sister, 'Jemie seldom goes anywhere but as the escort of the Leylands, as Mr L has to be in Liverpool much, he is like a brother in the family circle.' By the early 1870s, Whistler had

[*opposite*]
*La Princesse du pays de la
 porcelain*, 1863–65.
 Oil on canvas, 199.9 x 116.0 cm.
 Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
 Institution, Washington, DC.

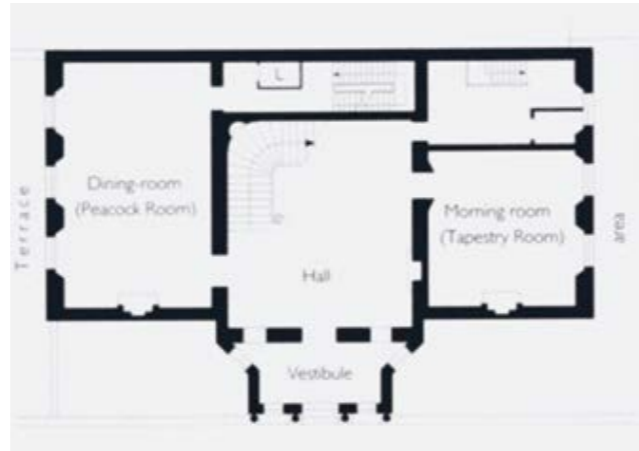


completed a series of portraits of Leyland’s family. These early commissions not only provided Whistler with a much-needed income, they also allowed him to carve out his unique visual style with the esteem and validation of a wealthy yet discerning patron.

With his increased wealth, Leyland devoted more time and money to acquiring art, to the extent that in 1874 he bought 49 Prince’s Gate to accommodate his growing collection. He commissioned Thomas Jeckyll (1827–81), to carry out the decoration of the dining room. Jeckyll was a specialist in interior decoration, and in 1870 had designed a new wing at 1 Holland Park for Aleco Ionides, who was a friend of Whistler from his Paris days. Whistler described Jeckyll as ‘one of my intimate comrades’. Later, in 1879, the architect Richard Norman Shaw would carry out the redesign of a number of the rooms on the first floor at Prince’s Gate.

Whistler was initially commissioned by Leyland to carry out the decoration of the hall at Princes Gate. However, as the redesign progressed, his involvement in the project grew. The dining room was originally conceived by Leyland as an ideal space in which to display his extensive porcelain collection along with Whistler’s painting, *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine*, 1863–65 (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC). Jeckyll devised a scheme for the room using some Spanish leather acquired by Leyland himself. During the course of work, Leyland asked Whistler, ‘Would it not be better to do it like [the] dado in the hall’, and invited Whistler to give his ideas to Jeckyll. It was at this time that Jeckyll seems to have become ill, which led to Whistler’s deeper involvement with the decoration. When Whistler saw Jeckyll’s finished room, he claimed ‘that the red flowers scattered over the gold ground of the Spanish leather hurt the harmony of his picture’, *La Princesse*. In what turned out to be a catastrophic error, no contracts were drawn up, no specific commission given, and Leyland was in Liverpool. It was not long before Whistler had overstepped his assignment, and plunged headfirst into developing the elaborate peacock scheme for the room. The walls and ceilings were painted in blue and gold, with peacock feather designs and peacocks painted on the closed shutters. He soon lost himself in the decoration: ‘I just painted it as I went on,’ the artist reported, ‘without design or sketch.’ The result was the Peacock Room as we now know it.

Whistler had completely reworked the entire room, from floor to ceiling. There was just one small flaw in his plan. Whistler had failed to consult Leyland on the extent of the work he was undertaking. The artist wrote to Leyland’s wife to say that the dining room ‘is something quite wonderful, and I am extremely proud of it. As a decoration it is thoroughly new, and most gorgeous though refined’. He held a private press party in February 1877 in the room without Leyland present, and without his consent. The reaction from visitors was mostly favourable. Yet not everyone was quite so joyous, least of all the owner of the property. It was



49 Prince’s Gate, Ground floor plan. Survey of London.

reported that when Leyland saw what Whistler had done he told the artist that the dining room had been ruined, and Whistler’s time wasted. When Whistler then demanded a staggering 2,000 guineas for the project, his patron flatly refused to pay. Whistler continued to work on the room, and in a letter to Leyland in October 1876 suggested that they had both agreed to contribute 1000 guineas each to the ‘disaster of the decoration.’ Leyland paid the artist £600 in addition to the £450 already advanced, and deliberately paid in pounds, as he would have done a tradesman, rather than the guineas a gentleman would have received. The dynamic and fruitful friendship between artist and patron quickly descended into an acrimonious split. The fallout from Whistler’s new creation extended beyond the two men. When Jeckyll saw Whistler’s alterations to his room he went home, and painted the floor of his bedroom gold. Jeckyll was a manic depressive, and was committed to a mental asylum in 1878, where he died in 1881.

The creation of the Peacock Room marks the beginning of a turbulent time in Whistler’s career. The artist had distanced himself from the Rossetti circle on the Cheyne Walk. In 1877 he was collaborating with one of the most daring architects of the age, Edward William Godwin (1833–86), and commissioned from him a bold design for what would become the White House, in Tite Street, which Whistler would be free to decorate to his own taste. Whistler’s feisty personality and stubborn principles would however lead him to make more enemies, including, famously, John Ruskin (1819–1900), whom he sued for libel. But with the cost of creating his own studio-house, and the mounting legal fees from the libel trial against Ruskin, Whistler was left bankrupt. Of all the creditors to sit at his bankruptcy, Leyland was the chief. When the creditors arrived to take an inventory of Whistler’s assets, they were greeted by the painting, *The Gold Scab: Eruption in Filthy Lucre (The Creditor)*, 1879 (California Palace of The Legion of Honor, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), which depicts Leyland as a grotesque reptile, covered in coins and playing the piano (remembering that Leyland was a keen pianist). In the painting, Whistler places Leyland sitting on top of the Whistler’s new White House in Tite Street, which, less than year into his occupation, he was forced to sell to his arch-enemy, Harry Quilter (1851–1907), an art critic for *The Times*, whom Whistler disliked. The Peacock Room signals a turning point for both artist and patron. While Whistler would go on to have a promising, if somewhat turbulent, career as an artist, Leyland would gradually fade from the pages of history. Sadly, the image of him has been passed down to us as a greedy and heartless capitalist. Upon closer examination, however, we can see that Leyland and Whistler had far more in common than it might appear on the surface, and it was perhaps for this reason that their separation was so bitter.

A biographical sketch published shortly after Leyland’s death noted, ‘The Artistic people of the day treated him as an equal whose judgement was excellent, not as the rich Liverpool shipowner who might give a commission or a present.’ The fiasco of the Peacock Room marked a turning point in Leyland’s career as an art collector. In the wake of his row with Whistler, Leyland seems to have ceased the patronage of living artists, and never commissioned another painting. More



Arrangement in Black: Portrait of F. R. Leyland, 1870-73.
Oil on canvas, 192.8 x 91.9 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, DC.



Symphony in Colour and Pink:
Portrait of Mrs Frances Leyland, 1871-74.
Oil on canvas, 195.9 x 102.2 cm.
The Frick Collection, New York.

unfortunate perhaps were the events in his private life. In 1879, Leyland and his wife separated, possibly because of Leyland's liaison with Rosa Laura Caldecott. A mere matter of months later, in March 1880, Leyland's daughter Fanny died in childbirth. She was only twenty years old. This tragedy seems to have been the final blow for Leyland, who wrote to Rossetti that his life seemed 'so dull and hopeless.' Leyland himself died in 1892, aged 60, of a heart attack while on a London Underground train between Mansion House and Blackfriars. He left an estate assessed at the vast sum of £732,770, and was buried not in Liverpool, but at Brompton Cemetery in London with a magnificent copper decorated chest tomb designed by Burne-Jones.

The episode of the Peacock Room has all the elements of good theatre, being both humorous and tragic. There is a sense of inevitability about the situation. The episode demonstrated the bold artistic vision that made Whistler such a pioneering artist, a vision that he would go on perfecting until his death in 1903. In doing so, Whistler would influence an entire generation of artists who would carry his artistic vision into the twentieth century. Whistler's paintings are displayed on the walls of the greatest art galleries and museums in the world, and command huge prices at auction. As Leyland predicted, his striking dining room remains even if the man himself has all but been forgotten. However, it is just worth considering for a moment why the Peacock Room still exists at all. It endures because Leyland, despite his disapproval, had the good taste not to demolish it or destroy it. That, more than anything else, speaks volumes about the 'Liverpool Medici'.

*Devon Cox is author of 'The Street of Wonderful Possibilities:
Whistler, Wilde, & Sargent in Tite Street' published by Frances Lincoln.*

WILLIAM CLEVERLEY ALEXANDER

Interior harmonies at Aubrey House

JEREMY MUSSON

[opposite]
Aubrey House, c.1870.
Autotype photograph.



In the late nineteenth century, old houses began to have a special appeal to people with an artistic frame of mind. In July 1873 the banker William Cleverley Alexander (1840–1916) heard through a friend that Aubrey House was up for sale. He went to see the rambling house, built c.1698 and extended in the 1750s, and at once agreed to buy the house for £18,000. Soon

after, he moved with his wife and seven children to the quiet, leafy corner of Kensington, close to Holland Park. As Alexander was an avid art collector, part of the appeal of Aubrey House may have been its proximity to the homes of leading artists such as Frederic Leighton and Marcus Stone. He cherished his new house as a place for his art collection that would include works by Tiepolo, Frans Hals, Goya and Guardi – many of which can today be seen in the National Gallery, the Ashmolean and the Fitzwilliam Museum. Today, Alexander is perhaps best known to art history as a key early patron of Whistler.



William Cleverley Alexander, c.1880.
Elliot and Fry, photograph.

Alexander had wide ranging artistic interests. He was a member of the Burlington Fine Arts Club, a founding member of the National Art Collections Fund and a committee member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). He was a prolific sketcher and watercolourist, especially of old buildings and landscapes, and published a portfolio of his sketches as *Drawings of Old London* (1908). He is also considered a notable pioneer in England in the field of collecting oriental art and ceramics, an interest he shared with Whistler. Alexander even made his own meticulous drawings of every piece of ceramic he bought, in the same vein as the 38 drawings by Whistler

in *A Collection of Blue and White Nankin Porcelain* (1878) for the collector Sir Henry Thompson.

Many of Alexander's best pictures were in the central rooms along the south front of Aubrey House. Taste was the key to their choice and display, and the painter and critic Roger Fry, a family friend, wrote that 'In Mr Alexander's

case, taste seemed to be a quite special and peculiar gift, like that of second sight’. Whistler was an early visitor to his patron’s large new house, writing archly to another patron, Mrs Leyland, in September 1873: ‘Alexander the banker called and took me off to his castle where I dined but found no cheques lying about loosely.’ The friendship between patron and painter can be dated back to Alexander’s purchase in 1871 of *Nocturne: Blue and Silver - Chelsea*, 1871 (Tate, London). This was Whistler’s first ‘Nocturne’, exhibited originally with the title *Harmony in Blue-Green - Moonlight* (before a chemical reaction led to a change of colour, and a change of name). The painting was first exhibited in 1871 at the Dudley Gallery in the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, which was probably where Whistler and Alexander met. Later Whistler’s mother also struck up a warm friendship with the young banker and his wife.

Whistler’s mother admired Aubrey House, describing it in September 1876, as ‘so elegant in taste and enclosed in gardens’. In the entrance hall was hung Whistler’s *Nocturne: Blue and Silver - Chelsea*. According to Alexander’s great-grandson, the late Jeffrey Wickham, family legend had it that whenever Whistler visited, he would pause at the front door to look at the painting and, after a dramatic silence, would simply say: ‘Beautiful. Beautiful.’ Had Whistler advised on the hanging of the picture?

In 1872 Whistler was commissioned by Alexander to make a portrait of his daughter Cicely which he painted in his studio at Cheyne Walk in Chelsea. There were to have been portraits of all the children, but there is only one completed oil, one unfinished oil, and ink sketches for two more. The completed painting of Cicely is one of Whistler’s masterpieces and was given a characteristic Whistler title, *Harmony in Grey and Green: Miss Cicely Alexander*, 1872/73 (Tate, London). It hung in Aubrey House from 1874, until it was transferred to Cicely’s own home in 1916. As requested in Alexander’s will, it was bequeathed to the National Gallery (an indication of his confident view of the painting’s future reputation), with a life interest to Cicely who died in 1932; the painting now hangs in Tate Britain.

Aubrey House is the likely setting for Whistler’s surviving sketches of Mary (May) and Grace, with Mary’s portrait probably planned to represent the interior of the room for which it was painted. Whistler wrote a letter to Mrs Alexander, probably in late 1874, saying:

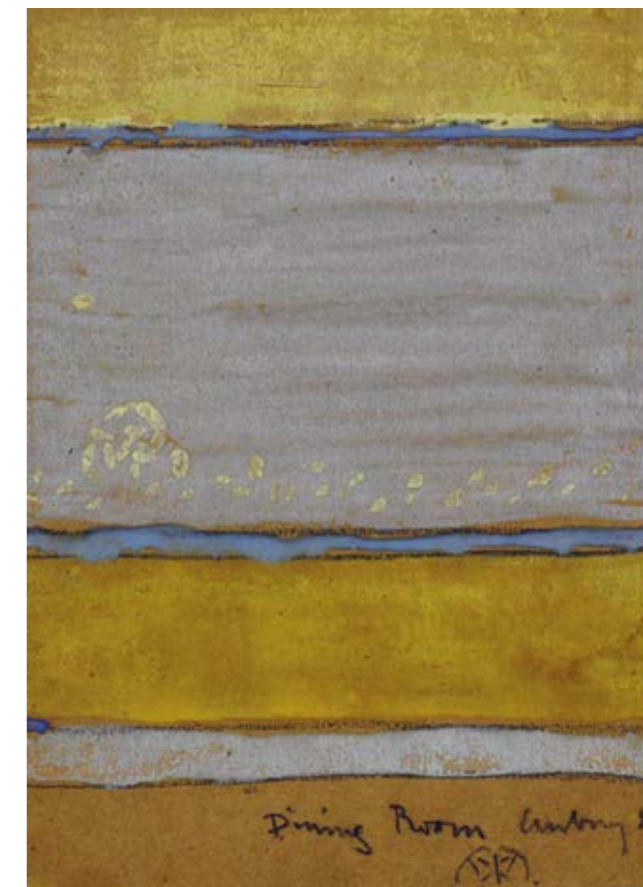
‘it occurs to me that if you like I will paint May in your own house – I think I should like this if you do not fear that I should be in the way – The new drawing room with its white and black wainscot is what I think of – it would be so delightful to be able to hang the picture up every now and then and see how it would look in its own proper place!’

He then went as far as to suggest he should come and stay at the house so that he could start early each morning, although there is no evidence that happened.

Whistler’s letter shows the very direct connection between the imagined artistic interior and the real, between Whistler’s suggestive painting of an interior and an actual interior. There are no surviving sketches or illustrations of the black and white scheme of the wainscot, which may even have been partly suggested



[above left]
Design for wall decorations for Aubrey House, 1874–74.
 Charcoal and gouache on paper,
 18.2 x 12.6 cm.
 The Hunterian, University of Glasgow.
 Inscribed ‘Dining Room Aubrey House’.



[above right]
Design for wall decorations for Aubrey House, 1874–74.
 Charcoal and gouache on paper,
 18.3 x 12.9 cm.
 The Hunterian, University of Glasgow.
 Inscribed ‘Dining Room Aubrey ho[use]’.

by Whistler. It certainly echoes the simple, restrained, banded backgrounds of his portraits, which are often referred to as evoking the spare interiors of Japanese architecture, but also shows an awareness of early Georgian interiors, which Whistler would have known in Chelsea.

As well as commissioning paintings, Alexander sought Whistler’s ideas on interior decoration, as explored by the art historians Linda Merrill and Deanna Bendix. The latter calls Whistler’s advice on Aubrey House, his ‘first interior design commission’. Aside from his famous Peacock Room, interior design is still an often-overlooked part of Whistler’s work, because so little actually survives, although there are a number of first-hand accounts of Whistler’s interest in room colour and wall treatment. The Pennells noted that, ‘Colour for him was as much decoration as pattern was for William Morris and in the use of flat colour for wall decoration Whistler has triumphed. His theory of interior decoration . . . has been universally adopted, even his use of distemper.’ Mrs D’Oyly Carte (Helen Lenoir) recalled Whistler supervising the mixing of paints, to get the exact shade for her rooms in her Adam-designed town house in the Adelphi: ‘His idea was to make the house gay and delicate in colour’.

We can assemble only an idea of Whistler’s contribution to Aubrey House from various sources, and they suggest a similar goal of lightness and delicacy.

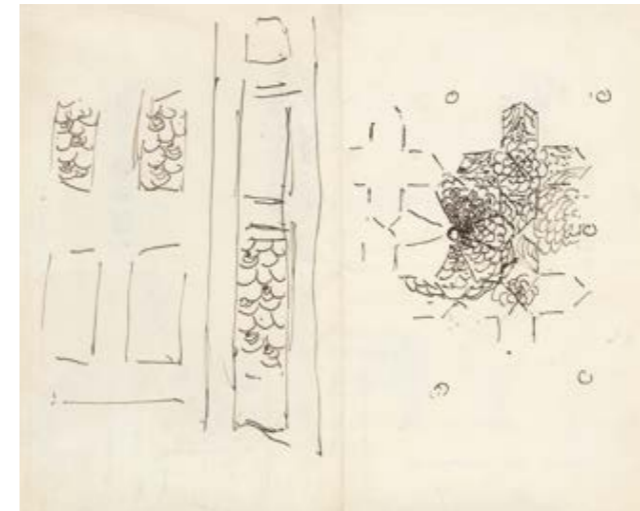
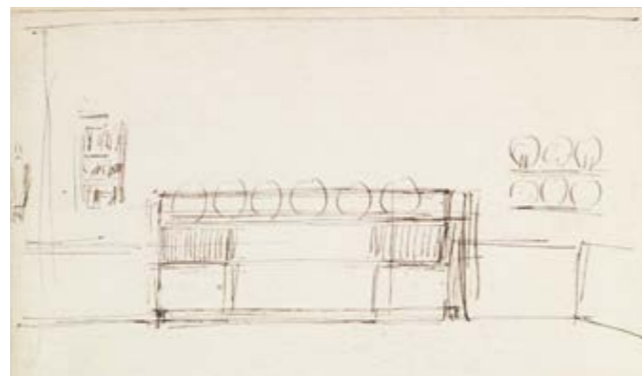
The panels of the 'White Room' (now part of the Long Room) were painted according to his scheme in various carefully selected shades. Violet Hunt recalled that 'the mouldings around the doors and so on were carried out carefully in gradations of white'. Alexander's daughter, Jean, later claimed that Whistler came to think of the scheme as not a success. The painted panelling was eventually removed between 1913 and 1914, when the two rooms were made into one for the better display of paintings, as the collection grew.

It is curious that the white scheme should be the most remembered, because the surviving Whistler sketches suggest much more ambitious explorations of colour, and this may indicate that the brightest were not indeed ever executed. There are some exceptionally beautiful surviving gouache sketches (now in the Hunterian) showing proposals for interior design for Aubrey House. They are small, only the size of sheets of writing paper, but nonetheless compelling works of art in their own right, evocative to modern eyes of the later paintings of Rothko, and should perhaps be read as 'ideas' for discussion rather than formal designs.

The sketches seem to depict near-abstract beach scenes, with bands of colour in washes of blue and cream, suggestive of sky and sea. The scheme appeared to aim at bringing nature inside the house with a play of light over the wall surface, which would have had a resonant, even cinematic effect on summer evenings in these south-facing rooms. Another single sketch shows a beach scene, with cream, yellow ochre and green, with the colours of the walls picked up in the panels. These both appear to have been intended for the dining room.

Other ink sketches for the dining room at Aubrey House (now in the British Library), show a series of ideas for the display of china between the windows and on shelves around the room. They are radically simple and modern in feel. The principle that Whistler pursued at Aubrey House was to reduce ornament in the furnishing and to allow the china to speak for itself. As Bendix has observed, the sketches catch Whistler 'in the act of thinking'.

According to Florence Gladstone in *Aubrey House Kensington 1698–1920* (1922), 'Whistler also prepared a Peacock design for the dining-room [at Aubrey House]. This was not accepted. It was afterwards adapted for Mr. Leyland's house in Prince's Gate.' This is probably not quite the case, but what might explain Florence Gladstone's observation are the two sketches in the British



Museum, on Alexander's own Lombard Street office writing paper, showing a wave-like pattern of peacock feathers as used in the door frames of the Peacock Room. Merrill argues that the sketches were made by Whistler to show Alexander what he was doing for Leyland, which seems probable, as they are very different in feel from the other sketches. But did Gladstone have other information from May Alexander, or even from notes made by Alexander himself?

Whistler's colour schemes for Aubrey House, at least those which were actually executed in the mid-1870s, may have lasted some time. The late nineteenth century interiors are hinted at in watercolours made by one of Alexander's daughters, Milly (later Mrs Dineley), and in the portraits of Alexander seated in the Red Room (drawing room), painted by Philip Connard. Could the latter background be a record of a Whistler scheme? The Pink Room (library) and the White Room became one large room (known as 'The Long Room') in 1913–14, bringing an end to earlier schemes. The Long Room was photographed soon after as a Picture Gallery, still hung with aesthetic restraint.

Whistler's sketches, both in body colour and in ink, and these few contemporary references in letters and memoirs, can only hint at the carefully chosen interiors of Aubrey House and the discussions between patron and artist. What we do know is that they were an early excursion of interior decoration by Whistler, as he explored the boundaries of his art with an imaginative patron. The sketches reveal a rare and creative friendship between the self-effacing, artistic banker and the inventive and imaginative artist, who changed the way a generation looked at colour.

Jeremy Musson, a social and architectural historian, former architectural editor at Country Life, broadcaster and author.

[above top]
Peacock designs, 1876.
Pen and ink on paper.
British Museum.

[opposite top]
Aubrey House, *Designs for the arrangement of china in the dining room*, 1873/74.
Recto, Pen and dark brown ink on paper, 22.8 x 17.8 cm. British Museum, London.

Verso, Pen and dark brown ink on paper, 22.8 x 17.8 cm. British Museum, London.

[above]
Philip Connard (1875–1958),
William Cleverly Alexander, c.1905.
Oil on canvas. Private collection.

[opposite middle]
Aubrey House, *Designs for the arrangement of china in the dining room*, 1873/74.

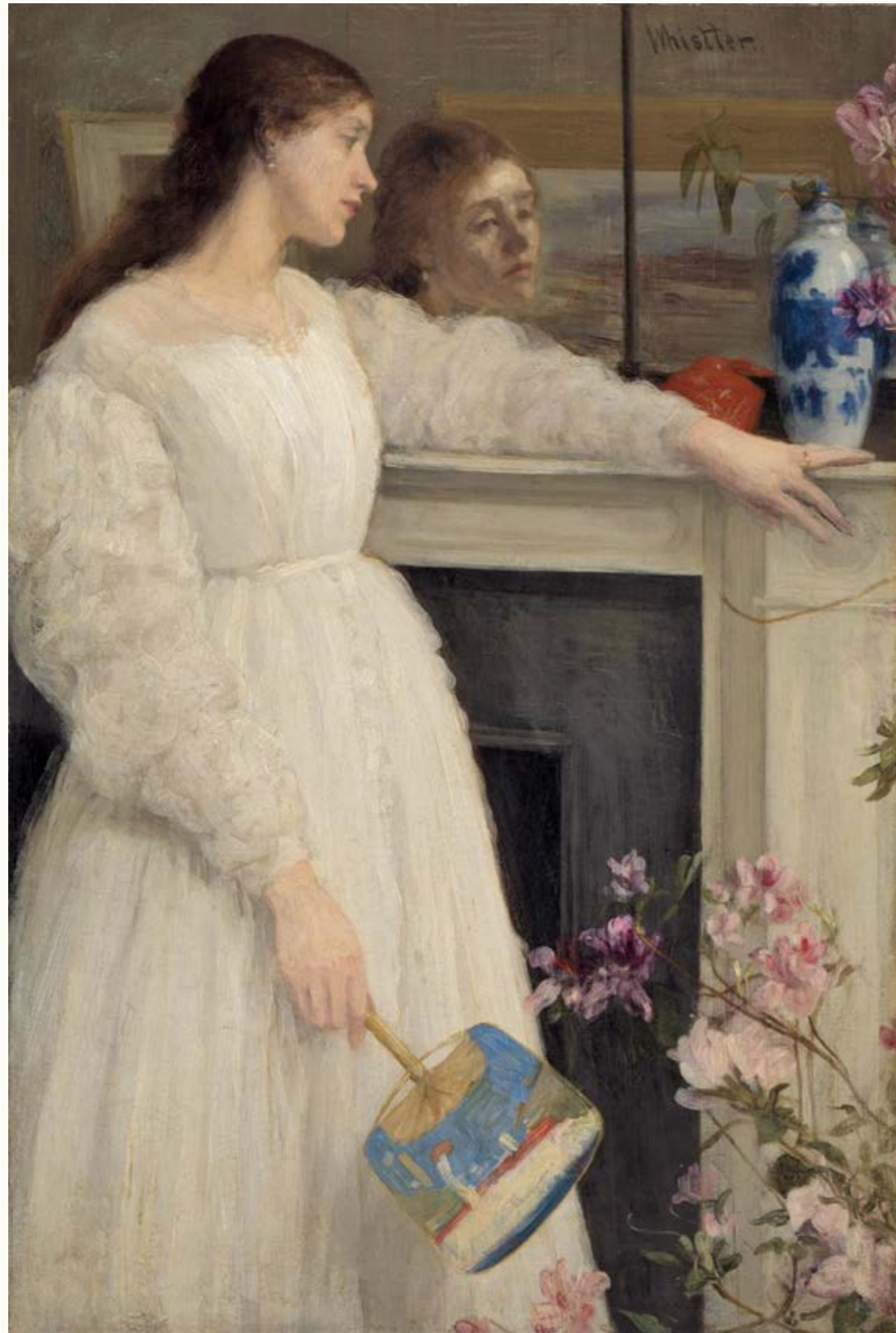
[opposite bottom]
Aubrey House, *Designs for the dining-room, chairs and door, plates on wall*, 1873/74.
Recto, Pen and dark brown ink on paper, 22.9 x 17.7 cm. British Museum, London.



A TEST FOR TASTE

65 Whistler at the National Gallery
– Charles Saumarez Smith

Nocturne- Blue and Silver - Chelsea, 1871.
Oil on panel, 50.2 x 60.8 cm.
Tate, London. [detail]



[*opposite*]
Symphony in White, No. 2,
The Little White Girl, 1864.
 Oil on canvas, 76.5 x 51.1 cm.
 Tate, London.
 Exhibited at the Royal Academy 1865.
 Bought by Arthur Studd 1893.

[*below*]
Arthur H. Studd, 1897.
 Charcoal on grey paper laid
 on card, 27.3 x 17.9 cm.
 The Hunterian, University of Glasgow.

Inscribed 'To Arthur H Studd/ in
 affectionate remembrance/ from
 "The ladies of the family"/ August
 11th.1903.' by R. B. Philip.

A TEST FOR TASTE

Whistler at the National Gallery

CHARLES SAUMAREZ SMITH

In 1892, Arthur Studd (1863–1919), artist and collector, saw two of the wonderful paintings by Whistler that he was subsequently to bequeath to the National Gallery. The paintings were on display at the Goupil Galleries in New Bond Street, London, in one of Whistler's most important exhibitions that included 43 *Nocturnes, Marines, & Chevalet Pieces*. The exhibition opened on 19 March 1892 and helped to establish his reputation, and his prices, amongst collectors. By the time the show finished, on 9 April, there had been 10,000 visitors. The director of the gallery had even written to Whistler saying 'We want to get some M. P. to ask the Government if they propose to buy a 'Whistler' for the National Gallery. It will advertise the show & we want to make an effort to have one of your works there'.


The first of the pictures Studd saw was the elegiac *Symphony in White, No. 2, The Little White Girl*, 1864 (Tate, London), a picture which the Alte Pinakothek in Munich tried unsuccessfully to buy in 1892. The other picture he greatly admired was *Nocturne: Blue and Silver — Cremorne Lights*, 1872 (Tate, London), one of Whistler's beautiful, vaporous views of the Thames, as seen from Battersea Bridge and looking towards the lights of Cremorne Gardens. Studd bought these two works in 1893 through Goupil. A third work was *Nocturne: Black and Gold - The Fire Wheel*, 1875/77 (Tate, London), acquired in 1896 for £1,000 by Studd when, owing to the illness of his wife, Beatrix, Whistler was facing financial difficulties.

Studd also acquired a large collection of prints, which he bequeathed to an American friend, J. Kent Sanders, with the request (but not injunction) that he should leave them to the British Museum. A decade later Sanders, then residing in Florence and in bad health, presented them to the museum, with the request that they be regarded as the bequest of Arthur Studd. A pastel, *Chelsea fruit shop* (1886/88), had also been owned by Studd and was acquired by Grenville Winthrop, and passed on his death in 1943 to the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



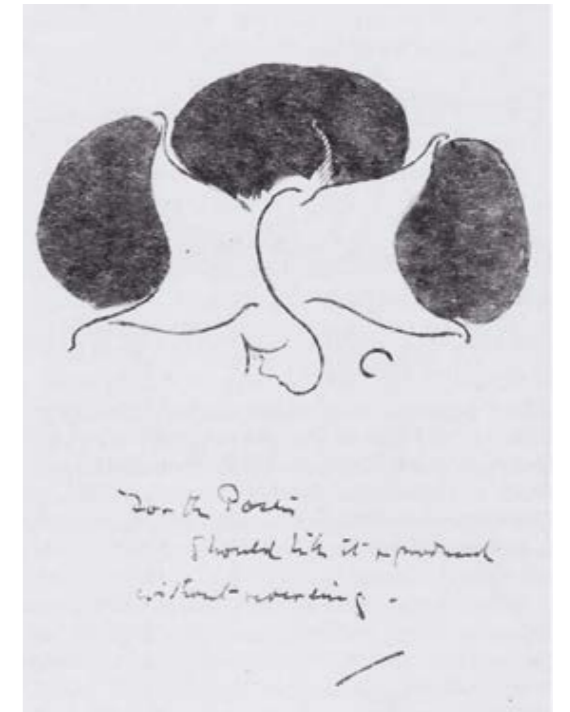
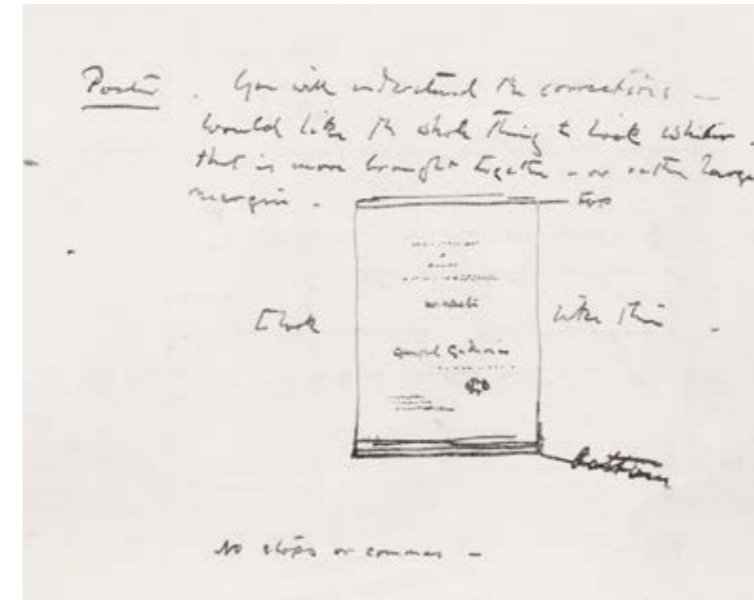
SMALL COLLECTION
OF
NOCTURNES
MARINES & CHEVALET PIECES
BY
MR. WHISTLER

THE GOUPIL GALLERIES
FOR
THREE WEEKS ONLY



MESSRS. BOUSSOD VALADON & Co
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March 21 to April 9



[opposite]
Nocturnes, Marines and Chevalet Pieces,
1892. Poster.

[above left]
Nocturnes, Marines and Chevalet Pieces.
Design for a poster in a letter from Whistler
to Thomas Way, dated 6 March 1892.
Pen and ink on paper, 22.0 x 17.3 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, DC.

[above right]
Nocturnes, Marines and Chevalet Pieces.
Design for a butterfly for a poster, 1892.
Ink on paper, 17.4 x 11 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, DC.

[opposite]
Interior of the Goupil Gallery,
by A.C. Cooper, London, October 1927.
Tate Archive, London.





Studd died of pneumonia on 25 January 1919. According to the terms of his will dated 9 January 1919, he bequeathed to the National Gallery his three pictures by Whistler namely: *The Little White Girl*, *The Fire Wheel*, and *Cremorne Lights*, coupled with an instruction that ‘they are not to be hung in the Tate Gallery or anywhere else except the National Gallery’. In spite of this clear request, the two *Nocturnes* were transferred to the Tate in 1949, and *The Little White Girl* in 1951.

The Whistlers bequeathed to the National Gallery in 1919 were not the only ones that used to be in the collection of the National Gallery. There was *Nocturne: Blue and Gold — Old Battersea Bridge*, 1872/75 (Tate, London), painted some time in the early 1870s and sold in 1877 to W. Graham, a member of parliament. In November 1878, the painting was produced in court as evidence in the Whistler v Ruskin libel case. After Graham’s death the painting was auctioned at Christies in 1886, bought by Robert H. C. Harrison for 60 guineas, and sold by him to the National Art Collections Fund for £2,000, which presented it to the National Gallery in 1905; but it was transferred the same year to the Tate.

Another picture was *Nocturne: Blue and Silver — Chelsea* (Tate, London) painted one summer afternoon in 1871, and bought from the Goupil Gallery

[above]
*Nocturne: Black and Gold –
The Fire Wheel*, 1875/77.
Oil on canvas, 54.3 x 76.2 cm.
Tate, London.
Bought by Studd 1896.

[above right]
*Nocturne: Blue and Silver –
Cremorne Lights*, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 50.2 x 74.9 cm.
Tate, London.
Bought by Studd 1893.

[right]
Nocturne: Blue and Silver - Chelsea, 1871.
Oil on panel, 50.2 x 60.8 cm.
Tate, London.



for £210 in 1871 by William Alexander (1840–1916), a prominent banker and collector. On his death the painting was bequeathed to two of his daughters, Rachel and Jean Alexander, who in turn gave the picture in 1959, not to the Tate Gallery as one might expect, but instead to the National Gallery, whilst retaining a life interest. Only when Jean Alexander died in 1972 was it transferred to the Tate.



There is also a portrait commissioned from Whistler by Alexander of another daughter, *Miss May Alexander*, 1874–75, now in the Tate Gallery, which was painted in the dining room of their wonderful, still intact house, Aubrey House in Kensington. On Alexander’s death in 1916 the painting was bequeathed not to the Tate Gallery, where it had been on loan since 1913, but, like his *Nocturne*, to the National Gallery. The painting had a life interest to May, and went to the Tate on her death in 1950. Likewise Alexander commissioned a portrait of another of his daughters *Harmony in Grey and Green: Miss Cicely Alexander*, 1872–73 (Tate, London), which was bequeathed on his death to the National Gallery with a life interest to Cicely. It went to the Tate Gallery on her death

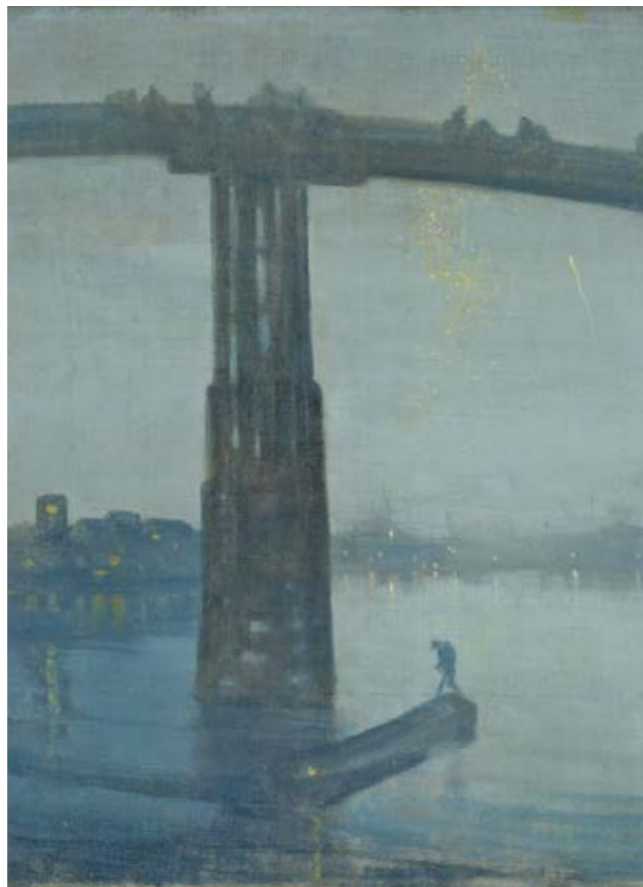
in 1932. Intriguingly, the painting was transferred back to the National Gallery in 1956, before returning to the Tate Gallery at a later date.

So, what is going on here? It is clear that the narrative of bequests of Whistlers to the National Gallery and the fact that they have all, without exception, been handed on to the Tate Gallery tells one something of interest about the nature of the relationship between the two institutions and that this, in turn, tells one something about the taste for Whistler in the twentieth century.

It is hard now to reconstruct a time when the National Gallery was not simply a great art gallery devoted to the display of old master paintings, but a gallery which, even after the foundation of the Tate Gallery in 1897, maintained an active interest in what was then considered to be contemporary art, so that when the recently founded National Art Collections Fund came to choose in 1905 which institution they should give the *Nocturne: Blue and Gold — Old Battersea Bridge* to, they felt that it was more appropriate that it should be housed in the National Gallery, although the National Gallery decided otherwise. In 1919, when Arthur Studd was drawing up his will, he felt that he would prefer his three great Whistlers to be exhibited not in the Tate Gallery, but in the National Gallery and left very specific instructions that they should remain there. When W. C. Alexander was making arrangements for his estate, he decided that his Whistlers should be left during their lifetime to his daughters and, thereafter, on their death, should pass to the National Gallery and this request was initially adhered to on their death.

Meanwhile, the Tate have never bought a Whistler, and have only been given two works: *Crepuscle in Flesh Colour and Green: Valparaiso*, 1866, by Graham Robertson in 1940; and *Pink and Grey: Three Figures*, 1879, by the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers, in memory of the Society’s first president, James McNeill Whistler, in 1950.

What I suspect has happened is not entirely to the credit of the National Gallery: that those people who left Whistlers to the National Gallery wanted him to be regarded as an artist of international significance whose work belonged in the canon of nineteenth-century painting and that his work belonged alongside those of his French contemporaries; but that the Trustees of the National Gallery decided that, to the contrary, he should be considered more properly as a British or American artist, whose work did not belong in the collections of the National Gallery, which until 2014 had no American holdings whatsoever and an extremely partial and unrepresentative display of nineteenth-century British paintings, which stops with the death of Turner.



Nocturne: Blue and Gold - Old Battersea Bridge, 1872/75.
Oil on canvas, 66.6 x 50.2 cm.
Tate, London.



[above left]
Miss May Alexander, 1874–75.
Oil on canvas, 193.0 x 102.0 cm.
Tate, London.



[above right]
Harmony in Grey and Green - Miss Cicely Alexander, 1872–73.
Oil on canvas, 190.0 x 98.0 cm.
Tate, London.

Instead, it was decided that paintings by Whistler should be shown more appropriately in the Tate Gallery on Millbank. In 1954, when the Tate Gallery Act was passed, it was agreed that the ownership of all paintings which were then held at the Tate Gallery should pass to the Trustees of the Tate. But, in the late 1980s, it was agreed that some of the paintings held by the Tate should be shown at the National Gallery and, amongst these paintings, was *Miss Cicely Alexander*, where she was until relatively recently. Even in 1996, when it was decided that the Tate’s holdings of nineteenth-century European paintings should pass on long-term loan to the National Gallery, it was taken for granted that Whistler belonged alongside the Tate’s holdings of British paintings, rather than alongside those of the National Gallery.

Now, it is not for me to comment on the rights and wrongs of these decisions, but I find them intriguing, and it helps to confirm the presupposition that Whistler is now, as he has always been, in a significant way, a test for taste — someone who bridges the different cultures of the nineteenth century, born in America, living for much of his life in Chelsea, but equally at home in the studios and salons of late nineteenth-century Paris. He escapes the boundaries of a national definition of painting and belongs to history as one of the immortal creatures of late nineteenth-century art.

Charles Saumarez Smith was Director of the National Gallery from 2002 to 2007 and then Secretary and Chief Executive of the Royal Academy of Arts.

REVIEWS



75 'Edward Burne-Jones',
Tate Britain
– *Thomas Hughes*

77 'The Great Spectacle:
250 Years of the Summer
Exhibition', The Royal
Academy, London
– *Simon Wartnaby*

*Caprice in Purple and Gold:
The Golden Screen, 1864.*
Oil on wood, 50.2 x 68.7 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, DC.
Exhibited at the Royal Academy 1865.

EDWARD BURNE-JONES

THOMAS HUGHES



‘Edward Burne-Jones’
24 October 2018 to 24 February 2019
Tate Britain, London

The first room of Tate Britain’s exhibition, *Edward Burne-Jones*, is painted a gorgeous deep red, clearly intended to pick out the reds and russets and golds of Burne-Jones’s altarpiece, *The Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi*, 1861 (Tate, London), hanging opposite the entrance door. This altarpiece is spectacular. A fluffy-haired angel on the left-hand panel floats above red embroidery painted with an almost metallic effect; a Madonna, somewhat suggestively unbuttoning her cape, on the right, receives the august visitor with a curiously unimpressed expression. In the centre a crowded Adoration feels festive and worldly; Swinburne, also wearing an impressive hairdo, appears joyfully piping notes of celebration. This is Burne-Jones ‘the late’ or ‘last’ Pre-Raphaelite, as the exhibition describes him. Religious subject matter is enriched with eroticism and luxury, but Burne-Jones is more than an oddly belated member of the Brotherhood. That way of thinking of Burne-Jones does a disservice to the weirdness and radicalism of his painting and its pivotal place in late-nineteenth-century British art. After all, Burne-Jones was hung near Whistler at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877. Ruskin praised Burne-Jones’s work but famously criticised Whistler, which led to him suing Ruskin for libel and winning, and Burne-Jones being called as a witness for Ruskin.

[*opposite*]
Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98),
Love Among the Ruins, 1870–73.
Watercolour, bodycolour and gum
arabic on paper, 96.5 x 152.4 cm.
Private collection.

At Tate we do not get enough of a sense of how Burne-Jones took Pre-Raphaelitism further than it had been taken, or of how his own kind of highly decorative painting, steeped in literature and mythology, made sense next to Whistler’s urbane Aestheticism—these are difficult and interesting issues. Opposite the altarpiece, Burne-Jones’s smaller, early works in watercolour do make sense seen through the ‘last Pre-Raphaelite’ lens. They are dark, Gothic images. It is almost as if we are invited to imagine the freshly made, hot metal arrows in *Cupid’s Forge*, 1861 (private collection), have been bent round and linked together to form long chains and attached to the unfathomable dress of *Sidonia von Bork*, 1860 (Tate, London), nearby. A larger, grander painting later on also makes sense viewed this way, *The Morning of the Resurrection*, 1886 (Tate, London). The central figure’s black shroud is like death itself and it is in the process of being turned into a shimmering gold by the light emanating from the resurrected Christ. However, in the corner of the first room we get something different, something more ambiguous, exquisite and painful. *The Lament*, 1866 (William Morris Gallery, London), depicts a young woman sitting and plucking a stringed instrument and a young man in torment. Roses, picking out the pink of the woman’s dress, curl down from the top right and stroke, or perhaps press too heavily, on the nape of the young man’s neck. Rose petals and leaves lie on the floor. Behind, a medieval world falls into disrepair. This is a premonition of one of Burne-Jones’s masterpieces, *Love Among the Ruins*, 1870–73 (private collection), the watercolour version depicting cradling lovers, a shattered column, and a rose-overgrown world that has fallen out of time. (It would be good to see Robert Browning’s eponymous poem, or extracts from it, here). More flowers pick out a dress’s colours but in this painting they are the same colour as the dress’s highlights, not its complement. This beautiful and sad pairing of blue flower with blue fabric becomes a leitmotif for the painter; a poetry, if not quite symphony, of colour.

Between *The Lament* and *Love Among the Ruins* there is an interruption: a huge white room of works



come across as a curatorial afterthought. The tapestries in room 7, in particular, sit oddly after *The Briar Rose*, completed in 1890 (The Farringdon Collection Trust) series, in the penultimate space. The painterly and the decorative, for Burne-Jones, are more complicatedly enmeshed than that.

The best thing about this exhibition is in seeing so many of the 1880s paintings, which are spread out over a few dark rooms at the core. *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, 1884 (Tate, London), looks even stranger in its elongated reality and shining, yet dark metals. *The Wheel of Fortune*, 1883 (Musée d’Orsay, Paris), mesmerises with its revolving drama. *The Depths of the Sea*, 1886 (Private collection), in which a smiling mermaid holds onto (pulls down) a beautiful male nude, continues the theme of emasculated men; clearly this fantasy was important to Burne-Jones and one would like to see it tackled a little more. *The Golden Stairs*, 1880 (Tate, London), another tall and thin one, depicts numberless female figures filing down a staircase in what could be Pompeii. It is hard not to compare *The Golden Stairs* mentally to Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* (1912).

By slowing down the narrative of these 1880s paintings into decorative tableau Burne-Jones is taking Pre-Raphaelitism towards Aestheticism, blending the two. The four paintings of the *Briar Rose* sequence are the apotheosis of this. It is history painting on pause. The king is asleep on his throne. We are not really sure whether the handsome knight, lingering at the far-left edge of the first picture, will be able to hack his way through the thorny branches to kiss the sleeping princess. Quests, sex, dominance, submission, magic, metal, fire, flowers, dreams; the exhibition leaves it entirely to us to find our own ways through these imaginative thickets of Burne-Jones’s. That is how I like it, but my worry is that those who are less accustomed to this strange painter might like a little more guidance and context.

Thomas Hughes is an Associate Lecturer in the History of Modern and Contemporary Art at The Courtauld Institute of Art.

[above left]
Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98),
The Wheel of Fortune, 1883.
Oil on canvas, 259 x 151.5 cm.
Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

on paper. Maybe it is intended to offer respite but I find the change of gear hard to handle and could not linger over these very long; though the female heads, by the door, are frightening and transfixing. At this point it is worth mentioning that Burne-Jones’s tapestries and his other design work, mainly represented here by some horrid cherubs painted onto *The Graham Piano*, 1879–80 (private collection), are left to the end and

THE GREAT SPECTACLE: 250 YEARS OF THE SUMMER EXHIBITION

SIMON WARTNABY

‘The Great Spectacle’
12 June to 19 August 2018
The Royal Academy of Arts, London

To celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Academy, *The Great Spectacle* exhibition told the story of its annual Summer Exhibition. It was staged in the Fine Rooms at Burlington House at the same time as the 2018 Summer Exhibition was on show in the main galleries of the Academy.

The Summer Exhibition was one of the most important artistic and social events in nineteenth-century London. This was especially so when the Academy moved to the grand, purpose-built new galleries added to Burlington House in 1868, which are still in use today. In 1869, for the first show at Burlington House, there were a record number of 314,800 visitors, and the zenith of its popularity was reached in 1879 with 391,197 visits. In the twentieth century numbers declined to reach their lowest of 44,611 in 1969. Since then there has been a steady increase to 296,442 in 2018, the highest since 1907.

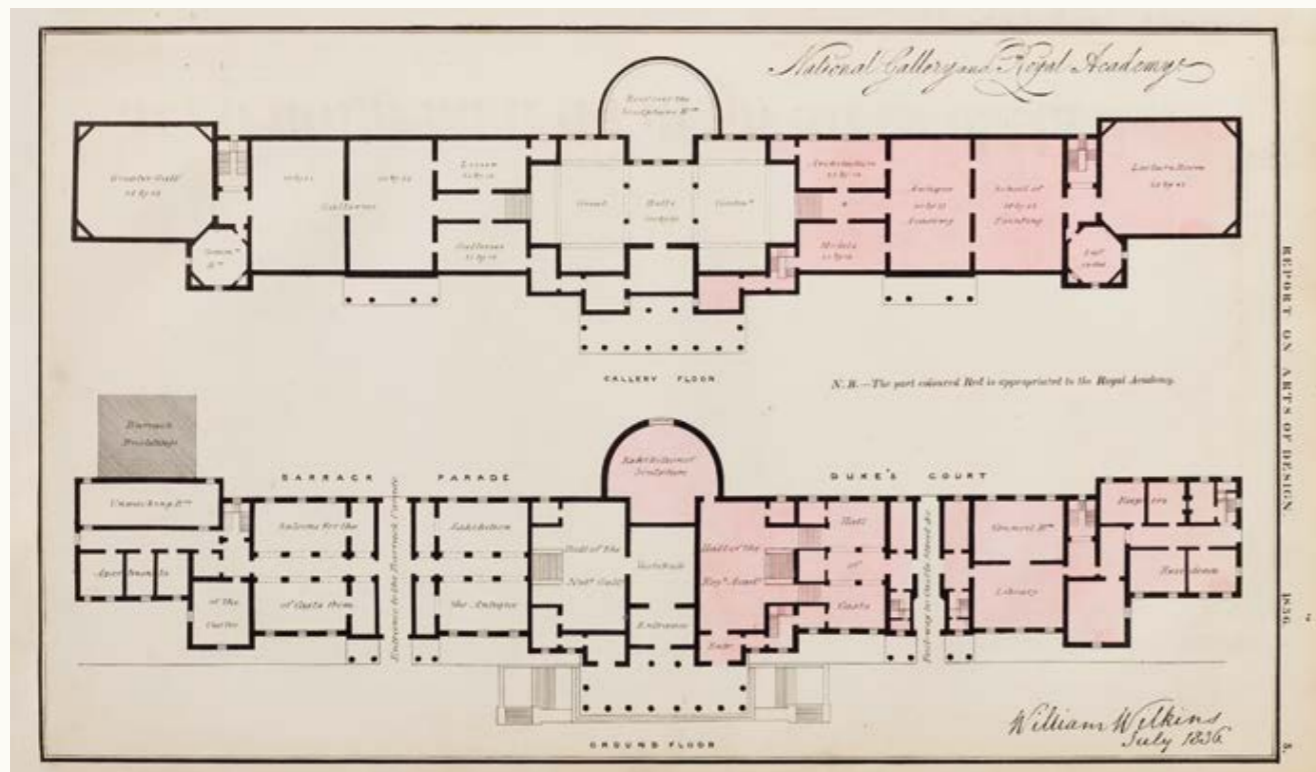
The exhibition display was chronological and the theme in room 6 was ‘Victorian Acclaim’, from the 1850s to 1890s. This was dominated by William Powell Frith’s *Ramsgate Sands*, 1851–54 (Royal Collections Trust), and the 26-year old Elizabeth Butler’s dramatic large painting *The Roll Call: Calling the Roll after an Engagement, Crimea*, 1874 (Royal Collections Trust). Exhibited in 1854 and 1874 respectively, their popularity was such that they had to be guarded by a policeman to control the crowds. The room also included two Whistler etchings from the 1860 exhibition, *The Lime Burner*

The Great Spectacle, exhibition poster, Royal Academy, 2018.



and *Black Lion Wharf*, both from the Thames Set of 1859. They had been alongside three more etchings (*Z. Astruc*, 1859, an unidentified ‘Portrait’ and *Thames Warehouses*, 1859), and a painting, *At the Piano*, 1858–59 (Taft Museum, Cincinnati). The 1860 exhibition was in the Academy’s premises at that time in what is now the east wing of the National Gallery. The selection by the Academy of his first major painting was a great success for the 26-year old artist, and he submitted work to eleven of the exhibitions (1859–65, 1867, 1870, 1872 and 1879), with a total of sixteen paintings and eighteen prints being accepted.

The catalogue to *The Great Spectacle* mentions that the final year in which Whistler exhibited a painting was 1872, when he showed what was to become one of his most famous works, *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter’s Mother*, 1871, (Musée d’Orsay, Paris). The catalogue goes on to say that the painting was almost rejected, and when hung it was positioned so high it was difficult to appreciate ‘the sombre tones of the composition’, and received a muted reaction. In fact so muted, that the catalogue states that Whistler never sent another painting to the Academy. The portrait was ‘one of the most famous paintings by an American artist to be held in a European collection’. It was therefore disappointing that we were denied seeing its return to the Academy, as it had been promised for the opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi.



The last time Whistler's work was accepted for the Summer Exhibition was in 1879 with just one etching, *Putney Bridge* (1879). For Whistler, 1879 was a difficult year following the Whistler v Ruskin trial. In May he had exhibited five paintings and some etchings at the Grosvenor Gallery, but that same month he had been declared bankrupt. So why just one etching? There is no evidence of how many works had been submitted, or rejected. The seven members of the 1879 Academy selection committee had rejected 74% of all submissions that year. It would seem unlikely that Whistler submitted just one work. So, was his work also rejected by the selection committee?

Although there is no evidence that Whistler submitted paintings to the Academy after 1872, he still had thoughts about exhibiting. There is correspondence that mentions Whistler considering submitting work in 1873 and 1885. In a letter of 31 January 1873, to the collector Louis Huth, Whistler refers to two paintings 'for the Academy', and in another letter of March to Alan Cole 'my pictures must go to the Academy on the 1st.' Whistler seems to have changed his mind as he says in a letter to William Grape probably March/June 1873 'I sent them nothing'. It seems that in 1885 Whistler considered

exhibiting again because there is a diary entry by Alan Cole on 19 October 1884 that says 'I went to tea with him [Whistler] to see his fine full length of Sarasate, [*Arrangement in Black: Portrait of Señor Pablo de Sarasate*, 1884 (Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh)] the violinist, for next year's "Academy".'

Despite the lack of Whistler's painting of his mother in *The Great Spectacle*, the choice of the two etchings helped to demonstrate Whistler's success at the Academy. The part he played in the etching revival in the nineteenth century and the importance of a new realism in his painting mediated through his London/Paris artistic milieu. His influential position was also recognised in two more recent exhibitions in London: *Monet and Architecture*, National Gallery, 2018, and *Van Gogh in Britain*, Tate, 2019, which both featured his paintings.

Simon Wartnaby is Honorary Secretary of the Whistler Society and an architectural historian.

[above]

National Gallery and Royal Academy plan, William Wilkins, 1836.

Editors: Simon Wartnaby, James Dufficy, Professor Daniel E Sutherland and Nicolas Chapple.

Image research: Simon Wartnaby and Patrick Duffy.

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Mr Whistler is the man at once of highest genius and most daring eccentricity of this school. He is equally capable of exquisite things or of gross impertinences, and this exhibition contains instances of both; of the former, in the *Little White Girl*, of the latter, in his two sketches of Japanese and Chinese fabrics and screens, accompanied by slight caricatures of maidens of the flowery land, mere plays of colour, and imitation of textures, ugly in form and unfinished in execution.

Exhibition of the Royal Academy.
Second Notice, *The Times*, London,
8 May 1865, p. 8.

