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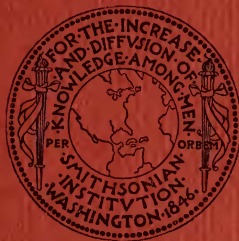
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

FREER GALLERY OF ART
OCCASIONAL PAPERS

NUMBER FOUR

JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER
A BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE
ILLUSTRATED FROM THE COLLECTIONS
OF THE FREER GALLERY OF ART

By
BURNS A. STUBBS



PUBLICATION 3994

WASHINGTON
1950

FREER GALLERY OF ART
OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Volume 1, no. 4 (1950)

James McNeill Whistler
A Biographical Outline Illustrated from the
Collections of the Freer Gallery of Art

By Burns A. Stubbs

2016 Interactive Online Edition

Featuring a new introduction, illustrations,
and updated bibliography

Produced and developed by
Ari Post, Sana Mirza,
Lee Glazer, and Zeynep Simavi

FREER | SACKLER

THE SMITHSONIAN'S MUSEUMS OF ASIAN ART

FREER GALLERY OF ART OCCASIONAL PAPERS

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Smithsonian Institution
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Introduction

Burns Stubbs's "Biographical Outline" Reconsidered

Archibald Wenley had high ambitions when he succeeded his mentor John Ellerton Lodge as the second director of the Freer Gallery of Art in 1943. Groomed by Lodge to become a Sinologist, Wenley had in the 1920s worked on museum-sponsored archaeological surveys in China, studied East Asian languages in Paris, and lived for several years in Kyoto. Back in Washington in the 1930s, he conducted research on the Freer's Chinese and Japanese objects and oversaw the tremendous expansion of the Islamic collection. Wenley represented a new type of highly trained, professional museum worker whose dedication to research contrasted with the more subjective methods of the previous generation, including the museum's founder, Detroit industrialist and autodidact Charles Lang Freer. As director, Wenley expanded and professionalized the staff, established a technical laboratory to carry out scientific analysis, and launched several scholarly publications series, including the Freer Occasional Papers. His objective was to make the museum a center for research in Asian art.¹ So, it may come as a surprise to learn that two of the first four publications to appear under the imprint of the Occasional Papers were devoted to American art.

Both publications were written by Wenley's assistant Burns Stubbs. *Paintings, Pastels, Drawings, Prints, and Copper Plates by and attributed to American and European Artists, Together with a List of Original Whistleriana in the Freer Gallery of Art* was a comprehensive, usefully indexed inventory: a 1948 version of a searchable collections database. The present volume, *James McNeill Whistler: A Biographical Outline Illustrated from the Collections of the Freer Gallery of Art*, appeared in 1950 and was the museum's first publication devoted to the artist that Freer himself had admired above all others. Conceived simply as a "concise but factual" compilation of secondary sources (some of which were more accurate than others),



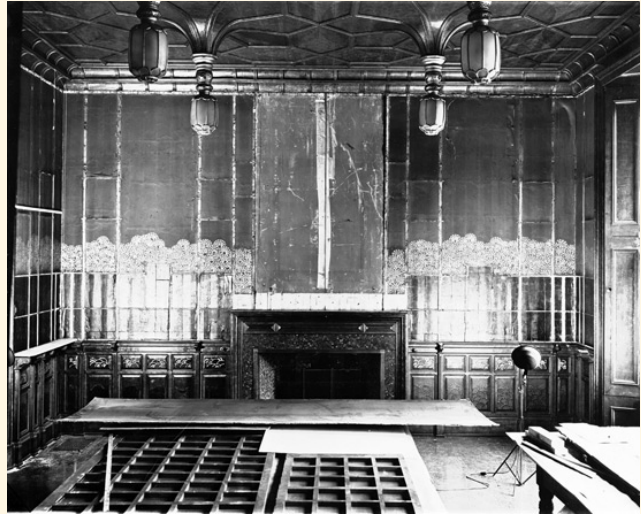
The Peacock Room, photographed upon the Freer Gallery's opening, 1923. Smithsonian Archives.

Stubbs's *Biographical Outline* nevertheless affirmed the importance of Whistler to the Freer's institutional history and present-day identity. Reissuing it now, in an annotated and expanded digital edition, is a reiteration of that same impulse.

When the Freer Gallery opened to the public in 1923, nearly half of the museum was devoted to American art; Whistler's work alone—four galleries plus the Peacock Room—filled the entire south side of the building. This arrangement endured until 1930, when American art was “retired” (to use the terminology of that era's collections managers), making way for important new acquisitions—most notably Islamic ceramics and manuscripts, as well as ancient Chinese

bronzes and jades. In the years immediately following World War II, however, American art enjoyed renewed visibility. In 1947, four galleries on the north side of the Freer were hung with paintings and works on paper by Whistler; a structural renovation of the Peacock Room, postponed on account of the war, began then as well. The famous aesthetic interior, always a major attraction, reopened in 1950, a landmark event that surely prompted the appearance of Stubbs's *Biographical Outline* of Whistler the same year. He went on to produce a handbook on the Peacock Room in 1951, which, despite a number of shortcomings, went through several reprintings and remained in circulation for decades.

Burns Archer Stubbs (1890—1964) had no formal training as an art historian and did not aspire to conduct original research. He had come to the Smithsonian in 1919 as a sergeant in the United States Army, detailed to help assemble and install an array of new military collections donated by the War and Navy Departments in the wake of the World War I.² Lodge hired him in 1920 to help with the transfer of the Freer collection from Detroit to Washington, and Stubbs went on to become the museum's “general factotum”—registrar, art handler, chauffeur, photographer, building superintendent, and de facto curator—until his retirement in 1956.³



Structural renovation of the Peacock Room, 1947.

Wenley gave Stubbs the title “assistant to the director” in 1944. The museum would not have a dedicated curator of American art until 1974, and among Stubbs’s many responsibilities was overseeing the American collections. It was in that capacity that he produced his three publications on Whistler and American art.

In the sixty-plus years that have passed, art historians and curators have produced an abundance of serious scholarship- on Whistler, his artistic production, and his varied cultural contexts. The selection of monographs, exhibition catalogues, catalogues raisonnés, and biographies included in this updated edition of Stubbs’s *Outline* only hint of the volume of work that has been done by Freer staff and our

colleagues in the field. In recent years, we have all benefitted from the digitization of key primary documents, especially the University of Glasgow’s online publication of Whistler’s correspondence and the catalogue raisonné of his etchings. These resources have allowed scholars to focus on analysis, interpretation, and questions of context, moving beyond the monographic and into comparative, interdisciplinary, and cross-cultural realms that Stubbs and even Wenley could have never imagined. Even so, as the Freer|Sackler’s current curator of American art, I owe a debt of gratitude to them both: to the Sinologist Wenley for recognizing American art as a unique asset, and to his assistant Stubbs for taking on “other duties as assigned.”

Lee Glazer

Associate Curator of American Art

January 2016



Illustration from a commemorative album presented to Burns Stubbs upon his retirement, 1956. Smithsonian Archives.

1. See John A. Pope, “Archibald Gibson Wenley: An Appreciation,” in *Ars Orientalis* 5 (1963): 1–5.
2. *Report of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution for the Year Ending June 30, 1920* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), 32.
3. W. T. Chase, “The Making of Volume 2 of the Freer Chinese Bronze Book,” in *Scientific Research on Ancient Asian Metallurgy: Proceedings of the Fifth Forbes Symposium at the Freer Gallery of Art* (London: Archetype Publications in association with the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2012), 14.

Select Updated Bibliography

(listed in reverse chronological order)

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FOREWORD

In view of the importance and scope of the Whistler Collection belonging to the Freer Gallery of Art and the interest shown by art lovers and collectors in the works of one of America's foremost painters and etchers, this concise but factual outline, illustrated by examples from the Freer Collections, will, it is hoped, fill the long-felt need of gathering and condensing material now to be found in a number of different books.

Many big and cumbersome volumes have been written about Whistler, but the average reader does not have access to them or the time or inclination to peruse them from beginning to end. For that reason the writer has tried to present most of the pertinent facts about the artist and his life in this short pamphlet.

Many sources were used in this compilation; they include: *Life of James McNeill Whistler*, by E. R. & J. Pennell, Philadelphia, 1911; *Recollections and Impressions of J. A. McNeill Whistler*, by A. J. Eddy, New York, 1903; *Whistler as I Knew Him*, by Mortimer Menpes, New York, 1904; many short sketches from magazines, newspapers, and catalogues printed during his lifetime and after his death; and the two hundred and seventy-odd Whistler letters which the Freer Gallery owns. This latter source of information helps immeasurably to clear up many controversial issues because most of these letters were written by Whistler personally or by his wife at his direction.

B. A. STUBBS

Freer Gallery of Art
May 1949.

LIST OF PLATES

(Plates at end of text ; all subjects photographed by author.)

Plate	No.	Title
Frontis- piece	06.57	James McNeill Whistler. Portrait of Himself. Oil painting.
1	05.333	A Fire at Pomfret. Water color.
2	08.10E	Two Lovers and an Old Woman. Pen-and-ink drawing.
3	97.17	Sketches on the Coast Survey Plate. Etching.
4	98.216	The Unsafe Tenement. Etching, first state.
5	04.75	Caprice in Purple and Gold, No. 2: The Golden Screen. Oil painting.
6	17.234	The Music Room: Harmony in Green and Rose. Oil painting.
7	09.127	Nocturne: Blue and Gold, Valparaiso. Oil paint- ing.
8	98.268	Limehouse. Etching, second state.
9	05.100	Portrait of F. R. Leyland: Arrangement in Black. Oil painting.
10	04.61	The Peacock Room: northwest corner (upper); southwest corner (lower).
11	02.97	Nocturne: Blue and Silver, Battersea Reach. Oil painting.
12	98.379	Nocturne. Etching, third state.
13	05.205	Study. Lithograph.
14	87.22	The Rialto. Etching, second state.
15	04.82	Southend Pier. Water color.
16	04.315	An Orange Note, Sweetshop. Oil painting.
17	05.129	Annabel Lee. Pastel.
18	04.65	Venus Astarte. Pastel.
19	99.54	The "Adam and Eve," Old Chelsea. Etching, in- termediate state between Kennedy's first and second.
20	05.208	Nocturne: The Thames at Battersea. Lithotint.
21	94.14	Red House, Paimpol. Lithograph, printed in colors.
22	08.15	The Little Red Note: Dordrecht. Water color.
23	06.227	Dorsetshire Landscape. Oil painting.
24	06.120	Zaandam. Etching, second state.
25	05.117	St. Ives: Cornwall. Water color.
26	02.109	Rose and Gold: The Little Lady Sophie of Soho. Oil painting.
27	03.301	Portrait of Charles L. Freer. Oil painting.
28	04.448	Two Whistler Butterflies. Pencil drawings.

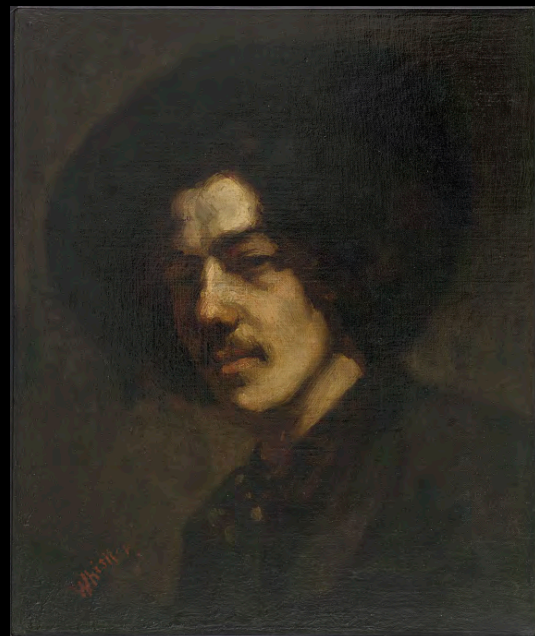
SUBJECTS LISTED IN NUMERICAL ORDER

Number	Plate	Number	Plate
87.22	14	04.448	28
94.14	21	05.100	9
97.17	3	05.117	25
98.216	4	05.129	17
98.268	8	05.205	13
98.379	12	05.208	20
99.54	19	05.333	1
02.97	11	06.57	Frontispiece
02.109	26	06.120	24
03.301	27	06.227	23
04.61	10	08.10E	2
04.65	18	08.15	22
04.75	5	09.127	7
04.82	15	17.234	6
04.315	16		



06.57. JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER: PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF

Painting in oil, done in Paris, c. 1858.



Portrait of Whistler with a Hat, 1857–59

From Freer | Sackler label:

As is frequently the case when a young artist creates a self-portrait, Whistler identified himself with a past master. Theodore Duret reported that Whistler was particularly struck by Rembrandt's *Portrait of a Man in a Beret* in the Louvre. Whistler adopted Rembrandt's general format as well as his rich, dark palette. The artist Kenyon Cox detected the impact of Courbet's realism in Whistler's use of "rather violent light and shade, with black shadows, the yellowish tone of the flesh, and the attempt at powerful modeling." The self-portrait exhibits a fastidious fashion-consciousness: the artist is wearing a flat-brimmed brushed silk hat—the "Quartier Latin type," as one friend described it. By the time Freer acquired this self-portrait in 1906, it had been frequently exhibited in America and reproduced as both a woodcut and an engraving.

JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER
A BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE
ILLUSTRATED FROM THE COLLECTIONS
OF THE FREER GALLERY OF ART

By BURNS A. STUBBS

Assistant to the Director, Freer Gallery of Art

[WITH 29 PLATES]

(NOTE: Paintings, etchings, etc., distinguished by an asterisk (*) in the following outline are included in the Freer Collections.)

FAMILY—BIRTH—EARLY DAYS

1834-1843

According to early records, the Whistler family was founded at a very early date in England, and many of Whistler's ancestors were soldiers or clergymen; one was a famous physician, another a poet. Some of them emigrated to foreign shores; among these were Francis Whistler, who went to Virginia early in the seventeenth century, and Ralph Whistler, who was an English Colonizer in Ulster, Ireland.

Whistler's paternal grandfather, John, came from the Irish branch of the family. He first arrived in America as a soldier destined for Burgoyne's army, and was present at the surrender at Saratoga in 1777. He returned to England, was discharged, married, and came back to America and settled at Hagerstown, Md.

His son, Maj. George Washington Whistler, born at Fort Wayne, Ind., May 19, 1800, was the father of James McNeill Whistler. Major Whistler was twice married; his first wife, Mary Swift, left him three children, George, Joseph (who died in his youth), and Deborah, later Lady Haden. His second wife was Anna Mathilda McNeill, descended from the McNeills of the Isle of Skye, Scotland; her father, Charles

Donald McNeill, was the grandson of Donald McNeill who had settled on Cape Fear River in North Carolina in 1746. Major Whistler resigned his commission in the United States Army in 1833 and moved his family to Lowell, Mass., to practice his profession of civil engineer.

James McNeill Whistler was born there in July 1834, in the Paul Moody house on what is now Worthen Street; the exact date is uncertain because of the lack of positive evidence. A reference by his mother 10 years after the event about a poem written for her by her son on the tenth to celebrate his birthday would naturally seem to fix that as the date, but the birthday book of James B. Francis, a close friend and associate of Whistler's father, fixes the date positively as July 11. At any rate his christening date is a matter of parish record of St. Anne's Church, Lowell, and it states that James Abbott, son of George Washington Whistler and Anna Mathilda Whistler, was christened on November 9, 1834.

He adopted his mother's family name, McNeill, shortly after entering West Point, and used it, as a rule, to the exclusion of the original middle name, for the rest of his life. One noteworthy exception was on the occasion of his marriage in 1888; then he signed himself James Abbott McNeill Whistler.

In 1842 Major Whistler went to Russia as consulting engineer for a railroad to be built by Czar Nicholas I, from St. Petersburg to Moscow. He sent for his family in 1843 and Mrs. Whistler started out with her three boys, James, William, and Charles, on the long journey. George and Deborah, Major Whistler's children by his first wife, went with them. Charles died enroute, and this tragic event saddened the meeting between Major Whistler and his family.

RUSSIA AND THE RETURN TO AMERICA

1843-1849

Whistler was 9 years old when his family took him to Russia, and his life there for the next few years followed the usual pattern of that of any son of a distinguished parent on duty at a foreign court. He and William attended private

schools, and he was entered at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg for a time.

During 1847 Mrs. Whistler took the children to England to visit relatives, and while there, Deborah met Francis Seymour Haden and married him in October. After the ceremony, Mrs. Whistler returned to Russia with the boys. The Russian climate had been very severe on James, and when Mrs. Whistler returned to England again in 1848, she left him with his sister, at 62 Sloane Street in London, upon her return to Russia again that fall. In 1848 Major Whistler contracted cholera which was raging in St. Petersburg, but recovered. However, he overtaxed his strength and died on April 9, 1849, from a heart attack.

Mrs. Whistler decided to return to America and place the boys in school. She stopped in London for a short visit, and on July 29, 1849, accompanied by James and William, sailed for New York. Arriving on August 9, she went by boat to Stonington, Conn., where she intended to settle. Later she moved to Pomfret, Conn., and placed the boys in a school under the Reverend Doctor Roswell Park, a former West Pointer, who was the head master.

AT POMFRET

1849-1851

Whistler spent 2 years at Pomfret, and the deepest impression he left there was his drawing ability. Many caricatures and portraits of his friends remain from this period; two are included in the Freer Collection, *A Fire at Pomfret**, and *Sam Weller's Lodging in the Fleet Prison**, both water-color paintings.

WEST POINT AND THE COAST SURVEY

1851-1855

Whistler's mother was proud of his drawing, but she did not foresee art as a career for him. She hoped he would follow in the footsteps of his distinguished father and become a soldier.

Notes

1.



Detail, *George Washington Whistler's Grave*, ca. 1849, pen and brown ink over pencil, Joseph and Elizabeth Robins Pennell Collection of Whistleriana, [Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division](#)

Note from the Library of Congress: "Widow Anna McNeill Whistler and her two boys returned to America in the summer of 1849; the drawing was probably done then or shortly after while they stayed with her sister Kate Palmer in Stonington."

Works referenced

- [A Fire at Pomfret](#) (F|S)
- [Sam Weller's Lodging in the Fleet Prison](#) (F|S)
 - The accepted title is *Sam Weller's Landlord in the Fleet*

Through the influence of George Whistler with Daniel Webster, he was appointed Cadet at Large by President Fillmore and entered West Point July 1, 1851. The Military Academy was then under the command of Col. Robert E. Lee. His record at West Point was unimpressive; he was discharged from the Academy June 16, 1854, for deficiency in chemistry. At that time he stood at the head of his class in drawing, but near the end in philosophy. The Freer Collection includes an album containing five of his pen-and-ink drawings* made while at West Point.

His mother was disappointed when he left West Point and he was faced with the necessity of finding another career. His half-brother, George, had married Miss Julia Winans, daughter of Ross Winans, owner of a locomotive works in Baltimore of which he was the superintendent. Whistler went to Baltimore and was offered an apprenticeship in the works, but refused it. Instead he went to Washington, D. C., seeking reinstatement at West Point. He had an interview with Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War, who promised to consider the matter and named a day for a second interview.

Meanwhile he obtained an interview with James C. Dobbins, Secretary of the Navy, with the idea in mind of trying to secure an appointment to Annapolis, but was unsuccessful. He went back to see the Secretary of War and received a final "no" to his request for reinstatement at the Military Academy. However, Jefferson Davis sent him to see Captain Benham of the Coast Survey. There he secured an appointment to the Coast and Geodetic Survey on November 7, 1854, and went to work.

The utmost accuracy and attention to detail was necessary in drawing and etching for the Coast Survey and his training here was of a highly technical character, but office routine was boring and it was not long before he got into trouble. At one time he was working on a plate showing the coast line of a rocky shore, but, unable to confine himself to the dull, mechanical map making, he proceeded to fill the upper spaces of the plate with tiny sketches of heads and figures. Whether he spoiled others or not is unknown, but this particular plate

Notes

1. The Americans Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell, Whistler's authorized biographers, noted in 1908 that "West Point coloured his after-years and was the basis of his code of conduct" (*Life of James McNeill Whistler* I, 36).
2. The Pennells stated that "the plan now was to apprentice him to Mr. Winans in the locomotive works" (Pennell, *Life of James McNeill Whistler* I, 39). Daniel Sutherland's 2014 biography suggests that Whistler was already planning his escape: "Whistler . . . hung around the Winans' drafting offices but with no intention of staying" (Sutherland, *Whistler: A Life for Art's Sake*, 34).
3. The offices of the Coast and Geodetic Survey were located east of the US Capitol at the northwest corner of New Jersey Avenue and C Street SE, just over a mile from the future site of the Freer Gallery of Art.

Works referenced

Whistler's drawings from West Point:

- *Two Lovers and an Old Woman* (F|S)
- *A Group of Figures at West Point* (F|S)
- *The Corkscrew* (F|S)
- *A la Yankee* (F|S)
- *An Outside* (F|S)

known as *Coast Survey Plate No. 1** is in the Freer Collection. Another, *Coast Survey Plate No. 2*, Anacapa Island, bears some of his work and his name.

Whether it was his penchant for the embellishment of official government maps or a tendency to ignore regular office hours that led to his leaving is unknown, but he resigned from the Coast Survey in February of 1855.

PARIS—THE LATIN QUARTER 1855–1859

Once again his half-brother George offered him an apprenticeship in Baltimore at the locomotive works, but Whistler insisted that now he was 21 and knew what he wanted. It was his desire to go to Paris and study art. He got his way and the family agreed to assist him financially.

George wanted him to go to L'École des Beaux-Arts, but instead he entered Gleyre's Studio. In Paris he met such men as Fantin-Latour, Degas, DuMaurier, Lamont, Poynter, and Rowley. The two men who influenced him most perhaps at this time were Courbet and Lecoq de Boisbaudran, both of whom were teaching then. Other Frenchmen who became his friends were Legros, Becquet, Henri Martin, Drouet, Henry Oulevey, and Ernest Delannoy.

Stories of his student days represent him as amusing and eccentric; also, as idle much of the time. Drouet reported that Whistler spent very little time at work, that he spent every evening at the students' balls and never arose before 11 or 12 in the morning. Oulevey, a fellow student at Gleyre's, could not remember Whistler ever doing much, either there, at the Louvre, or at the Luxembourg. Like most young students of his day and age, finances were the bane of his existence, and his struggles with poverty often forced him to postpone meals for indefinite periods, to say nothing of moving frequently to cheaper quarters. This last eventuality often made it difficult for his friends to find him even when succor in the guise of a friend bearing his delayed allowance was the reason for the search.

Notes

1. Charles Gleyre (1806–1874) was an academic painter and teacher whose atelier became a center of bohemianism. Along with Whistler, Gleyre's students included Monet, Renoir, and Sisley.
2. The bold facture, realist subject matter, and confrontational public persona of Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) exerted a powerful influence on Whistler through the 1850s and early 1860s.

Academician Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran's (1802–1897) students included Whistler's close friends Alphonse Legros and Henri Fantin-Latour, with whom Whistler would later form the Société des Trois. Lecoq de Boisbaudran developed a teaching technique based on visual memorization that would become an essential aspect of Whistler's approach to the Nocturnes of the 1870s.

Works referenced

- *Coast Surveys* (F|S)

Among his best known works of his Latin Quarter days are the etchings, *Bibi Lalouette**, the daughter of his favorite restaurateur; *Fumette**; *Portrait of Whistler**; and *La Mère Gérard**. Paintings of this period include *La Mère Gérard*; *At the Piano* (The Piano Picture); *Head of an Old Man Smoking*; *Portrait of Whistler in the Big Hat**. His first commissions were for copies of paintings hanging in the Louvre.

In 1858 Whistler and Ernest Delannoy decided to make a sketching tour to Alsace. They journeyed to the Rhine and returned to Paris late that year where, in November, he published his first set of etchings. They were printed by Delârte, 171 rue St. Jacques, and issued as a set under the title *Twelve Etchings from Nature**. Some of the plates such as *Liverdun**, *Street at Saverny**, *The Kitchen**, were etched on the Rhine journey, some were etched in Paris, and others in London during visits to his relatives. The set became commonly known as *The French Set*.

It was from Delârte that Whistler learned the art of printing etchings, and shortly after *The French Set* was issued, he obtained a press and began to experiment with printing. It was during this period, too, that he painted a portrait of his father entitled, *Portrait of Major Whistler**. Whether it was painted from a miniature or a lithograph sent him by his brother George is still in doubt, but from his own account it gave him considerable trouble.

In 1859 he sent his painting, *At the Piano*, to the Salon along with two etchings. The etchings were accepted, but the painting was rejected. Others had paintings rejected, too, among them his friends Legros, Ribot, and Fantin-Latour. The artist Bonvin was an acquaintance of Fantin-Latour's and offered to exhibit the rejected pictures in his studio. The exhibition was a success and marked the end of what Whistler called his "student days."

Notes

1. View all impressions from the [French Set](#) in the Freer|Sackler's collection.

Works referenced

- [Bibi Lalouette](#) (F|S)
- [Fumette](#) (F|S)
- [Portrait of Whistler](#) (F|S)
- [La Mere Gerard](#) (F|S)
- [At the Piano](#) (Taft Museum of Art)
- [Head of an Old Man Smoking](#) (Louvre)
- [Portrait of Whistler with a Hat](#) (F|S)
- [Portrait of Major Whistler](#) (F|S)
 - The authenticity of this portrait has been questioned. It most closely resembles a portrait made by Chester Harding, who probably executed this one as well.

HIS BEGINNINGS IN LONDON

1859–1863

Whistler decided to establish himself in London after his student days in Paris, but it was only the beginning of a series of almost endless journeys between the two capitals. In 1859 he sent two etchings to the Royal Academy, his first exhibition in England.

He stayed at first with his sister, Lady Haden, at 62 Sloane Street and often invited some of his friends to stay with him, among them Fantin-Latour, Henri Martin, and Legros, although his brother-in-law, Seymour Haden, disapproved. It was inevitable that the neat, precise Haden would find it hard to endure some of Whistler's artist friends, and a final break came. At any rate, when DuMaurier returned from Antwerp in 1860, Whistler went to live with him for several months.

The joyous life of the Latin Quarter in Paris appealed to Whistler enormously; so, in London, with such kindred spirits as Alma-Tadema, DuMaurier, Harold Sower, Stacey Marks, Val Princep, and several other English students he had met in Paris, it was only natural that the carefree conduct of those not too distant days was often repeated in a round of parties, balls, and gatherings of talented men of every kind.

His disposition seems to have been breezy and debonair and he was witty and charming, but perhaps he arrived in England at an inopportune time. His etchings received favorable comment, but criticisms leveled at the "Piano Picture" when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy seem to have aroused his ire. At any rate, judging from his personal letters and later replies to press notices, the year 1859 marked the beginning of a fight between him and English public opinion as to his worth as an artist, which lasted many years. England at this time was under the sway of the painters in the Royal Academy and Mid-Victorian art was at its highest level. To say the least, Whistler was a puzzle to the people whose influence counted in British art circles at the time; that they were no less a puzzle to him is borne out by subsequent events. Among others he met at this time were Arthur Severn, Arthur Lewis, John Foster, George Boughton, and the artists Charles Keene,

Notes

1. The actual date was 1860, when Whistler sent four etchings to the 92nd Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts in London. These are now in the collection of the University of Glasgow. See the [Whistler Etchings Project](#).
2. Scholarly consensus is for 1862, when *The White Girl* was rejected by the Royal Academy—prompting Whistler to write his first letter to the press, which was published in *The Athenaeum*.

Boyd Houghton, Albert Moore, Fred Walker, and George Mason.

During 1859 many of his Thames etchings were made, among them, *Black Lion Wharf** and *Eagle Wharf (Tyzac Whiteley & Co.)**. Eventually he moved to an inn in Wapping in order to be near his subjects and wandered from Greenwich to Westminster, often crossing the river to work at Cherry Gardens. Dating his pictures and plates seems to have been an established practice with Whistler in his early years, and the year 1859 appears on many of his Thames etchings. Later, however, he discontinued the practice altogether, but the definite changes of style and manner as well as the transitional changes of his signature help to date most of his work with comparative ease.

He had reissued his *French Set** of etchings in London in 1859, entitled *Twelve Etchings from Nature** by James Abbott Whistler, London, published by J. A. Whistler, at 62 Sloane Street (Haden's house). Serjeant Thomas saw the prints and met Whistler. He became interested and arranged their further publication as well as those Whistler had etched on the Thames. He opened a shop with his son, Edmund Thomas, as manager, where both printing and sales could be handled. The arrangement did not last long because Edmund Thomas was more interested in law than he was in art.

The year 1860 saw Whistler devoting less time to etching and more to painting on the river; one picture in particular, *Wapping*, absorbed his attention for awhile. Later the same year he painted *The Thames in Ice**, called when first exhibited *The Twenty-fifth of December, 1860, on the Thames*. Two others produced that year were the *Portrait of Mr. Luke Ionides* and *The Music Room**, the latter described also under the titles of *The Morning Call* and *Harmony in Green and Rose, The Music Room**. The year 1860 also saw the production of the drypoint, *Annie Haden**, and the etchings *Axenfeld**, *Riault**, *Mr. Mann**, and *Rotherhithe**.

*The Music Room** marks the virtual end of Courbet's influence and was a decided advance in technique as well as the beginnings of a more definite adherence to the teachings of

Notes

1. For more information on the French Set, see the [Whistler Etchings Project](#).
2. The Thames as a continuous source of inspiration for Whistler was the subject of the 2014 Freer|Sackler exhibition [An American in London: Whistler and the Thames](#). For more on the Thames set, see the [Whistler Etchings Project](#).

Works referenced

- [Black Lion Wharf](#) (F|S)
- [Eagle Wharf](#) (F|S)
- [Wapping](#) (National Gallery of Art)
- [The Thames in Ice](#) (F|S)
- [Portrait of Mr. Luke Ionides](#) (University of Glasgow)
- [The Music Room](#) (F|S)
- [Annie Haden](#) (F|S)
- [Axenfeld](#) (F|S)
- [Riault, the Engraver](#) (F|S)
- [Mr. Mann](#) (F|S)
- [Rotherhithe](#) (F|S)

Gleyre. All his later Arrangements, Nocturnes and Symphonies, emphasized their analogy with music, and their success was based upon the practice of pitching them in one or two related color tones. In painting, color harmony was to be the basis of his creed hereafter and his central idea was that it should appeal only to the eye and was not intended as a medium for the expression of ideas or emotions.

The year 1861 saw him again turn to the river with his etching tools; the upper as well as the lower Thames was visited. Two of his plates made during visits to Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Edwards at Sunbury were published by the Junior Etching Club as illustrations in *Passages from Modern English Poets*. He met Frederick Goulding at the Press of Day and Son when proving these two plates, and Whistler pronounced him the best professional printer in England. Frederick Goulding printed many plates for him afterward, some after Whistler's death.

The *La Mère Gérard* painting was sent to the Royal Academy in 1861 and it drew the usual criticism from the press. During the summer Whistler went to France where he painted *The Coast of Brittany* or *Alone with the Tide*. He also produced the drypoints *The Forge** and *Jo** this year. "Jo" was Joanna Heffernan (Mrs. Abbott), and she appeared often in Whistler's work of this period. She was the model for *The Symphony in White, No. 1, The White Girl*.

Whistler became ill during the winter and went to the south of France to recuperate. There he painted *Blue and Silver, The Blue Wave Biarritz*; later he went on to Fuenterrabia, his only visit to Spain. In 1862 he sent *The White Girl*; *The Thames in Ice**; *The Coast of Brittany* or *Alone with the Tide*, and one etching, *Rotherhithe**, to the Royal Academy, but *The White Girl* was rejected. The etching *Rotherhithe** drew unstinted praise, as did all Whistler's etchings, and the paintings received mild approval, but the rejection of *The White Girl* was a disappointment to him. It was one of his first paintings that defied modern convention; the massing of white on white produced the form of

Notes

1. The two works by Whistler included in *Passages from Modern English Poets* were *The Punt* and *Sketching*. For more on this project, see the [Whistler Etchings Project](#).
2. Frederick Goulding (1842–1909) was a master printer who began working with Whistler in 1859. Basic biographical information can be found in the 1912 supplement to the *Dictionary of National Biography*. See also Gordon Fyfe, *Art, Power, and Modernity: English Art Institutions, 1750–1950* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 127–130.

Works referenced

- [Le Mere Gerard](#) (Colby Museum of Art)
- [Coast of Brittany \(Alone with the Tide\)](#) (Wadsworth Atheneum)
- [The Forge](#) (F|S)
- [Jo](#) (F|S)
- [Symphony in White, No. 1, The White Girl](#) (National Gallery of Art)
- [Blue and Silver, The Blue Wave of Biarritz](#) (Hill-Stead Museum)

the design by subtle differences in tonal value. Later he attempted the same thing with black on black; then from this he went on to the use of two colors, sometimes black and brown or black and grey and others. Various colors were used as fill-in for backgrounds or props, but they remained incidental. The main theme of most of his paintings was usually expressed in the titles he gave them, such as the *Arrangement in Black and White, No. 1, The Young American**, or *Nocturne, Blue and Gold, Valparaiso**, designating the two basic colors which dominated the completed picture.

During 1862 he won recognition at the South Kensington Museum, where the International Exhibition was being held, for his etchings *Thames Warehouses** and *Black Lion Wharf**. The Berners Street Gallery opened during this summer with the avowed purpose of placing before the public the work of young artists who might not have access to the other galleries. Pictures by Maclise, Egg, Frith, Cooper, and Poynter were shown along with Whistler's *White Girl*.

The *Athenaeum* was critical in a published article and drew from Whistler his first letter to the press, dated July 1, 1862, the beginning of his writing which culminated in such publications as *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, and others.

Whistler moved this year to Chelsea; he took rooms in Queen's Row, which marked the beginning of many years of residence in the neighborhood. The illustrated magazines were seeking talent about this time, and Whistler was engaged by Edward Dalziel to make six drawings during 1862, four of them for publication in *Once a Week*, the other two in *Good Words*. The subjects were drawn on wood in pen, pencil, and wash, and engraved by the Dalziel Brothers and Joseph Swain.

Another important work of 1862 was the painting *Old Westminster Bridge*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1863 under the title *The Last of Old Westminster*, along with six etchings: *Weary**; *Old Westminster Bridge**; *Old Hungerford Bridge**; *Becquet**; *The Forge**; and *The Pool**. In 1863 he decided to send *The White Girl* to the Salon, and he took it to Fantin-Latour's Paris studio for

Notes

1. The full text of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* is available online at [Project Gutenberg](#).

Works referenced

- [Arrangement in Black and White, No. 1, The Young American](#) (F|S)
- [Nocturne, Blue and Gold, Valparaiso](#) (F|S)
- [Thames Warehouses](#) (F|S)
- [Black Lion Wharf](#) (F|S)
- [The Last of Old Westminster](#) (MFA Boston)
- [Weary](#) (F|S)
- [Old Westminster Bridge](#) (F|S)
- [Old Hungerford Bridge](#) (F|S)
- [Becquet](#) (F|S)
- [The Forge](#) (F|S)
- [The Pool](#) (F|S)

framing. The Salon rejected it along with paintings by Fantin-Latour, Legros, Manet, Bracquemond, Jongkind, Harpignies, Cazin, Jean-Paul Laurens, and Vallon. The rejections created a scandal, and Martinet, a dealer, offered to show the rejected pictures in his gallery. Napoleon III heard about it and ordered that a "Salon des Refuses" should be held in the same building as the official "Salon," the "Palais de l'Industrie." The exhibition met with instant success.

Whistler appreciated his triumph in Paris, and now official honors were coming to him in Holland and England. Some of his etchings hung at The Hague won him a gold medal, and the British Museum bought 12 of his etchings for the Print Room.

His mother was now in England, and as living with the Hadens was becoming a strain on both the brothers-in-law, he decided to take a house for his mother and himself. His first in London, it was [No. 7 Lindsey Row, Chelsea](#), now 101 Cheyne Walk.

CHELSEA

1863-1879

The location of his Chelsea home suited him perfectly. Across the river was [Battersea Church](#) and a row of factories; old Battersea Bridge was nearby, and at night the lights of Cremorne added their attraction. It was here that he conceived his Nocturnes, pictures of the night.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti lived nearby, and Swinburne and George Meredith lived with him; there Whistler often met Frederick Sandys, Charles Augustus Howell, William Bell Scott, Burne-Jones, and others. Rossetti also introduced him to Ford Madox Brown and Murray Marks. Others he met were Charles Keene, Linley Sambourne, George Moore, Edmund Yates, and Oscar Wilde.

Whistler had become acquainted with Oriental art in Paris and decorated his house with prints, blue and white Chinese porcelain, screens, and fans. Perhaps the chief bond between Whistler and Rossetti was the love they shared for "Blue and White" and Japanese prints. At any rate, each tried to

Notes

1. Whistler had taken a house in Chelsea, where he lived with his model-mistress Jo Hiffenan prior to his mother's arrival later in 1863—at which point Hiffenan was forced to find other lodgings. See a photograph of [No. 7 Lindsay Row, Chelsea](#).
2. St. Mary's, Battersea, is located on the south side of Battersea Bridge. Its steeples, along with the smokestacks and clock tower of the Morgan Crucible Works, appear in the 1878 lithotint [Nocturne](#).

3.



See a photograph of the interior of Whistler's [drawing room](#).

outwit the other in the hunt for choice pieces, and soon the rage for “Blue and White” was on in England. Sir Henry Thompson, among others, began collecting it, and several years later Whistler made [a number of illustrations](#) for a catalogue of his collections.

This was the beginning of the so-called Japanese pictures by Whistler. He painted *Die Lange Leizen*; *The Golden Screen**; *The Balcony**; and a bit later, *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine**. They were Japanese only in the sense that he used props such as Japanese costumes, screens, fans, or pottery. The models, backgrounds, and surroundings were European.

*La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine** is the portrait of [Miss Christine Spartali](#) (Countess Edmond de Cahen), daughter of the Greek Consul-General in London. The Consul-General did not like the picture and would not buy it. A collector who did like it also refused to buy because he objected to the artist’s name spread in large letters across the top of the canvas. Whistler indignantly refused to change it, and it finally came into the possession of Frederick Leyland and eventually led to the decoration of the *Peacock Room**. The episode of the large signature was, perhaps, the determining factor in the ultimate invention of the butterfly.

Throughout his life he left some of his work unsigned, but the majority of his pictures in all mediums bear a signature of one kind or another. He used, J.W., J.A.W., J.M.W., J.McN.W., Whistler, J. Whistler, James Whistler, during his early years. Now, realizing the inharmonious effect of a large signature or perhaps of any kind of a signature at all, he began to experiment with the formation of his initials into a pattern.

Here again he seems to have borrowed an idea from the Orient, first by placing the letters J.M.W. within a framework, either round or oblong; later, the initials were worked into a design which became more and more fantastic until they evolved eventually into the butterfly. At first the butterfly itself was very simple, but eventually he used even this conventionalized emblem to denote a mood or a very definite meaning as well as a signature of distinction and purpose.

Notes

1. See page 18 for notes and links to the illustrations Whistler made for Sir Henry Thompson.

2.



From *Life*, Christina Spartali; Julia Margaret Cameron, ca. 1865–70; photograph; Freer|Sackler Archives

For a complete history of *La Princesse*, see *The Peacock Room*, 66–74.

3. “Whistler’s monogram ‘J.W.’ was developed into a ‘butterfly’ signature in c. 1869 and gradually evolved over the next thirty years, acquiring antennae, veins and a tail. In the more barbed of his letters, he would sign himself with a stinging tail, like that of a scorpion” (MacDonald, *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler*). See examples of his [signature](#).

Works referenced

- [Die Lange Leizen \(Purple and Rose\)](#) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)
- [The Golden Screen](#) (F|S)
- [The Balcony](#) (F|S)
- [La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine \(Princess from the Land of Porcelain\)](#) (F|S)

About 1873 Whistler reworked a number of his early etchings which had been signed and dated in the early sixties. Along with the changes in design or execution he added the butterfly without removing the original signature. Here, too, it might be well to note that many of his etchings and dry-points were unsigned; others were unsigned in their early states but signed either with his name or the butterfly in later states, and, in a few rare instances, the signature or butterfly was removed entirely in the last state.

Whistler began early to design and decorate his frames, but eventually gave it up and substituted a simple gold frame with parallel reeded lines for his paintings and a plain white frame in two planes for his etchings.

In 1865 he sent *Symphony in White, No. 2, The Little White Girl*, to the Royal Academy. Again, the model was “Jo.” Here again Japan entered into the detail only in a minor sense; the model holds a Japanese fan and there is blue and white pottery on the mantle upon which she leans.

During the spring of 1865 Whistler was joined in London by his younger brother, Dr. William Whistler, who had been sent to England by the Confederate Government. The end of the Civil War came while he was there, and he did not return to the United States. In September the two brothers took their mother to Coblenz to an oculist for consultation, and this gave Whistler an opportunity to revisit some of the scenes of *The French Set* of etchings. Later he went to Trouville where he painted *Sea and Rain*, among others. He returned to London in November, and early in 1866 came the most inexplicable adventure of his life. He sailed for Valparaiso, Chile. No reasonable explanation has ever been given for this trip, but a few beautiful paintings resulted, among them, *Flesh-color and Green*; *Crépuscle, Valparaiso*; and *Nocturne, Blue and Gold: Valparaiso*.*

He arrived back in London late in 1866 and shortly afterward moved to No. 2 Lindsey Row, now No. 96 Cheyne Walk, and from this new studio came many of his large portraits, the more important of which were *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1, Portrait of the Painter's Mother*;

Notes

1. For a detailed account of the stylistic evolution of Whistler's frames, see Sarah Lawrence Parkerson, “Variations in Gold: The stylistic development of the picture frames used by James McNeill Whistler” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2008).
2. Daniel Sutherland maintains that Whistler and his brother Willie traveled to Valparaiso as part of an ill-fated scheme to transport weapons to Peru and Chile for their wars for independence against Spain. Whistler, Sutherland makes clear, was motivated by money, not republican sentiment (Sutherland, *A Life For Art's Sake*, 94–98).

Works referenced

- [*Symphony in White, No. 2, The Little White Girl* \(F|S\)](#)
- [*Crépuscule in Flesh Colour and Green: Valparaiso* \(Tate\)](#)
- [*Nocturne, Blue and Gold: Valparaiso* \(F|S\)](#)
- [*Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1, Portrait of the Painter's Mother* \(Musée d'Orsay\)](#)

*Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 2, Portrait of Thomas Carlyle; Arrangement in Black, Portrait of Frederick R. Leyland**; *Arrangement in Black, No. 3, Portrait of Sir Henry Irving as Phillip II of Spain; Arrangement in Black and White, No. 1, The Young American**; and *Arrangement in Black and Brown, Portrait of Rosa Corder*. Here, too, many of his Nocturnes were painted, night scenes of the river, scenes of the Chelsea streets and houses on snowy evenings or at twilight; and here he worked on a series of decorative schemes for F. R. Leyland, studies which combined Japanese and classical motives of design and color.

This subject engrossed his attention for many years, and the first of the series remain in *The Six Projects**, which were originally called "Schemes" and were painted in connection with his large decorative panel called "The Three Girls," or "Symphony in White No. IV," which Leyland had commissioned him to paint but which never came into his possession.

Here it might be well to state that the titles descriptive of the color schemes of these and other early works were not added to the more definite original titles until some time after the pictures were painted. Judging from the variations in the catalogues of different exhibitions it would seem, too, that the artist did not always strictly adhere to these color-descriptive titles or even to some of his original titles.

Whistler exhibited in both London and Paris in 1867 where some of his pictures drew praise and others caustic criticism. Among the pictures sent to the Royal Academy in London was his *Symphony in White, No. III, The Two Little Girls*. It marked his first use in a title of the term "Symphony," borrowed from musical terms to explain his ideas pictorially.

The next two or three years saw a number of paintings finished, and he was busy with his etching. In the early seventies, Murray Marks tried to form a Fine Art Company with Alexander Ionides, Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Morris. They were to deal in paintings, prints, blue and white china, and decorative work. The company did not materialize and Alexander Ionides who had advanced most of the money became the owner of the 16 plates by Whistler known as *The Thames*

Notes

1. Freer acquired an oil sketch, *The White Symphony: The Three Girls*, and reams of preparatory drawings related to this never-completed work, whose significance to Whistler's artistic development was the focus of the 2016 exhibition *The Lost Symphony: Whistler and the Perfection of Art*.

Works referenced

- *Arrangement in Black and Grey, No. 2, Portrait of Thomas Carlyle* (Frick Collection)
- *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of F. R. Leyland* (F|S)
- *Arrangement in Black, No. 3, Portrait of Sir Henry Irving as Phillip II of Spain* (Metropolitan Museum of Art)
- *Arrangement in Black and White, No. 1, The Young American* (F|S)
- *Arrangement in Black and Brown, Portrait of Rosa Corder* (Frick Collection)
- *Symphony in White, No. 3, The Two Little Girls* (Barber Institute of Fine Arts)

Set* and the prints from them. He had a hundred sets printed, gave one set to each of his children, then they were taken over by Messrs. Ellis and Green and published in 1871 as *Sixteen Etchings of Scenes on the Thames and Other Subjects**. Later, the plates came into the possession of the Fine Art Society; then Frederick Keppel of New York bought them. They had been steeled, and he had the steeling removed. Goulding printed a number from each. The plates were then defaced and in 1896 came into the possession of Charles L. Freer.

Recognition of Whistler's etchings was by this time becoming universal. Samuel P. Avery had begun collecting them in the early sixties. The New York Public Library contains the Avery Collection. The British Museum bought his prints. The Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, was accumulating them, and a large collection was made for the Windsor Castle Library. Important collections were acquired also by the museums of Dresden, Venice, and Melbourne.

The year 1872 was notable as the first time that Whistler "exhibited" a portrait as an "Arrangement" or a night scene as a "Nocturne." The term "Arrangement" was perhaps another borrowed musical term, but Leyland is credited with suggesting the term "Nocturne" to Whistler. When he first began painting his night scenes, he called them "Moonlights," but "Nocturne" appealed more to him and he began using it regularly. It also marked the end of his exhibiting at the Royal Academy. He had sent the *Portrait of the Painter's Mother* to the Royal Academy. It was first refused, but Sir William Boxall prevailed upon the committee to accept it and it was finally hung. He never sent another picture to the Royal Academy.

During 1873 Frederick Leyland, the owner of *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine**, commissioned Whistler to paint portraits of his four children, Mrs. Leyland, and himself. This was the beginning of long and frequent visits to Leyland's place near Liverpool, and the record of these visits is preserved in many mediums; portraits of the family in oil, water color, and pastel; also etchings and drypoints such as *Speke Hall*; *Speke Hall, No. 2**; and *Speke Shore**.

Notes

1. Whistler actually began painting portraits of the Leylands in 1870, when he started what became *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of F. R. Leyland* (Freer|Sackler). Work on *Symphony in Flesh Colour and Pink: Portrait of Mrs. Frederick R. Leyland* (Frick Collection) commenced in 1871. Whistler never completed the portraits of the Leyland children.

Works referenced

- [Speke Hall, No. 1](#) (F|S)
- [Speke Hall, No. 2](#) (F|S)
- [Speke Shore](#) (F|S)

Early within this so-called Leyland period Whistler began making small sketches with charcoal, sometimes touched with pastel colors, using rough wrapping paper of a variety of tones—portrait studies, studies of models, sketches of buildings or landscapes, and suggestions for pictures. This variety of sketches led to one of the most fascinating and notable phases of Whistler's art, his pastels. Charming in composition and coloring as well as in grace and pose, they are works of the greatest distinction and rival some of the finest classical art, yet remain essentially individual and modern.

Late in 1874 Whistler organized his first "one-man show" at 48 Pall Mall. He exhibited 13 paintings, including portraits, nocturnes, and projects, and about 50 etchings. During October of 1874 the Liverpool Art Club held an exhibition of Whistler etchings, and shortly before it opened the first catalogue of Whistler's etchings appeared entitled *A Catalogue of the Etchings and Dry-points of James Abbott McNeill Whistler*, London, privately printed by John Russell Smith of 36 Soho Square. Ralph Thomas was the compiler. It was said there were only 50 copies printed, so it has become extremely rare.

The year 1875 saw him exhibiting in the Dudley Gallery and among his paintings shown was the *Nocturne in Black and Gold, The Falling Rocket*, made famous by the Ruskin trial. The spring of 1876 marked the beginnings of portraits of Sir Henry Cole and Lord Redesdale. Meanwhile, he was having financial difficulties, and it is said that Whistler, in a rage, tore several of his canvases from their stretchers and slashed them to pieces rather than have them fall into the hands of his creditors.

At about this time Leyland bought a house in Prince's Gate, and having purchased the gilded staircase from Northumberland House which was being torn down, installed it at Prince's Gate and commissioned Whistler to suggest a matching color for the hall and to paint the detail of leaf and blossom on the dado. It was the intention to hang Whistler's painting, *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine**, amidst Leyland's collection of blue and white pottery in the dining room, the shelves

Notes

1. For a detailed account of Whistler's first solo exhibition, see Robin Spencer, "Whistler's First One-Man Exhibition Reconstructed," in *The Documented Image: Visions in Art History*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg and Laurinda S. Dixon (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 27–50.

2. Works included in the Liverpool exhibition *Collection illustrative of the History and Practice of Etching: Lent and Catalogued by James Anderson Rose, Esq., of London* can be found in the Whistler Etchings Project.

Works referenced

- *Nocturne in Black and Gold, The Falling Rocket* (Detroit Institute of Arts)
- Detail of leaf and blossom on the dado for the stair hall adjacent to the dining room at Prince's Gate (F|S)

of which had been designed by the architect, Jeckyll, and the sideboard by Whistler. Likewise, the space opposite *La Princesse** was intended to hold Whistler's painting, "The Three Girls," but neither of these ideas was ever fully carried out, and one change led to another, the final outcome being *The Peacock Room**.

Leyland himself was away for many months, but he heard about the receptions and press views held at Prince's Gate without his permission and was annoyed at having his private dwelling turned into a public gallery. He had promised Whistler 500 guineas for retouching the leather on the walls, but Whistler had not stopped there. He began to develop the peacock theme and only stopped when he had covered the entire room with the motive, including the ceiling and shutters. The panel opposite *La Princesse** carried a symbolical theme, representing, as Whistler said, the relations between the patron and the artist. This panel contains two peacocks, one standing in a shower of flying feathers and gold clutching a pile of coins in one claw, the other, turned away, spreading his wings in angry but triumphant defiance.

Whistler demanded 2,000 guineas for the completed job, but Leyland refused to pay it. Instead he sent Whistler 1,000 pounds and they quarreled. It is to Leyland's credit that despite their disagreement, he left the room intact. Whistler himself called it "the one perfect mural decoration of modern times."

In the spring of 1877 Sir Coutts Lindsey founded the Grosvenor Gallery for the avowed purpose of showing only the pictures of artists whom he invited. Whistler sent several of his important works, among which were *The Fur Jacket*, exhibited as *Harmony in Amber and Black*; *Arrangement in Black, No. 3*, *Sir Henry Irving as Philip II of Spain*; and *Nocturne in Black and Gold, The Falling Rocket*. There were several other painters whose work was shown, but it remained for Whistler's *The Falling Rocket* to draw the most abusive criticism, and the critic whose caustic views received the widest publicity was Ruskin. Whistler resented it and sued Ruskin for libel.

Notes

1. There is no evidence that Whistler was involved in the creation of the sideboard; his work in the Peacock Room was entirely decorative, applied to surfaces and structures developed by Jeckyll.
2. For a definitive history of the Peacock Room, see Linda Merrill, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography*.
3. For an account of the lawsuit, see Linda Merrill, *A Pot of Paint: Aesthetics on Trial in Whistler v. Ruskin*.

Works referenced

- [*The Peacock Room*](#) (F|S)
- *Art and Money, or; The Story of the Room* (F|S)
- *The Fur Jacket* (F|S)

During 1878 Whistler became acquainted with lithography through Thomas Way and that year published *The Toilet** and *Broad Bridge** in "Piccadilly," edited by Mr. Watts-Dunton. This year also marked an important transition period in his etchings; the early manner of his Thames etchings almost disappears and a new concept and use of the medium appears in his "*Adam and Eve*," *Old Chelsea**. Later, in his Venetian etchings, he made other important changes in style and manner which he considered a marked advance in technique. The Thames etchings were drawn with a minute attention to detail; gradually he began to depend upon fewer lines and strokes to suggest figures, buildings, ships, etc., and later, in the Venetian etchings, he reached the zenith of this power of suggestion, giving the beholder the impression that indeed every detail actually had been drawn merely by the character of line and spacing.

The year also marked the date of publication of the "Catalogue of Blue and White Nanking Porcelain, forming the Collection of Sir Henry Thompson." Nineteen of the twenty-five drawings it contained were by [Whistler](#).

To the second Grosvenor Exhibition in 1878 he sent another series of "Nocturnes, Harmonies and Arrangements," among them the *Arrangement in Black and White, No. 1, The Young American**.

During the summer he commissioned the architect, E. W. Godwin, to build a house for him in Tite Street, but the fall saw him entangled in financial and personal worries. His pictures were not selling, and his mother was ill at Hastings. Money was needed for the "[White House](#)," as his home in Tite Street was to be called, and he pawned several of his paintings to Henry Graves, head of a Pall Mall firm. Among these pictures were *Portrait of Thomas Carlyle* and *Portrait of the Painter's Mother*.

Late in November, the case of "Whistler vs. Ruskin" came to trial. The results are history. Whistler won the case; the jury found for the plaintiff and awarded him damages of one farthing which he wore as a watch charm for the rest of his life. The costs of the trial had to be borne equally between

Notes

1. Many of Whistler's illustrations for Thompson's collection are part of the Freer|Sackler collection: [F1893.18](#); [F1898.415](#); [F1907.174](#); [F1907.175](#); [F1907.176](#); [F1907.177](#); [F1907.178](#); [F1907.179](#).

2.



White House, Tite Street, Chelsea, built for James M. Whistler by E. W. Godwin. Part of the Joseph and Elizabeth Robins Pennell Collection of Whistleriana, courtesy of the [Library of Congress](#).

Works referenced

- [The Toilet](#) (F|S)
- [Broad Bridge](#) (F|S)
- [The "Adam and Eve," Old Chelsea](#) (F|S)

the two and as Whistler's finances were already in hopeless confusion, he was forced to file a petition in bankruptcy and in May of 1879 was declared a bankrupt. Although left homeless by his financial straits, he sent several pictures to the Grosvenor Gallery in 1879. Among them were *Portrait of Rosa Corder*; *Portrait of Miss Connie Gilchrist*; *The Pacific*; *Nocturne in Blue and Gold*; and six etchings and five drawings in chalk and pastel.

He had long planned a trip to Venice to make a series of etchings and approached the Fine Art Society with the idea. They liked the scheme and commissioned him to make 12 plates in Venice for them. So, after everything he owned had been sold to satisfy his creditors, he packed his trunk and started off to Venice. He spent the balance of 1879 there and most of 1880, making etchings, pastels, water colors, and several oils; among the latter was *Nocturne, Blue and Gold*, and *St. Marks*.

The friends he met in Venice included the Brownings, Otto Bacher, Harper Pennington, Mrs. Bronson, and Mr. and Mrs. William Graham. When he left Venice, he left a number of canvases with the Grahams to be sent for when he got settled in London.

THE RETURN TO LONDON

1880-1884

Dr. William Whistler had married Miss Helen Ionides early in 1877 and had a house in Wimpole Street. Whistler took rooms there with his brother and sister-in-law upon his return to London at the end of November 1880. Later he took lodgings in Langham Street; then he moved to Alderney Street.

The first series of 12 Venetian etchings selected from 40 plates he brought back were issued by the Fine Art Society, but the critics could see nothing in them. In January 1881 he held an exhibition at the Fine Art Society of his pastels, 50 of which he had brought back from Vienna. The frames were of his own design and he wrote the catalogue. In spite of adverse criticism, many of the pastels sold and the show was a financial

Notes

1. The pastels were brought back from Venice, not Vienna (as Stubbs states in what is surely a typo). Regarding the number of etched plates brought back from Venice: During his Venice sojourn, Whistler produced more than fifty etchings and many more pastels, fifty-three of which were exhibited at the Fine Arts Society in January 1881.

Works referenced

- [The Gold Girl](#) (Metropolitan Museum of Art)
- [Nocturne: Blue and Gold, St. Mark's](#) (National Museum Wales)

success. But before the show was closed, he was summoned to Hastings where his mother had died suddenly after a long illness.

The *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1, Portrait of the Painter's Mother* was in the possession of Henry Graves, and Whistler borrowed it and sent it to the United States to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia in 1881 hoping vainly that it would remain in America. Later, in 1882, it was shown at the Society of American Artists in New York, and after the showing Whistler was elected a member of this society.

In May of 1881 he took a studio at No. 13 Tite Street but it was some time before he could obtain a commission for a painting. The first was Lady Meux, and he painted three large full-length portraits of her. Sir Henry Cole, whom he had painted before, sat for a second portrait, but it remained unfinished because of the sudden death of the sitter early in 1882.

Oscar Wilde was a frequent visitor to the Tite Street studio as was Walter Sickert. Lady Archibald Campbell posed there for *The Yellow Buskin*, as did M. Duret for a portrait. Whistler's title for *The Yellow Buskin* was *La Dame au Brodequin Jaune* and he insisted upon using that instead of its English equivalent for many years. It was his contention that the French title was more dignified and expressed more exactly just what the painting represented, and he violently resented the use of the English translation. At any rate, this portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell remains as one of his most distinguished and successful paintings.

The year 1882 saw Whistler exhibiting again at the Grosvenor; among the pictures shown was *Scherzo in Blue, The Blue Girl*. It drew a fire of criticism from the press because it had been shown at the private view temporarily in an unfinished state. He removed it immediately, finished it, and sent it back to the regular showing, completed. An unknown, signing himself "Art Student," took up his cause for him unsolicited and from this time on he had aid in fighting his battles.

The year 1882 brought out the "Paddon Papers: The Owl

Notes

1. The pastel show opened January 29; Anna Whistler died only a few days later, on January 31.
2. Whistler took the lease on 13 Tite Street in March 1881 and moved in two months later.
3. The "Art Student" was Whistler's disciple Walter Sickert, who published a defense of Whistler in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in June 1882. See Anna Gruetzner Robins, ed., *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

Works referenced

- *Arrangement in Black (The Lady in the Yellow Buskin)* (Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art)
- *Scherzo in Blue, The Blue Girl* (whereabouts unknown)

and the Cabinet," a pamphlet published by Whistler marking the end of relations between himself and Howell.

During the winter of 1883 he gave a second exhibition of his etchings and drypoints at the Fine Art Society. They were 51 in number, mostly Venetian subjects, but a few were etched in London. He prepared the catalogue and decorated the gallery in white and yellow. Yellow dominated everything; yellow hangings on the walls, yellow matting on the floor, yellow chair seats and couch covers, an attendant was attired in white and yellow livery, white and yellow paper butterflies were handed out to his friends. Also in 1883 he sent his picture, *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1, Portrait of the Painter's Mother*, to the Salon in Paris and received a third-class medal.

During the winter of 1883-84, he spent many weeks at St. Ives, Cornwall, sketching and drawing. In May 1884 he sent many of these sketches to his show at Dowdeswell's Gallery. It was his first showing of water colors in any great quantity, and the major point of interest was the undoubted proof of his mastery over a medium which had been difficult for him in the past. Most of these were executed in pure wash, without preliminary outlines, and form an exquisitely beautiful manifestation of Whistler's talent and taste. They rank high among the finest known works in this very difficult medium. The catalogue was entitled "Notes, Harmonies, Nocturnes," and contained some sketches from Holland also.

Among Whistler's friends in the early eighties were Joseph Pennell, Mortimer Menpes, Julian and Waldo Story, Frank Miles, Hon. Frederick Lawless, Francis James, Sir Ronnell Rodd, Carlo Pellegrini, Oscar Wilde, and Herbert Vivian.

THE FULHAM ROAD STUDIO

1885-1887

Whistler moved from Tite Street to 454A Fulham Road in 1885; again he was hard up. He had a number of paintings almost ready for exhibition but was short on funds. Here Whistler painted the *Portrait of William M. Chase* and Chase painted Whistler. On February 20, 1885, he gave his first

Notes

1. The 2003 Freer|Sackler exhibition *Mr. Whistler's Galleries* recreated the décor and layout of the so-called *Arrangement in White and Yellow* show of Venice etchings at the Fine Arts Society in 1883. For a detailed account of the exhibition and the impact of Whistler's innovative design, see David Park Curry, *James McNeill Whistler: Uneasy Pieces*, 316-29, and Kenneth John Myers, ed., *Mr. Whistler's Gallery*.
2. Although Stubbs called the works displayed at the Dowdeswell show "sketches," this was not altogether accurate. Whistler regarded them as completely finished works.

Works referenced

- *Portrait of William M. Chase* (whereabouts unknown)

“Ten O’clock” lecture, so called from the hour at which his hearers were invited to attend, before a distinguished audience in London. He repeated it several times and had it printed.

During 1886 he exhibited at the Dowdeswell’s Gallery, which also exhibited and published for him the *Set of Twenty-Six Etchings**, 21 plates of which had been etched in Venice, the other 5 in England. It is interesting to note here that this set of etchings was the first of Whistler’s works bought by Charles L. Freer.

During the same year, in May, he again gave an exhibition at Dowdeswell’s of a second series of “Notes, Harmonies, Nocturnes.” This second series included oils, pastels, water colors, and pencil drawings.

During the autumn of 1884 Whistler had joined the Society of British Artists. On December 1, 1884, he attended his first meeting, was elected president in June of 1886, and took office in December. He remained its presiding officer, under many difficulties, until his resignation in June of 1888, although he held the office until December. The minority which had backed Whistler resigned with him, prompting his statement that “the artists came out and the British remained.”

A revived interest in lithography during 1887 led Whistler to make several lithographic drawings and to authorize the issue of a set made up of *Limehouse**; *Nocturne**, *Battersea Bridge**; *Reading**; *Gaiety Stage Door**; and *Victoria Club**, to be published in London under the title of “Notes,” by Messrs. Boussod, Valadon & Co.

During the Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887, Whistler made an etching of Windsor Castle and another of the service in Westminster Abbey, as well as a series of 12 etchings, all done in a single day, on the occasion of the Naval Review in July of that year. Although never published as a set this group of 12 subjects is often referred to as the *Naval Review Series**.

Notes

1. In the “Ten O’Clock Lecture,” Whistler articulated his philosophy of art for art’s sake, effectively casting his oeuvre as the final chapter in a transhistorical “story of the beautiful.” In promoting his own brand of aestheticism, Whistler also sought to discredit his chief rivals, proselytizers and popularizers such as John Ruskin, William Morris, and Oscar Wilde.
2. The transformative effect of Freer’s purchase of the Second Venice Set was the subject of the 2014–15 Freer|Sackler exhibition *Fine Impressions: Whistler, Freer, and Venice.*
3. Whistler’s efforts to rebrand himself in the 1880s resulted in an expanded market for his work in America and Europe, increasing his bitterness toward the British art establishment, which, he believed, would never properly appreciate him.

Works referenced

- *Limehouse* (F|S)
- *Nocturne* (F|S)
- *Battersea Bridge* (F|S)
- *Reading* (F|S)
- *Gaiety Stage Door* (F|S)
- *Victoria Club* (F|S)
- *Naval Review Series* (F|S)

MARRIAGE, NEW HONORS, AND TRAVELS

1888–1897

On August 11, 1888, Whistler married Beatrix Godwin, widow of E. W. Godwin, the architect of the White House in Tite Street. He had recently left the Fulham Road studio for the Tower House, Tite Street, and the house was in disorder. However, he took his bride to France and spent the rest of the summer and autumn. When he returned to London in the late fall he brought back about 30 etched plates of Tours, Loches, and Bourges and water-color sketches of Boulogne and Touraine. The year after his marriage he etched 17 plates in and about Dordrecht and Amsterdam, including *The Embroidered Curtain**; *The Balcony**; and *Zaandam**.

In 1888 Whistler had been asked to show at the International Exhibition at Munich. He sent *The Yellow Buskin* and was awarded a second-class medal; soon afterward he was elected an honorary member of the Bavarian Royal Academy and a year later won a first-class medal and the Cross of St. Michael.

About 1890 he again took up his interest in lithography and made many lithographs from this time on until about 1896. Most of them were printed by Thomas R. Way who also catalogued them later.

In 1889 he was made Chevalier of the Legion of Honor and won a first-class medal at the Paris Universal Exhibition. He was showing the *Mother*; *The Fur Jacket*; and *Arrangement in Yellow and Grey, Effie Deans*, at Amsterdam that fall and was awarded a gold medal there. These honors, though late, pleased him immensely.

In March of 1890 Whistler moved to No. 21 Cheyne Walk, and this year, too, marked the appearance of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, a collection of Whistler's letters, arranged and edited, then published in book form. But not without lawsuits, quarrels, and confiscations of unauthorized additions, was William Heinemann able to produce the final edition which met with Whistler's approval. He published it in London in June of 1890 and it was published at the same time in New York by John W. Lovell Co. A second edition,

Notes

1. View Whistler's lithographs from the 1890s.
2. *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* brought together in one volume many of Whistler's letters to the press as well as other aesthetic pronouncements and those of his critics.

Works referenced

- *The Embroidered Curtain* (F|S)
- *The Balcony* (F|S)
- *Zaandam* (F|S)
- *Arrangement in Yellow and Grey, Effie Deans* (Rijksmuseum)

somewhat enlarged, came out in 1892, issued by the same publishers, and a reissue appeared in New York in 1904, published by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The year 1891 saw the purchase of the *Carlyle* for the Glasgow Corporation Art Gallery and the *Mother* bought for the Musée du Luxembourg, Paris; the latter has since gone to the Louvre.

Early in 1892 Croal Thompson arranged with Whistler for an exhibition of "Nocturnes, Marines, and Chevalet Pieces" at the Goupil Galleries in London. Whistler spent most of the year in Paris but went back and forth to consult about hanging, cataloguing, and other details. The exhibition was a complete success and marked the turning of the tide of public feeling about Whistler's work. The pictures were all lent by private owners at Whistler's request and were not for sale, but the important results of the exhibition were that he was besieged by prospective sitters and the price of his work took an immediate jump in the market.

He finally settled for the time being at No. 110 rue du Bac, Paris, and opened a new studio at No. 86 rue Notre Dames-des-Champs. He was etching now and working with lithography but was painting very little. Mrs. Whistler was not well, so they decided on a trip to the coast. Some of the results of this trip are shown in the lithographs of *Vitré**; *The Yellow House, Lannion**; and *The Red House, Paimpol**; these last two, experiments in color lithography of which he became a master.

In 1893 he began a number of large portraits, among them those of A. J. Eddy; J. J. Cowen, called *The Grey Man*; Dr. Davenport of Paris; Miss Charlotte Williams of Baltimore; Miss Peck of Chicago, later Mrs. W. R. Farquhar; and Miss Kinsella.

Whistler's first meeting with Mr. Freer, on November 12, 1894, is recorded in a letter which Freer addressed to Col. Frank J. Hecker of Detroit four days later. Mr. Freer had already begun to acquire Whistler's work and had made many purchases in 1893; but the bulk of the collection was bought from 1898 on.

Notes

1. The sale of the portraits of *Mother* and *Carlyle* to public collections outside of England was a watershed in Whistler's career, enshrining him as a living Old Master of transnational importance.
2. Art historian Anne Helmreich has pointed out that Whistler worked closely with Goupil Gallery Director D. C. Thomson in the early 1890s to drive up prices for his older works on the secondary market, thereby boosting the market value of his new work. Anne Helmreich, "Traversing Objects: The London Art Market at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present*, ed. Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 142-43.
3. Freer actually met Whistler in March 1890 during the collector's first trip to London. The encounter was published, with some inaccuracies, as "A Day with Whistler: C. L. Freer Tells of His Recent Visit to 'Tower House,'" *Detroit Free Press*, March 30, 1890. A transcription of the article and related correspondence can be found in Linda Merrill, ed., *With Kindest Regards*.

Works referenced

- *Vitre* (F|S)
- *Yellow House, Lannion* (F|S)
- *Red House, Paimpol* (F|S)

The year 1894 saw the start of the Eden trial, brought about by Sir William Eden's refusal to pay Whistler's price for Lady Eden's portrait; but a much more serious worry afflicted him suddenly. Mrs. Whistler became gravely ill of cancer, the Paris studio was temporarily closed, and in December they hurried to London for medical advice. Meanwhile new honors and new successes came Whistler's way. In 1894 he received the Temple gold medal at the Pennsylvania Academy, in 1895 a gold medal at Antwerp, and numerous commissions, but the blow of his wife's illness was too distracting for him to appreciate good fortune in any guise.

The year 1895 dragged on. Whistler made many trips to Paris in connection with the Eden case, and late in the year he and his wife returned to their rue du Bac apartment, but Mrs. Whistler was more ill than ever.

Once again he went back to work, but in the late summer took Mrs. Whistler and settled at the Red Lion Hotel, Lyme Regis. While there he arranged a show of his lithographs in London. At Lyme Regis he painted *The Little Rose of Lyme Regis*; *The Master Smith*; and *Dorsetshire Landscape**, the latter the only known large landscape he ever attempted.

The lithograph show at London was a triumph, but Whistler derived little pleasure from it. He was moving from place to place seeking comfort for his wife. They moved finally to St. Jude's Cottage, Hampstead Heath, and there, on May 10, 1896, Mrs. Whistler died. She was buried at Chiswick on May 14, her birthday.

Miss Ethel Philip had stayed with the Whistlers until her marriage, at the rue du Bac house, to Charles Whibley in 1895. When she left, Miss Rosalind Birnie Philip took her place; now after Mrs. Whistler's death, Whistler made her his ward, changed his will and made her his heiress, eventually canceling all his former bequests and leaving everything to her. He stayed at Hampstead a short time, then went to Whitehall Court to stay with Mr. Heinemann, and remained there off and on 2 or 3 years.

"The Company of the Butterfly" was formed in 1896, and

Notes

1. Regarding *Dorsetshire Landscape*, Stubbs is referring to the painting titled *Green and Silver: The Devonshire Cottages*, which actually dates to 1883 or 1884, and, as the title states, depicts a Devonshire landscape, not a Dorsetshire one. Stubbs is repeating a mistake originally made by Freer and others, who believed that the work was painted during Whistler's 1895 trip to Lyme Regis.

Works referenced

- [*The Little Rose of Lyme Regis* \(MFA Boston\)](#)
- [*The Master Smith of Lyme Regis* \(MFA Boston\)](#)
- [*Green and Silver: The Devonshire Cottages* \(F|S\)](#)

later, in 1898, at No. 2 Hinde Street, Manchester Square, an agency was launched to provide a sales outlet for his new work. He had no control over earlier work and was unable to reconcile himself to the large profits dealers made buying and selling his pictures, but he was determined to keep the sale of all his new work in his own hands. The company remained in operation for a few years, but as it did not prove as profitable as he had hoped, he gave it up.

In Paris in 1897 Boldini painted Whistler's portrait and made a drypoint of him on a zinc plate. Helleu made one at the same time, but Whistler liked neither of them. The Freer Collection owns a print from both plates*.

This was the summer of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and Whistler again saw the Naval Review, this time from the deck of George Vanderbilt's yacht.

LONDON AND PARIS

1897-1901

At the close of 1897, the Eden case finally ended in Whistler's favor, but during the winter of 1897-98, he was ill much of the time. His heart, never very strong, began to trouble him now. In April of 1898 he was elected president of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers. Also that year the Académie Carmen opened in Paris and was carried on under his direction. He published "The Baronet and the Butterfly" in 1899, an account of the Eden trial. He continued painting, some of his work being *Rose and Gold: Little Lady Sophie of Soho** and *Brown and Gold: Lilly in our Alley*, also several other portraits; but his health had broken down and he was forced to stop work from time to time.

In the summer of 1900 he made visits to Holland and Ireland, bringing back each time a few small exquisite examples of his work in different mediums. Stopping at Chester, he made several drawings of the picturesque old houses, one of which, *The Rows, Chester**, a monochrome in sepia, is in the Freer Collection.

Notes

1. The short-lived Académie Carmen was established in Paris in 1898 by Whistler and Carmen Rossi, one of Whistler's favorite models (who was later accused of stealing works from his studio). Whistler, who taught at the school along with the sculptor Frederick MacMonnies, hoped to guarantee his art historical legacy by training the next generation of American and British art students flocking to Paris; Rossi, meanwhile, was hoping for more immediate rewards. The school closed in 1901. See Robyn Asleson, "The Idol and His Apprentice: Whistler and the Académie Carmen of Paris," in *After Whistler: The Artist and His Influence on American Painting*, ed. Linda Merrill (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 74-85.

Works referenced

- Giovanni Boldini, *Whistler Asleep* (F|S)
- Paul Cesar Helleu, *Portrait of Whistler* (F|S)
- *Rose and Gold: Little Lady Sophie of Soho* (F|S)
- *Brown and Gold; Lilly in our Alley* (Fogg Museum)
- *The Rows, Chester* (F|S)

At the Paris Exposition in 1900 Whistler exhibited several paintings, among them *The Little White Girl*; *L'Andalouse*—the title given a full-length portrait of Mrs. Charles Whibley, and a full-length portrait of himself, later destroyed, and a number of etchings and lithographs. He was awarded a Grand Prix for painting and another for engraving. In December of 1900 he decided to go to Tangier in search of health and stopped at Gibraltar, where he made numerous sketches, then went on to Algiers.

THE END

1901–1903

Traveling from Algiers, he went to Marseilles where he had to spend 2 weeks in bed. His doctor recommended Corsica, and he went to Ajaccio where he stayed for some time. He devoted much time to pen and pencil drawings and water colors, and made a few etchings.

He returned to London in May and from then on wandered from place to place, restless and ill. During 1902 he moved first to Bath, then in March to the Tite Street house in London, then back to Bath. Later he took a studio at No. 74 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, not far from where he had lived in former days. Here he worked intermittently, trying to paint, making a few etchings, pastels, and a water color or two. Friends with whom he came in contact these days included Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Adams, Charles L. Freer, William Heinemann, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pennell, Arthur Studd, and Thomas R. Way.

During 1902 he started a portrait of R. A. Canfield, to which he gave the title *His Reverence*, and despite many unpleasant things said about the man, Whistler always made him welcome, both as a sitter and a friend. The *Portrait of Charles L. Freer** in the Freer Collection was started during 1902 also, but was left at Whistler's studio and only came into Mr. Freer's possession after Whistler's death. Later during 1902, he journeyed to Holland, but illness soon made him turn back to London again. Early in 1903 he received the degree of LL.D. conferred upon him by Glasgow University.

Notes

1. The Pennells met Whistler in London in the 1880s. Their two-volume authorized biography, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, appeared in 1908.
2. Richard Canfield (1855–1915) owned fashionable gambling rooms in New York City, Newport, and Saratoga Springs. He owned a fine collection of Whistlers that he sold to the Knoedler Gallery in 1914.

Works referenced

- *His Reverence* (private collection)
- [Portrait of Charles L. Freer](#) (F|S)

Early in July he became ill again but fought it off. On the 17th he had an appointment to go driving with Mr. Freer, but, though his illness had been long, the end was swift. He was dying before Mr. Freer reached the house. He had suffered an attack, his old heart ailment, and, although a doctor was sent for, the need for one had passed. The services were held July 22, 1903, from Old Chelsea Church, and he was buried at Chiswick. His pall-bearers were M. Théodore Duret, Sir James Guthrie, John Lavery, Edwin A. Abbey, George Vanderbilt, and Charles L. Freer.

James McNeill Whistler, the artist, left a legacy to the world; his work appears in many mediums and in many places. The span of useful endeavor allotted to him was less than 50 years, yet the amount of work he accomplished was truly prodigious. His paintings are hung in most of the great art centers of the world; he produced great numbers of water colors and pastels, over 440 of his etchings and drypoint subjects have been catalogued (the total number of prints from these plates is unknown); in lithography he produced over 150 subjects, and there are numerous drawings of his in pencil, pen-and-ink, and chalk scattered far and wide.

As time goes on, he emerges as a man with an extraordinary singleness of purpose, with great interpretative power, a creator of beauty in line, form, and color, and an astonishing versatility in his masterful control of the various mediums he used. Throughout his life he followed a system in etching, lithography, and drawing from which he never deviated. He first selected a point of interest, worked that in and finished it; he then finished the picture with other objects of less importance.

Another important idea that he carried to perfection was that everything should be enclosed within the frame and appear as far away as the object actually was when he drew it. In painting he found this a much more difficult problem than in etching or drawing and worked diligently to master it.

In some of his earlier paintings branches of trees, sprays of flowers, even the edge of buildings run into the picture giving the impression that the composition is carried beyond

the frame, but later he succeeded in getting the completed picture well within the frame by a careful placing of the subject before he started work.

As a man, he was often an enigma, sometimes tender and understanding; sometimes irascible, hot-headed and rash. He had charm, wit, and gaiety, and his courtesy to models and servants was unailing. His delightful sympathy with children is shown in the many pictures he made of them. His joy in a fight is preserved in his writing and in stories told about him by his critics and friends. His eccentricities in dress and manner have brought down upon his memory a shower of anecdotes, some true, some false, but the world has seldom seen a greater contrast than the small, erect, dandified man with monocle and cane, strolling about London, and the serious man, attired in painting jacket, hard at work in his studio, or seated along the Thames or a Venetian canal busily absorbed with copper plate and etching needle intent upon capturing for posterity a fleeting moment of beauty.

It is only fitting that America, through her art galleries and private citizens, should possess most of Whistler's great works of art. The Freer Gallery alone is the owner of *The Peacock Room**, 65 oil paintings, 52 water-color paintings, 78 pastel, crayon, and chalk drawings, 68 pencil drawings, 14 pen-and-ink drawings, 748 etchings and drypoints, 192 lithographs and lithotints, 3 wood engravings after designs by Whistler, and 38 original copper plates including the *Coast Survey Plate No. 1**, and the canceled set of plates known as *The Thames Set**.

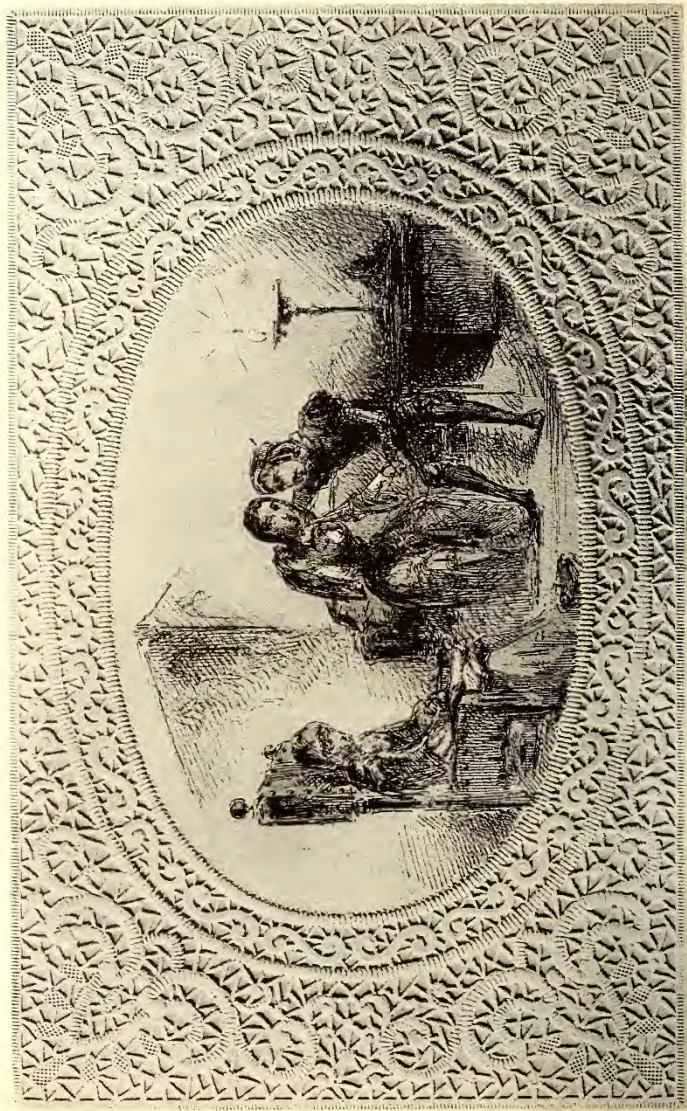


05.333. A FIRE AT POMFRET

Water color, done at about the age of 15 while in school at Pomfret, Conn.



A Fire at Pomfret
1849 – 51
Watercolor
[F1905.333a-b](#)

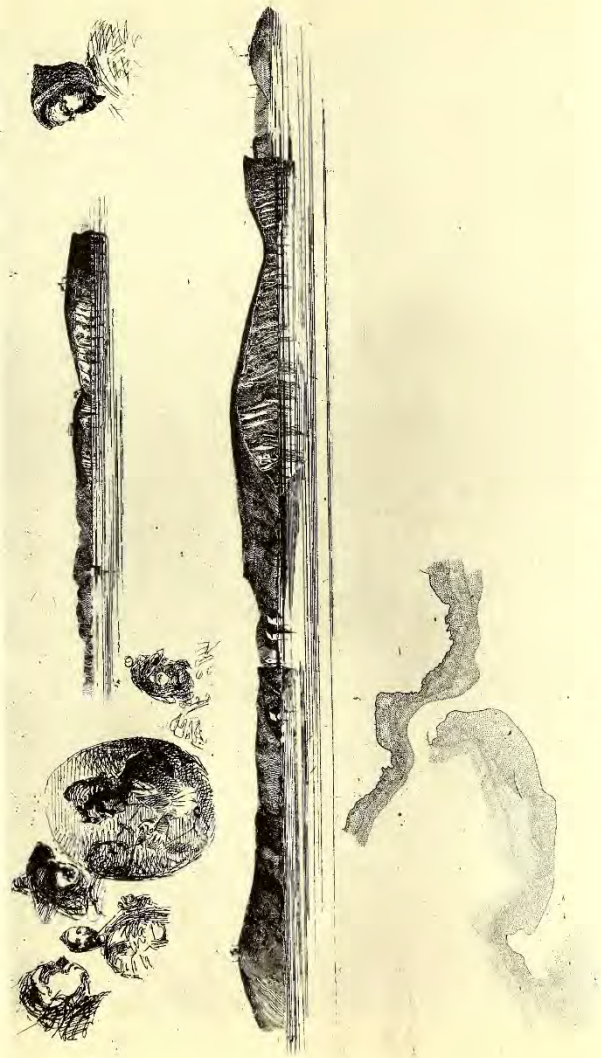


08.10E. TWO LOVERS AND AN OLD WOMAN

Pen-and-ink drawing from an album, done at West Point between 1851 and 1854.



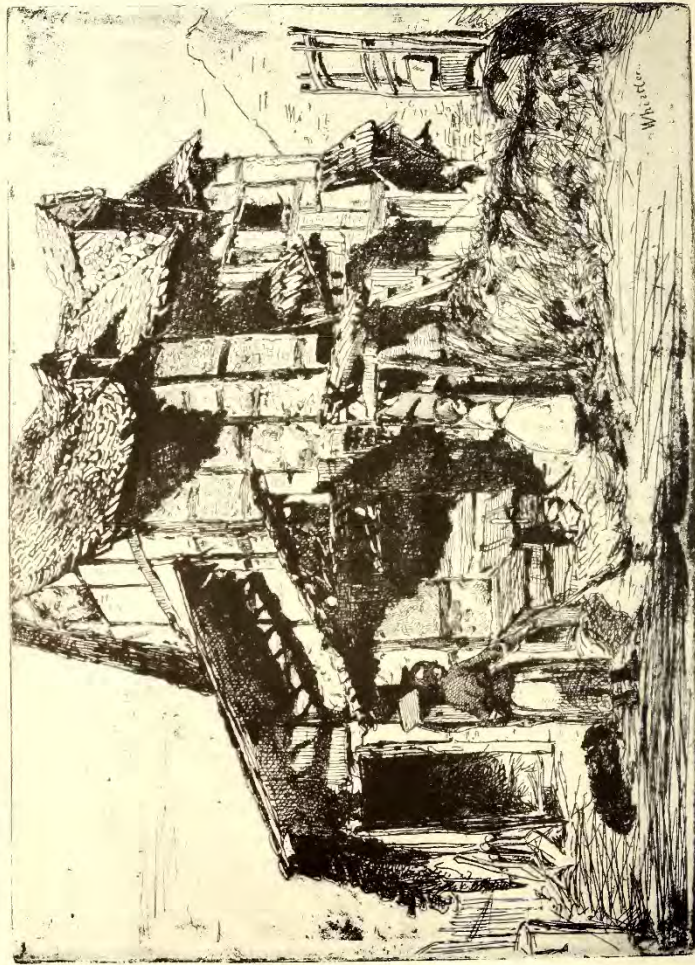
Detail, *Two Lovers and an Old Woman*
1851-1854
Pencil, pen, and ink with watercolor
[F1908.10e](#)



97.17. SKETCHES ON THE COAST SURVEY PLATE
Etching, made at the Coast and Geodetic Survey, Washington, D. C., during 1854



Sketches on the Coast Survey Plate
1854
Etching
[F1897.17](#)



98.216. THE UNSAFE TENEMENT

Etching, first state. In the third state, No. 4 of "The Twelve Etchings from Nature"
(The French Sec).



The Unsafe Tenement
1858
Etching
[F1889.20](#)



04.75. CAPRICE IN PURPLE AND GOLD, NO. 2: THE GOLDEN SCREEN
Oil painting.



Caprice in Purple and Gold: The Golden Screen
1864
Oil on wood panel
[F1904.75a](#)



17.234. THE MUSIC ROOM: HARMONY IN GREEN AND ROSE

Oil painting.

***Harmony in Green and Rose: The Music Room***

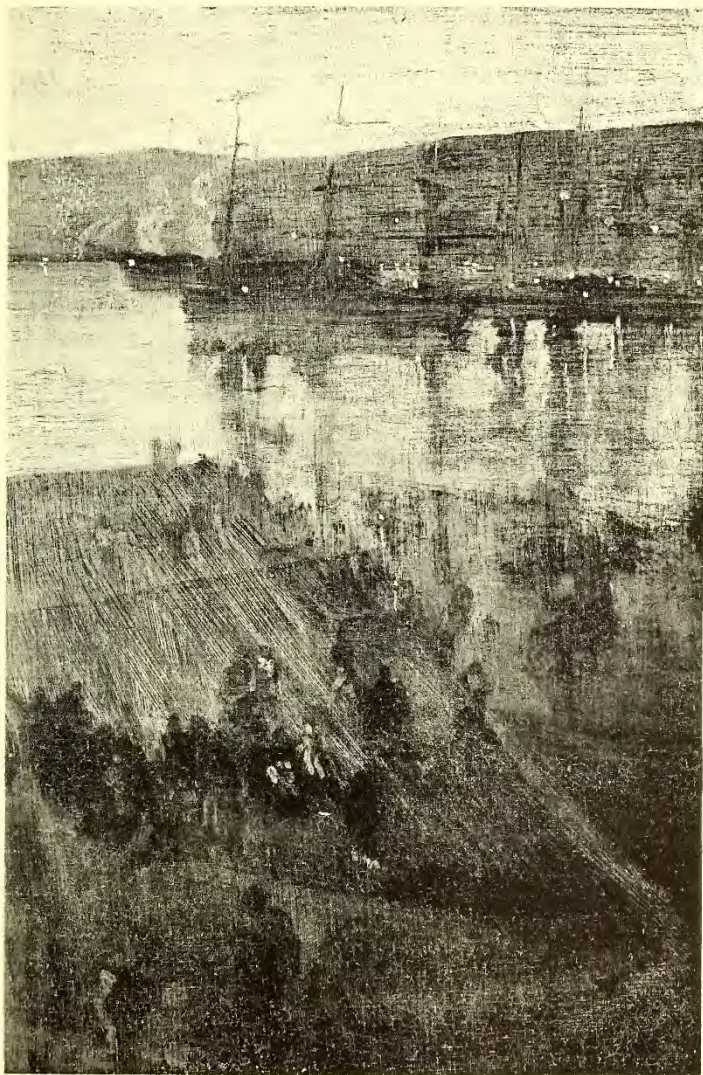
1860 – 61

Oil on canvas

[F1917.234a-b](#)

From Freer | Sackler label:

Set in the London home of Whistler's brother-in-law Seymour Haden, this painting was originally titled *The Morning Call*. The woman reflected in the mirror at the left is Whistler's half sister Deborah Haden. The seated girl is his niece, Annie Haden. The standing woman, Miss Isabella Boott, was connected to the Haden family by marriage. Instead of trying to create a convincing illusion of three-dimensional space, Whistler adopted a color scheme and sharply angled perspective that emphasize the flatness of the picture plane.



09.127. NOCTURNE: BLUE AND GOLD, VALPARAISO

Oil painting, painted during the visit to Chile in 1866.

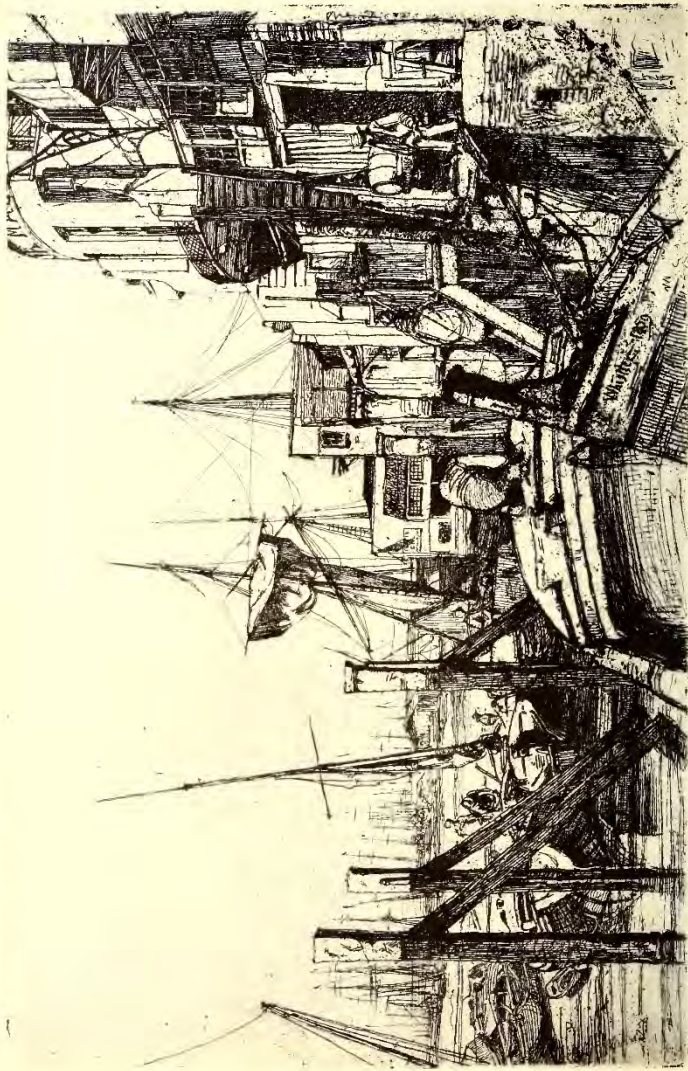


Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Valparaiso

1866/ca. 1874

Oil on canvas

F1909.127a-b



98.268. LIMEHOUSE

Etching, second state. In the third state, No. 12 of the 'Sixteen Etchings of Scenes on the Thames and Other Subjects' (The Thames Set).



Limehouse
1859
Etching
F1888.33



05.100. PORTRAIT OF F. R. LEYLAND: ARRANGEMENT IN BLACK
Oil painting.



Arrangement in Black: Portrait of F. R. Leyland
1870 – 73
Oil on canvas
[F1905.100a-b](#)



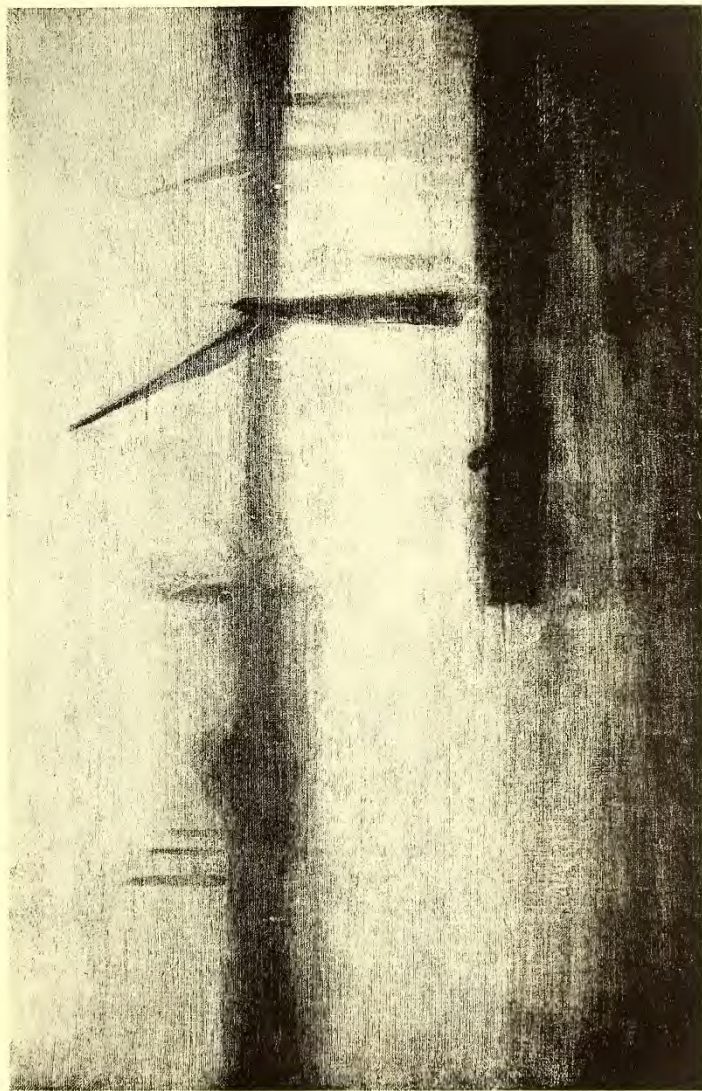
04.61. THE PEACOCK ROOM

Oil color and gold on wood and leather. *Upper*, northeast corner; *lower*, southwest corner.



Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room
1876 – 77

Oil paint and gold leaf on canvas, leather, mosaic
tile, and wood
[F1904.61](#)



02.97. NOCTURNE: BLUE AND SILVER, BATTERSEA REACH

Oil painting.

**Nocturne: Blue and Silver—Battersea Reach**

1870-1875

Oil on canvas

F1902.97a-b

From Freer | Sackler label:

Following a suggestion by his patron Frederick Richards Leyland, Whistler used the musical term “Nocturne” to title more than thirty paintings of London after dark that he created in the 1870s. This one depicts barges moored to unload coal and other goods along the Chelsea docks; the chimneys and factories of Battersea appear in ghostly outline on the opposite shore. Whistler applied a brown underpaint to the coarsely woven canvas before covering the surface with thin layers of runny blue pigment. Later, he reworked the picture, and it is now more grey than blue, with touches of bright color to define the artificial urban light and its reflections on the river.



98.379. NOCTURNE
Etching, third state. In this state, No. 4 of "A Set of Twelve Etchings" (The First Venice Set).



Nocturne

1879 – 80

Etching and drypoint

[F1898.379](#)

From Freer|Sackler label:

Many contemporary critics and collectors believed that inked plates should be cleanly wiped, so that prints had crisp lines which clearly showed off the etcher's skill. Some progressive print makers, including Whistler, believed that printing, like etching, was an art, and that many prints could be impressed by leaving extra ink on the printing plate.

Contemporary reviewers who disapproved of what they condescendingly described as "artistic printing" hated *Nocturne*. Brusquely dismissing it, one critic concluded that *Nocturne* "can hardly be called, as it stands, an etching; the bones as it were of the picture have been etched, which bones consist of some shipping and distant objects, and then over the whole of the plate ink has apparently been smeared. We have seen a great many representations of Venetian skies, but never saw one before consisting of brown smoke with clots of ink in diagonal lines."

Quotation from the *British Architect*, December 10, 1880.



05.205. *Study*
Lithograph.



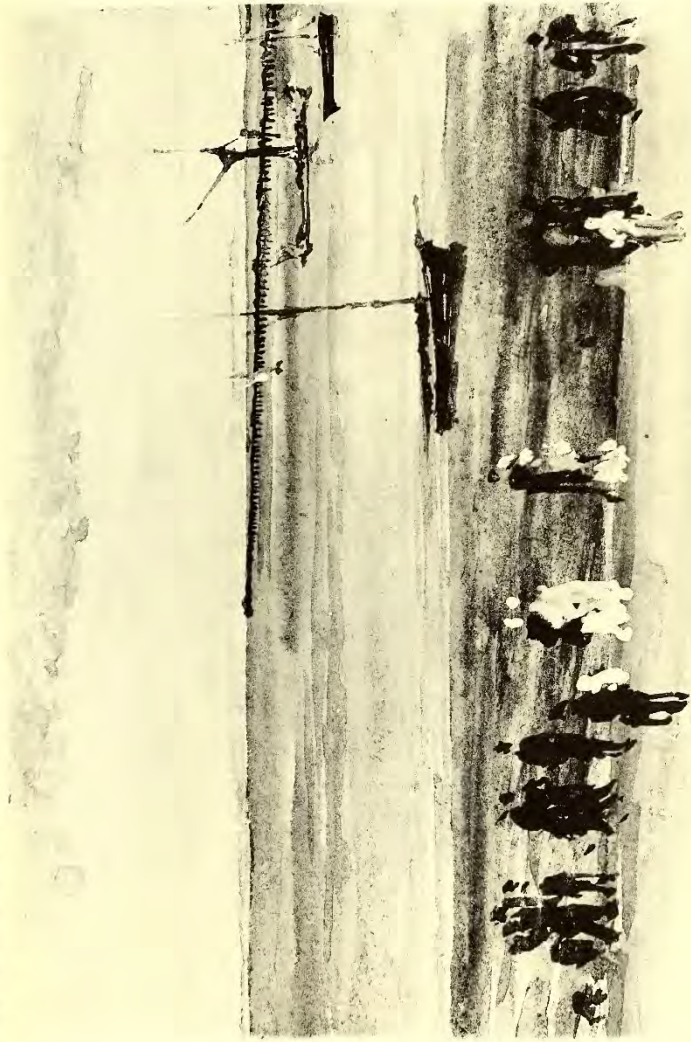
Study
1878
Lithograph
[F1905.205](#)



The Rialto
1879 – 80
Etching
F1905.7

87.22. THE RIALTO

Etching, second state. Published in this state in "Venice, Second Series, Twenty-Six Etchings" (The Second Venice Set).



04.82. SOUTHEND PIER
Water color.



Southend Pier
1883 – 84
Watercolor
[F1904.82a-c](#)



04.315. AN ORANGE NOTE, SWEETSHOP
Oil painting.



An Orange Note: Sweet Shop

1883 or 1884

Oil on panel

[F1904.315a-c](#)

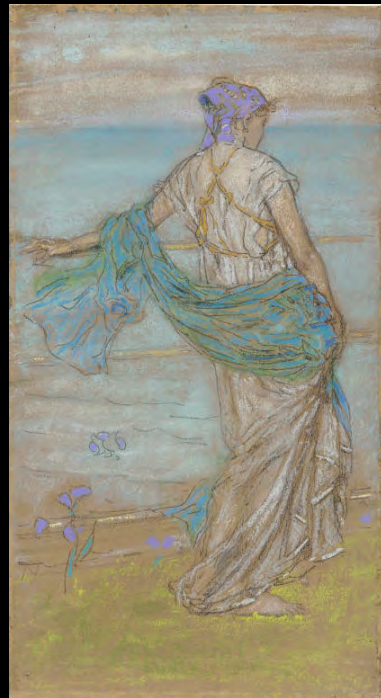
From Freer | Sackler label:

This is one of several paintings of shop fronts that Whistler completed while in St. Ives. Sympathetic critics singled it out for enthusiastic praise when Whistler exhibited it in London in 1884. One declared, it "is probably the most perfect little thing of its kind that was ever wrought by an artist who has learnt how to see....It is without detail, without apparent labour, without dramatic interest; but it is exquisite in colour, faultless in tone, and its well-considered mystery has, at least, the interest of suggestiveness."

Quotation from Mr. Whistler's Exhibition,
Standard, May 19, 1884.



05.129. ANNABEL LEE
Pastel.



Annabel Lee
1885 – 87
Chalk and pastel on brown paper
[F1905.129a-b](#)



04.65. VENUS ASTARTE

Pastel.

**Venus Astarte**

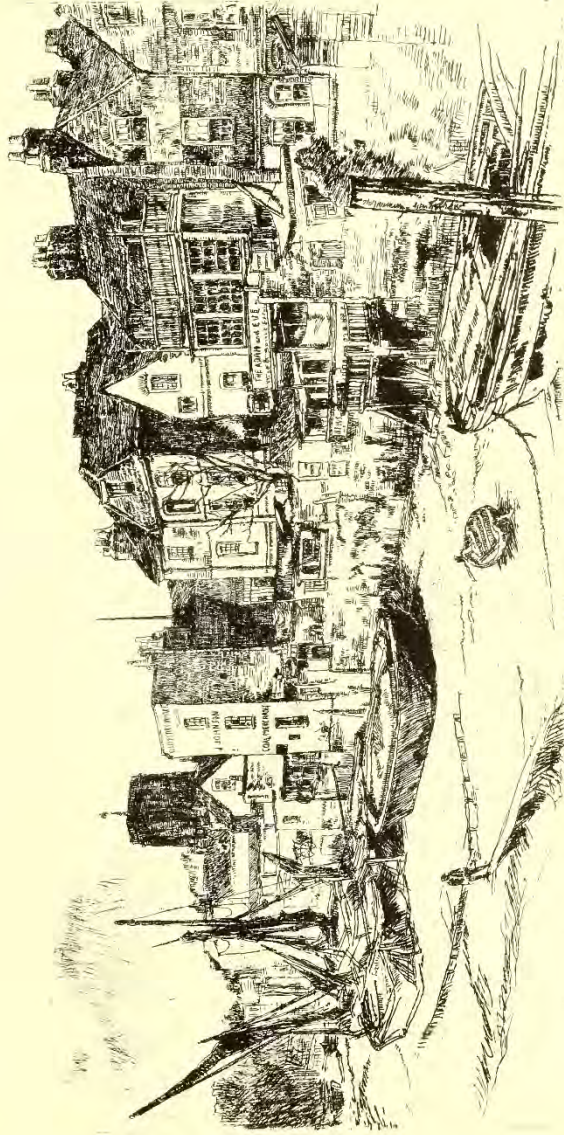
1888 – 90

Chalk and pastel on brown paper

F1904.65a-c

From Freer|Sackler label:

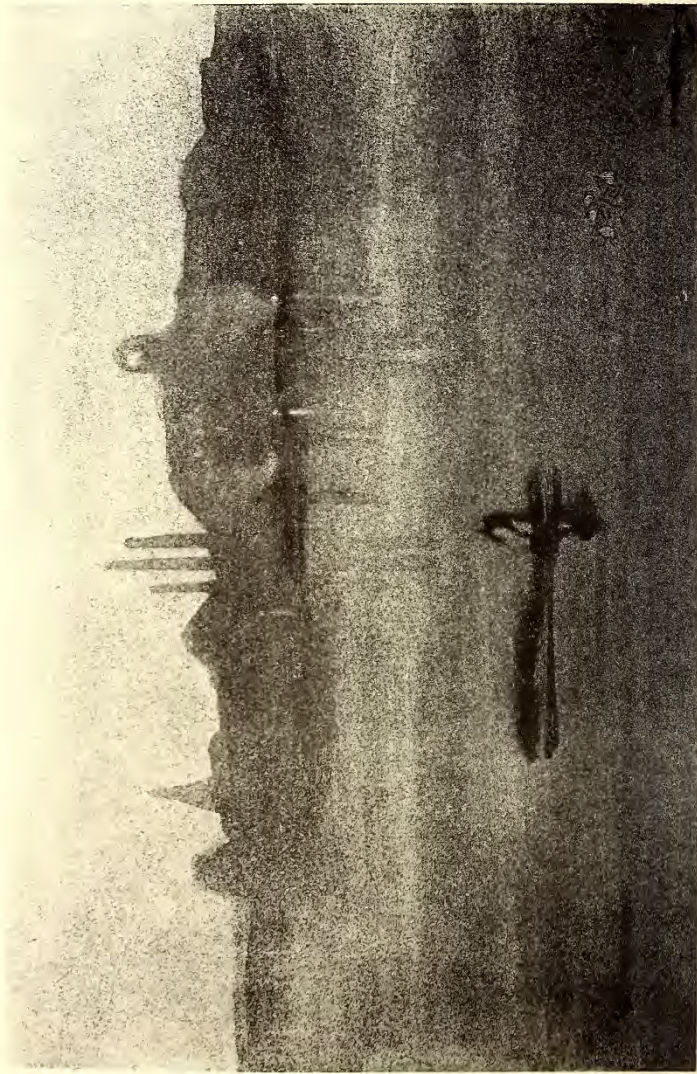
This drawing, which depicts the Greco-Roman goddess of love & beauty, was exhibited in Whistler's time as *The Birth of Venus* and *Venus Rising from the Sea*. The pose and proportions suggest Whistler's interest in classical sculpture, and the use of drapery to frame the model's head also occurs in *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Little Blue Girl* (F1903.89)



99.54. THE "ADAM AND EVE", OLD CHELSEA
Etching. Intermediate state between Kennedy's first and second.



The "Adam and Eve," Old Chelsea
1883 or 1884
Etching and drypoint
F1893.29



05.208. NOCTURNE: THE THAMES AT BATTERSEA
Lithotint.



Nocturne

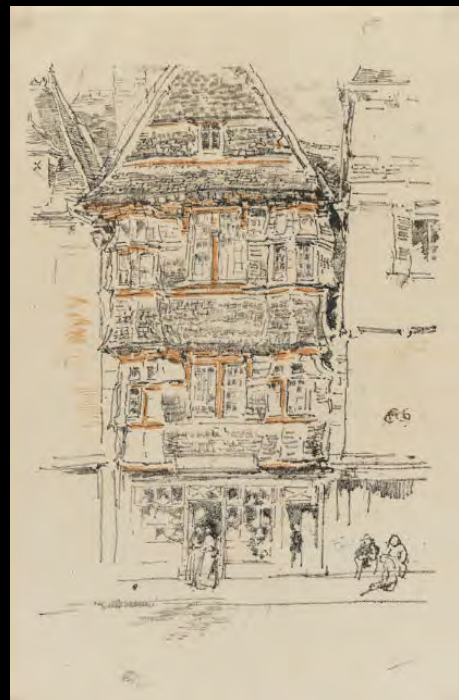
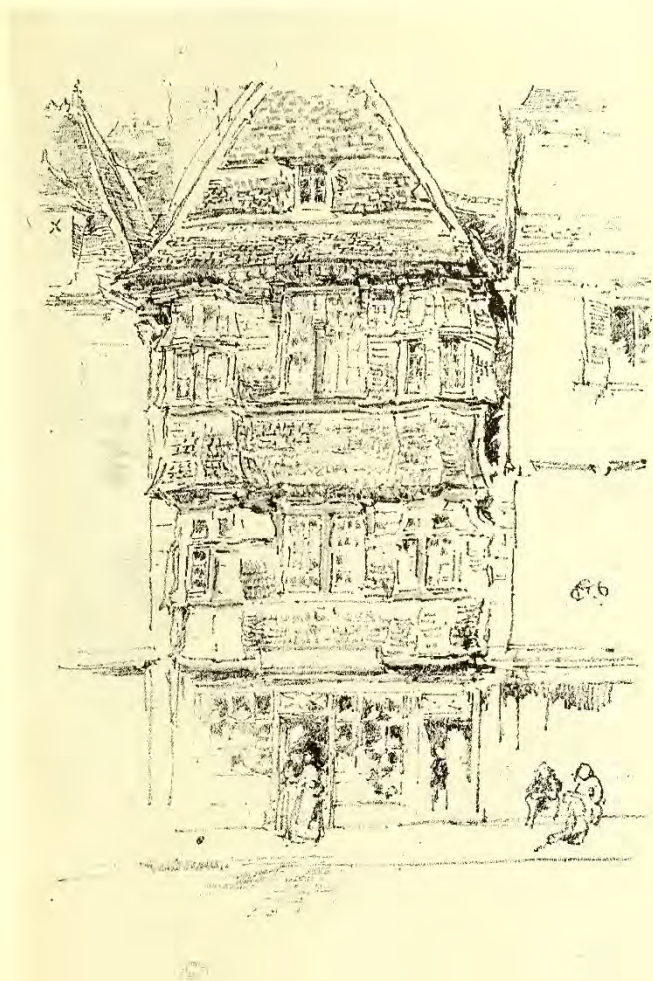
1878

Lithotint

[F1906.136](#)

From Freer | Sackler label:

Nocturne is a view of the Thames from Whistler's studio in Chelsea. Whistler did not reverse the drawing, so the printed image is backwards, but many of his contemporaries would have recognized the industrial landscape of Battersea, which included the lighted clock tower of the Morgan Crucible Company, the factory smokestacks, the triangular profile of the slag heap, and the spire of Battersea Church. Whistler used broad washes and the cool tones of the paper to create a powerfully moody print that can hold its own with the painted nocturnes.



Red House, Paimpol

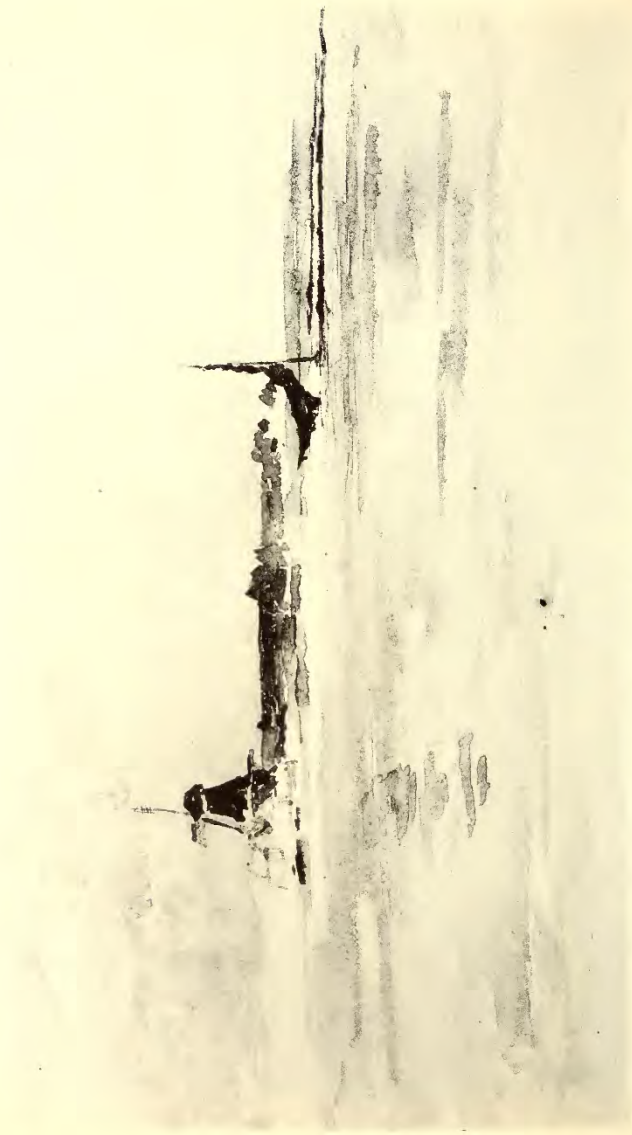
1893

Lithograph

F1894.14

94.14. RED HOUSE, PAIMPOL

Lithograph, printed in colors.



08.15. THE LITTLE RED NOTE: DORDRECHT

Water color.



A Little Red Note: Dordrecht

1884

Watercolor

F1908.15a-b



06.227. DORSETSHIRE LANDSCAPE

Oil painting.



Green and Silver: The Devonshire Cottages

1883 or 84

Oil on canvas

[F1906.227a-c](#)



06.120. ZAANDAM
Etching, second state.



Zaandam

1889

Etching

F1906.120

From Freer|Sackler label:

It is a short boat trip from Amsterdam to Zaandam, and Whistler probably visited Zaandam several times during his stay in Amsterdam, completing both this etching and *The Mill* (F1906.127). *Zaandam* is the last pure landscape Whistler ever etched. In *Zaandam*, as in many of the Amsterdam etchings, Whistler adopted an unusually low vantage point, devoting almost half his image to the watery foreground.



05.117. ST. IVES: CORNWALL
Water color.



Penzance, Cornwall
1883
Watercolor
[F1905.117a-b](#)



02.109. ROSE AND GOLD: THE LITTLE LADY SOPHIE OF SOHO
Oil painting.



Rose and Gold: The Little Lady Sophie of Soho
1898 – 99
Oil on canvas
[F1902.109a-b](#)

From Freer | Sackler label:

This painting is modeled on Sophie Burkitt, the daughter of the artist's landlady at 8 Fitzroy Street. Freer found that Whistler's picture appealed to "as perhaps of his very best" yes found it "so illusive" that it would "baffle the cleverest photographer." When the painting was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum in 1910, a reviewer called it "one of the most perfect of Mr. Whistler's productions, with its dignity of repose, its wonderfully vital expression, now smiling, now earnest, the very essence of soul and movement, which alone was Mr. Whistler's power to convey to the canvas." But the very language in which the painting is discussed points toward its historical underpinnings. One need not search far for Whistler's muse, *The Little Lady Sophie of Soho* represents his attempt to capture the enigmatic half smile of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*.



03.301. PORTRAIT OF CHARLES L. FREER
Oil painting.



Portrait of Charles Lang Freer

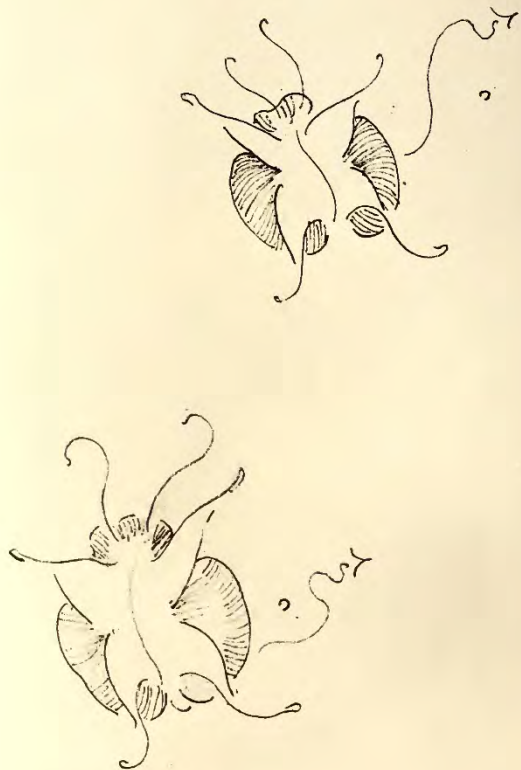
1902 – 03

Oil on panel

[F1903.301a-b](#)

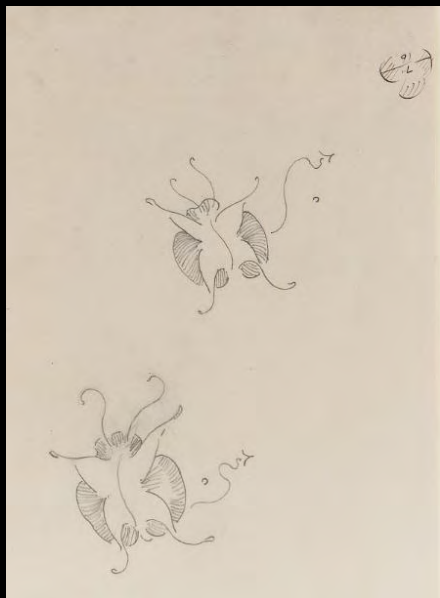
From Freer|Sackler label:

This is the only portrait of Charles Lang Freer to enter the collection of the museum that he founded. It was begun in 1902, when Freer was in London and Whistler insisted that his friend and patron sit for him in a brown jacket, specially chosen by the artist. Although he had not been eager to have his likeness taken, Freer ultimately was pleased with the result: “He is making me look like a pope,” he explained to his business partner, Frank Hecker. “There will of course, be little of Freer in it....It will surely be all Whistler!”



04.448. TWO WHISTLER BUTTERFLIES

Pencil drawings.



Two Butterflies

ca. 1890

Pencil

F1904.448

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FREER | SACKLER

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