



Poetry of  
**Sight**

The Prints of  
James McNeill  
Whistler  
(1834–1903)

January 24 through May 10, 2003

The New York Public Library  
Humanities and Social Sciences Library  
Stokes and Print Galleries (Third Floor)  
Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street

“As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject-matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or of colour.”



# Introduction

**P**ainter, draughtsman, decorator, and writer, James McNeill Whistler claimed multiple allegiances and crossed many boundaries in both his life and art. Born in America and raised in Russia, Whistler spent his adult life as an artist in three of Europe's greatest cities: Paris, London, and Venice. His cosmopolitan lifestyle brought him into contact with artists working in a range of styles, from realism to aestheticism, impressionism to classicism. Neither a follower nor a leader, from the start Whistler was intent on forging his own aesthetic philosophy, which he would articulate through his images and writings. While his artistic achievements have been hotly debated, from his earliest student days until the present, one aspect of his oeuvre has brought him near-consistent acclaim: his prints.

A dedicated printmaker, he produced over six hundred etchings, drypoints, and lithographs, the best known of which are those he published in sets. The rustic charm of the French Set, the gritty realism of the Thames Set, and the decorative aestheticism of the First and Second Venice Sets document the evolution of Whistler's art and his approach toward printmaking. Ever conscious of his need to support himself and his ambition to engage an audience, Whistler was drawn to printmaking, taking advantage of the medium's inherent multiplicity.

The New York Public Library has outstanding holdings of Whistler material across several collections. The Print Collection's S. P. Avery Collection, comprising nearly 18,000 prints, is especially rich in early impressions of Whistler's prints, many inscribed at the collector's behest. The Print Collection is also home to the A. E. Gallatin Collection of Whistler Portraits, which documents the extraordinary attraction to Whistler-as-subject. Manuscript holdings documenting Whistler's family life and his correspondence with dealer Edward G. Kennedy are found in the Manuscripts and Archives Division and the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature. This exhibition brings together material from all of these collections to present an overview of Whistler's art and life on the centenary of his death.

Nicole Simpson & Elizabeth Wyckoff  
*Print Specialists*

## Checklist of the Exhibition

Works are by James McNeill Whistler unless otherwise attributed. The S. P. Avery Collection and the A. E. Gallatin Collection are part of the Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, of The New York Public Library's Humanities and Social Sciences Library. Prints preceded by an asterisk (\*) are on view January 24–April 5, 2003; prints preceded by two asterisks (\*\*) are on view April 8–May 10, 2003. All other prints are on view during the entire exhibition period.

This exhibition has been made possible by the continuing generosity of Miriam and Ira D. Wallach.

# Portraits of Whistler

**W**histler was one of the most frequently depicted personalities of the nineteenth century. Numerous artists portrayed him in a variety of media and styles, ranging from formal painted portraits to sketched caricatures. Attuned to the power of outward appearance, he devised a flamboyant, eccentric style. His striking figure, combined with his legendary wit and caustic temperament, assured him the constant media attention he desired.

Many of the portraits on display form part of the A. E. Gallatin Collection of Whistler Portraits. Gallatin, who would go on to become a champion of modern art and open the pioneering Gallery of Living Art at New York University in 1927, began his career as a collector and scholar of impressionism and aestheticism. He published several works on Whistler, including the 1918 *Portraits of Whistler: A Critical Study and an Iconography*, based in part on his own collection. In 1934 he donated this personal collection to the Library's Print Room. Explaining his rationale for such an intensive study, he stated:

*It is always interesting to see the portrait of a great man and thus to learn what he looked like, but in order to obtain a really correct conception of his physiognomy, an examination of a number of his likenesses is highly desirable. This is particularly true of Whistler, for the vast number of portraits of him that were painted, drawn, and etched by himself and by his contemporaries contain most striking contrasts in the way he saw himself and was seen by different artists. In fact so dissimilar are these various portraits that future generations will have difficulty in determining what he really looked like.*

## *Early Portrait of Whistler*

Etching, only state,  
1857–58  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Portrait of Whistler*

Etching and drypoint,  
first state of two, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Whistler with the White Lock*

Etching, only state,  
1879  
S. P. Avery Collection

## George C. Phelps Studio after photograph by Étienne Carjat *Whistler*

Photomechanical  
reproduction, ca. 1863  
A. E. Gallatin  
Collection

## Sir Leslie Ward (British, 1851–1922) *Caricature of Whistler*

Black crayon, colored  
chalks, and white  
gouache, n.d.  
S. P. Avery Collection

## Henri-Charles Guérard (French, 1846–1897) after William Merritt Chase (American, 1849–1916) *James McNeill Whistler*

Etching, n.d.  
S. P. Avery Collection

## Dornac Studio *Whistler in His Paris Studio*

Albumen photograph,  
1899  
A. E. Gallatin  
Collection

## Thomas Robert Way (British, 1861–1913) *Whistler in Air Street Studio*

Oil painting, 1880  
A. E. Gallatin  
Collection

## Sir Edward Tennyson Reed (British, 1860–1933) *Whistler Descending the Stairs*

Pencil, 1890s  
A. E. Gallatin  
Collection

## Paul Helleu (French, 1859–1927) *James McNeill Whistler*

Drypoint, 1897  
A. E. Gallatin  
Collection

## Walter Crane (British, 1845–1915) *Whistler as a Butterfly*

Pen and black ink,  
1908  
A. E. Gallatin  
Collection  
Theodore Lacombe  
(American, 19th  
century)

# Early Life



Dornac Studio. *Whistler in His Paris Studio*. Albumen photograph, 1899. A. E. Gallatin Collection

**W**histler declared, in 1885, “The master stands in no relation to the moment at which he occurs – a monument of isolation – hinting at sadness – having no part in the progress of his fellow men.” Despite the perpetuation by his biographers, Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell, of the myth of Whistler as an isolated genius, he had an active social life and engaged with a wide variety of artists from most of the major movements of his day. His gregarious nature was evident from childhood, as noted by his mother in her diary, and cultivated by his peripatetic upbringing. While his family did not overtly encourage him to become an artist, they nurtured his innate talent and allowed him to pursue his calling.

## *George Washington Whistler*

Lithograph, for Appleton's *Mechanic's Magazine & Engineer's Journal*, 1853  
S. P. Avery Collection

George Washington Whistler (American, 1800–1849)

Autograph letter, signed, to Joseph G. Swift, January 9, 1831  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Proclamation of George Washington Whistler's appointment as officer in the United States Artillery, signed by President Andrew Jackson  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Anna Mathilda McNeill Whistler (American, 1804–1881)

Autograph diary, St. Petersburg, Russia,

November 1843–September 1848  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Henri-Charles Guérard (French, 1846–1897)

after James McNeill Whistler

## *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother*

Etching, for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, July 1, 1883  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Map of England and Wales*

Pen and ink, ca. 1850  
Print Collection, Gift of Mrs. Henry Draper

## *Sketches on the Coast Survey Plate*

Etching, only state, 1854–55  
S. P. Avery Collection

# The French Set

**A**t the age of twenty-one, Whistler left America for Europe, intent on pursuing his career as an artist. Three years later, in 1858, he published his first set of prints, *Twelve Etchings from Nature*, popularly known as the *French Set*. Including landscapes, portraits, and figure and genre studies, these prints reflect Whistler's interest in seventeenth-century Dutch art, as well as his involvement in the contemporary realist movement. Sir Francis Seymour Haden, Whistler's brother-in-law, published and marketed the edition of seventy sets. Whistler enlisted the service of famed French printer Auguste Delâtre to print his plates, which were issued in both Paris and London. As had been previously arranged, Haden marketed the prints in Europe while Whistler's mother was responsible for enlisting subscribers in the United States. With low overhead costs, the sets were priced fairly and sold well. Critics praised their picturesque charm, and Whistler himself considered them among his best work. With this auspicious beginning, Whistler launched a prolific and enduring etching career.

## *Auguste Delâtre*

Etching, only state, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection  
(not included in the French Set)

## Title page

Etching, only state, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *La Rétameuse*

Etching, second state of two, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *\*La Mère Gérard*

Etching, first state of four, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *\*\*La Mère Gérard*

Etching, fourth state of four, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Little Arthur*

Etching, third state of five, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Little Arthur*

Etching, fifth state of five, 1858  
Print Collection,  
Gift of Samuel Isham

## *Annie*

Etching, fifth state of five, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *\*Fumette*

Etching, fourth state of four, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *\*\*Fumette*

Etching, fourth state of four, 1858  
Print Collection, Gift of Mrs. Henry Draper

## *En Plein Soleil*

Etching, first state of two, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *En Plein Soleil*

Etching, second state of two, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Liverdun*

Etching, second state of two, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Street at Saverne*

Etching, second state of five, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Street at Saverne*

Etching, fourth state of five, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Unsafe Tenement*

Etching, first state of four, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Kitchen*

Etching, second state of three, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *\*La Marchande de Moutarde*

Etching, third state of five, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *La Vieille aux Loques*

Etching, first state of three, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *\*\*La Vieille aux Loques*

Etching, second state of three, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

# Early Prints

**A**s is evident in the *French Set*, Whistler's early etchings reflected a variety of influences and introduced many of the persistent themes of his life's work. While producing those etchings, he was also working on other prints that demonstrate a different range of interests and intents. These prints were never published in sets, and often depict subjects to which Whistler would rarely, if ever, return. Viewing them along with the published sets, his official public output, gives a broader sense of his work during this period.

*The Dutchman  
Holding a Glass*

Etching, second state  
of two, 1857  
S. P. Avery Collection

*The Wine Glass*

Etching, first state  
of two, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

*The Wine Glass*

Etching, second state  
of two, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

*Gretchen at  
Heidelberg*

Etching, only state,  
1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

*The Miser*

Drypoint, second state  
of five, 1861  
S. P. Avery Collection

*Venus*

Etching, first state  
of two, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection



*La Marchande de Moutarde*. Etching, third state of five, 1858.  
S. P. Avery Collection

# Collaboration

## with Francis Seymour Haden

Shortly after the departure of Auguste Delâtre, who had been his guest while completing the publication of the *French Set*, Haden set up a printing studio on the top floor of his London home and embarked on an intensive period of printmaking. He was undoubtedly inspired by witnessing Delâtre at work and by the auspicious launch of Whistler's etching career. Together, Haden and Whistler embarked on a period of collaboration, etching the same subjects and experimenting with printing. It was a rare period of accord between the two artists, for their relationship soon began to deteriorate due to professional and personal disagreements. The final, violent break came in 1867. Whistler was enraged when he discovered that Haden had unceremoniously buried his medical partner, and Whistler's personal physician, James Reeve Traer, who had died while abroad. During a confrontation between the two men, Whistler pushed Haden through a plate-glass window. Although forbidden thereafter to enter the Haden household, Whistler remained close to his half sister Deborah, Haden's wife, for the remainder of his life.

Sir Francis  
Seymour Haden  
(British, 1818–1910)  
*James McNeill  
Whistler*  
Pen and brown ink,  
1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

Sir Francis  
Seymour Haden  
(British, 1818–1910)  
*Portrait of Francis  
Seymour Haden,  
No. II (While  
Etching)*  
Drypoint, second state  
of three, 1862  
S. P. Avery Collection

*Reading by  
Lamplight*  
Etching and drypoint,  
second state of two,  
1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

Sir Francis  
Seymour Haden  
(British, 1818–1910)  
*A Lady Reading*  
Etching and drypoint,  
seventh state of nine,  
1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

*The Music Room*  
Etching, second state  
of two, 1858  
S. P. Avery Collection

*Greenwich  
Pensioner*  
Etching, second state  
of two, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

Sir Francis  
Seymour Haden  
(British, 1818–1910)  
*Sub Tegmine ...*  
Etching and drypoint,  
second state of five,  
1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

Sir Francis  
Seymour Haden  
(British, 1818–1910)  
*Egham Lock*  
Etching and drypoint,  
first state of ten, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

Sir Francis  
Seymour Haden  
(British, 1818–1910)  
Autograph letter,  
signed, to Auguste  
Delâtre, June 29,  
[1859?]  
Manuscripts and  
Archives Division



*The Lime-Burner*. Etching and drypoint, first state of two, 1859. S. P. Avery Collection

# The *Thames Set*

In 1859, after the successful launch of his printmaking career with the publication of the *French Set*, Whistler moved to London and began to etch a series of views along the Thames. Partly from financial motives, for he found more willing patrons in England than in France, Whistler's move was also prompted by a search for new and heroic subject matter. French poet Charles Baudelaire, in 1846, had urged artists to open their eyes to their surroundings, arguing, "The life of our city is rich in poetic and marvellous subjects. We are enveloped and steeped as though in an atmosphere of the marvellous; but we do not notice it."

Turning to London's gritty industrial core, the docks of the lower Thames, Whistler found a subject perfectly suited to express his realist aims and explore his new methods of formulating compositions, discovering the "marvellous" of the everyday. Although Whistler began his series of views as part of a joint undertaking with brother-in-law Haden, the two eventually abandoned the idea of a collaborative project. In 1860, he entered into an agreement with lawyer and arts patron Serjeant Thomas, whereby Thomas would finance the printing by Delâtre, in exchange for representing these works for the next seven years. These early impressions, richly printed on a variety of antique papers, were priced too high, almost double the cost of the entire *French Set*, and sold poorly. In 1871, patron Alexander Ionides purchased the plates and arranged for their sale to the publishing firm Ellis & Green. The firm issued an edition of one hundred under the title *A Series of Sixteen Etchings of Scenes on the Thames and Other Subjects*, known as the *Thames Set*. Although Whistler disliked the harsh impressions pulled from the now steel-faced plates, critics responded favorably. An anonymous reviewer for *Punch* proclaimed, "Let all lovers of good art and marvelous etching who want to know what Father Thames was like before he took to having his bed made, invest in Whistler's portfolio."

## *The Lime-Burner*

Etching and drypoint, first state of two, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Old Westminster Bridge*

Etching, first state of two, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Eagle Wharf*

Etching, only state, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Black Lion Wharf*

Etching, second state of three, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Rotherhithe*

Etching and drypoint, second state of three, 1860  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Thames Warehouses*

Etching, first state of two, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Limehouse*

Etching, second state of three, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Becquet*

Etching and drypoint, second state of four, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Thames Police*

Etching, first state of three, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Pool*

Etching, third state of four, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Chelsea Bridge and Church*

Drypoint with crayon additions, second state of six, 1870–71  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Millbank*

Etching, first state of five, 1861  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Little Pool*

Etching, fifth state of eight, 1861  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Forge*

Drypoint, third state of four, 1861  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Early Morning, Battersea*

Drypoint, only state, 1861  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Old Hungerford Bridge*

Etching, third state of three, 1861  
S. P. Avery Collection

# Late Thames Prints

**T**he Thames would be a recurrent theme throughout Whistler's life. The prints he made of this riverside after the publication of the *Thames Set* reflect the changes he underwent during the intervening period. For seven years, between 1863 and 1870, Whistler abandoned etching, focusing on his painting and the decoration of the Peacock Room. In 1866, he suddenly and mysteriously left for Valparaiso, Chile, purportedly to witness military action, which he had missed by not participating in the Civil War. Upon his return in 1867, he broke with Haden and emphatically renounced Gustave Courbet, along with any ties to realism. His circle of friends now included Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Albert Moore, with whom he would advance the art-for-art's-sake movement. His work during this period, some created specifically for the market to help ease his ever-growing financial straits, displays his concern with decorative compositions and the influence of Japanese art.

*The "Adam and  
Eve," Old  
Chelsea*

Etching and drypoint,  
second state of two,  
1879  
S. P. Avery Collection

*Old Putney  
Bridge*

Etching and drypoint,  
fourth state of four,  
1879  
S. P. Avery Collection

*Under the Old  
Battersea Bridge*

Etching and drypoint,  
first state of three,  
1879  
S. P. Avery Collection

*Battersea: Dawn*

Drypoint, second state  
of four, 1875  
S. P. Avery Collection



*Weary*. Drypoint,  
first state of three, 1863.  
S. P. Avery Collection

# Drypoint

## Portraits

**B**eginning in the autumn of 1859, Whistler devoted himself to a new medium, drypoint. In drypoint, the artist uses a sharp needle to inscribe a design on an ungrounded plate. As a result, Whistler observed: "The tiny thread of metal loughed out of the line by the point as it runs along, clings to its edge through its whole length and, in the printing holds the ink in a clogged manner, and produces, in the proof, a soft velvety effect most painter like and beautiful." This burr quickly wears down from the pressure of the printing press, allowing only a limited number of impressions to be printed. Whistler was perhaps inspired by brother-in-law Seymour Haden, who first experimented with the medium based on his firsthand study of Rembrandt's pioneering use of drypoint. Within a few months of taking up the needle, Whistler created twelve drypoints, primarily portraits of friends, family, and himself. For the next twenty years, he would return to the medium primarily for portraiture, although he incorporated drypoint into his etchings throughout his career. Together, Haden and Whistler's innovative use of drypoint stimulated experimentation by other artists and launched a revived interest in this centuries-old medium.

below:  
*Drouet*. Etching and drypoint, first state of two, 1859.  
S. P. Avery Collection



### *Axenfeld*

Drypoint, third state of three, 1860  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Astruc, a Literary Man*

Drypoint, first state of two, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Drouet*

Etching and drypoint, first state of two, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Riault, the Engraver*

Drypoint, second state of three, 1860  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Bibi Lalouette*

Etching and drypoint, second state of two, 1859  
Print Collection, Gift of Mrs. Nathan Straus

### *Annie Haden*

Drypoint, second state of three, 1860  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Arthur Haden*

Drypoint, third state of three, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Fumette, Standing*

Drypoint, first state of two, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Jo*

Drypoint, only state, 1861  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *\*\*Finette*

Etching and drypoint, second state of ten, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *\*Finette*

Etching and drypoint, ninth state of ten, 1859  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Weary*

Drypoint, first state of three, 1863  
S. P. Avery Collection

# The Peacock Room

below:  
*Fighting Peacocks.*  
Pen and brown ink,  
1876.  
S. P. Avery  
Collection

**F**rederick R. Leyland, a tycoon of the Liverpool shipping industry, was one of Whistler's most important patrons. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a fellow recipient of Leyland's patronage and a Chelsea neighbor of Whistler, introduced the two in 1864. For the next thirteen years, Leyland purchased and commissioned numerous paintings and prints from Whistler, primarily portraits of his family. Their relationship ended publicly and spectacularly in 1877 over the controversy surrounding Whistler's decoration of Leyland's dining room, the Peacock Room.



Whistler's work from this period documents a period of transition. Like many other artists of the time, he began amassing a collection of Japanese objets d'art, which he would often incorporate into his paintings. He also drew on the formal qualities of Japanese art: asymmetrical compositions, flat modeling, cropped or unusual vantages, and careful consideration of negative space. Increasingly concerned with balance, harmony, and decoration, he emphasized art's formal qualities over its subject matter. This movement toward autonomy, or art for art's sake, is most evocatively realized in Whistler's moonlit scenes, named "nocturnes" by Leyland.

As with others in the aesthetic movement, Whistler expanded into the decorative arts. He worked intensely on the decoration of the Peacock Room, and of his own home, the White House. In future years, he designed his own exhibitions and publications down to the smallest detail. He conceived these projects as art objects, elevating them to the status of fine art through their elegant design.

### *The Velvet Dress*

Drypoint, fourth state of five, 1873  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Maud, Seated*

Drypoint, first state of three, 1873  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Elinor Leyland*

Drypoint, third state of seven, 1873  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Speke Hall, No. 1*

Etching and drypoint, second state of ten, 1870  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *The Peacock Room*

Photograph, 1877  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Three Peacock Shutters*

Pen and brown ink, 1876  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Double-gourd Vase and Saucer-shaped Dish*

Illustration for A Catalogue of Blue and White Nankin Porcelain forming the Collection of Sir Henry Thompson  
Collotype, 1878  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Fighting Peacocks*

Pen and brown ink, 1876  
S. P. Avery Collection

# The *First* Venice Set

In 1879, Whistler received a commission from the Fine Art Society, the still-active London art gallery founded in 1876, to travel to Venice for three months to produce a set of twelve etchings. He extended his stay to fourteen months and made fifty etchings. Upon his return to London in 1881, he selected twelve etchings from the fifty; published as *Twelve Etchings*, they are known as the *First Venice Set*. Although the exhibition received its share of unfavorable reviews, the prints soon came to be appreciated as among his most successful.

Although Whistler's idea for a set of etchings of Venice was based on the success of his *Thames Set*, the eighteenth-century tradition of the Venetian *vedute*, or topographical views, was a formidable precedent. For travelers visiting Italy on the Grand Tour, Canaletto and others had painted and etched an exquisite visual record of the ceremonies, rituals, and architecture of the "Serenissima." Whistler, well aware of this grand tradition, arrived in Venice intent upon forging a new artistic vision of the much-depicted city. With the conventions of the highly detailed and glistening *vedute* – the same ones he had employed in his Thames views – as a starting point, he began to minimize descriptive detail, producing ethereal images of the city hovering on the water.

## *Little Venice*

Etching, only state,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Two Doorways*

Etching and drypoint,  
third state of six,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Piazzetta*

Etching and drypoint,  
third state of five,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Riva, No. 1*

Etching and drypoint,  
third state of three,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Doorway*

Etching and drypoint,  
roulette, third state  
of seven, 1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Little Lagoon*

Etching and drypoint,  
second state of two,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Little Mast*

Etching, first state of  
four, 1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Traghetto, No. 2*

Etching, fourth state of  
six, 1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

Below:  
*Nocturne*. Etching  
and drypoint, third  
state of five,  
1879–80.  
S. P. Avery  
Collection

## *The Mast*

Etching, fifth state of  
six, 1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Beggars*

Etching and drypoint,  
fourth state of nine,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Palaces*

Etching, second state  
of three, 1879  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Nocturne*

Etching and drypoint,  
third state of five,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection



# Whistler vs. the Critics

In his own time, Whistler's cult of personality often overshadowed his work, as it has continued to do in the hundred years since his death. Skilled at spirited, and impromptu, verbal sparrings, Whistler thoroughly enjoyed reliving such occasions through written accounts. From letters to the editor and individually issued pamphlets to his voluminous correspondence, Whistler employed a variety of methods to ensure his voice was heard. He certainly enjoyed the public attention, and his career profited from such exposure, but he also acted out of a sense of frustration and a need to articulate his artistic theories. Lamenting contemporary art criticism, he wrote:

*No! let there be no critics! they are not a "necessary evil," but an evil quite unnecessary, though an evil certainly. Harm they do, and not good. Furnished as they are with the means of furthering their foolishness, they spread prejudice abroad; and through the papers, at their service, thousands are warned against the work they have yet to look upon.*

John Ruskin  
(British, 1819–1900)  
Volume 7, Letter 79,  
July 2, 1877 of *Fors  
clavigera. Letters  
to the Workmen  
and Labourers of  
Great Britain*  
Orpington, Kent:  
G. Allen, 1871–84  
Rare Books Division

*Whistler v. Ruskin:  
Art and Art Critics*  
London: Chatto &  
Windus, 1878  
Print Collection

Linley Sambourne  
(British, 1845–1910)  
*Whistler versus  
Ruskin – An  
Appeal  
to the Law*  
Wood engraving from  
Punch, December 7,  
1878  
A. E. Gallatin Collection

Phil May  
(British, 1864–1903)  
*On the Brain. –  
Mr Whistler*  
Wood engraving  
from Pick-Me-Up,  
January 9, 1892  
A. E. Gallatin Collection

*Mr. Whistler's  
"Ten O'Clock"*  
London: Chatto &  
Windus, 1888  
Print Collection

*Mr. Whistler's  
"Ten O'Clock"*  
London: Chatto &  
Windus, 1888  
Henry W. and Albert A.  
Berg Collection of  
English and American  
Literature

Anonymous  
*Note of a Recently  
"Established  
President"*  
Wood engraving from  
Punch, June 19, 1886  
A. E. Gallatin Collection

*The Gentle Art of  
Making Enemies*  
London:  
W. Heinemann, 1890  
Henry W. and Albert A.  
Berg Collection of  
English and American  
Literature

Edward Tennyson Reed  
(British, 1860–1933)  
The  
*Mephistophelian  
Whistlerian Butter-  
fly "On the  
Pounce"  
at Antwerp*  
Wood engraving from  
Punch, June 28, 1890  
A. E. Gallatin Collection

*Propositions*  
Letterpress, 1896  
S. P. Avery Collection



*The Tall Bridge.* Lithotint, second state of two, 1878. S. P. Avery Collection

# Whistler on Stone

**W**histler's in-depth involvement with lithography – he produced some 170 lithographs between 1878 and 1897 – was stimulated by his association with Thomas Way, a lithographic printer in London. Responding to the character of Whistler's moody paintings, Way revived a technique called lithotint, with which the artist could attain painterly effects. Whistler's earliest lithographs (and all his lithotints) were drawn directly on stone. Almost immediately, however, he began using specially prepared lithographic transfer paper, which could easily be transported wherever he went. Each drawing would then be transferred onto a lithographic stone, from which the image was printed.

From its beginnings in the late 1790s, lithography had been heralded as a means of multiplying drawings, and Whistler deliberately referred to his lithographs as “drawings.” He also had them printed, like his etchings, on antique and fine modern papers, and priced them accordingly. Whistler's correspondence with his American dealer, Edward G. Kennedy, provides ample insight into the artist's attitudes about the status of lithography in general, and about his own lithographs specifically.

## *Study No. 1: Mr. Thomas Way*

Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1896  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Toilet*, published in *Piccadilly*

Lithotint, second state  
of five, 1878  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Tall Bridge*

Lithotint, second state  
of two, 1878  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Limehouse from Notes*

Lithotint, second state  
of three, 1878  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Nocturne from Notes*

Lithotint, second state  
of two, 1878  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Old Battersea Bridge from Notes*

Lithograph, second  
state of two, 1878 and  
1887  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Garden*

Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1891  
Print Collection

## *Gaiety Stage Door*

from *Notes*  
Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1879 and  
1887  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Victoria Club from Notes*

Transfer lithograph,  
second state of two,  
1879 and 1887  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Marketplace, Vitré*

Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1893  
Print Collection,  
Avery Fund

## *Yellow House, Lannion*

Color transfer litho-  
graph, third state of  
three, 1893  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Draped Figure Reclining*

Color lithograph, sec-  
ond state of two,  
1893–94  
S. P. Avery Collection

## Stéphane Mallarmé

Frontispiece from  
Stéphane Mallarmé,  
Vers et prose (Paris:  
Librairie Académique  
Didier, Perrin et Cie,  
1893)

Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1892  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Firelight: Joseph Pennell, No. 1*

Frontispiece from  
Joseph and Elizabeth  
Pennell, Lithography  
and Lithographers  
(London and New  
York: T. Fisher Unwin  
and  
The Century Co.,  
1898)

Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1896  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Winged Hat, published in The Whirlwind, October 25, 1890*

Transfer lithograph,  
second state of two,  
1890

Print Collection, Gift  
of David Keppel and  
Mrs. Frederick Keppel

## *Unfinished Sketch of Lady Haden*

Lithograph, second  
state of three, 1895  
Print Collection

## *The Little Nude Model, Reading*

Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1889–90  
Print Collection,  
Avery Fund

## *Draped Figure Seated from L'Estampe origi- nale*

Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1893  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Thames*

Lithotint, second state  
of three, 1896  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *By the Balcony*

Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1896  
Print Collection, Gift  
of Edward G. Kennedy

## *The Siesta*

Transfer lithograph,  
only state, 1896  
Print Collection, Gift  
of Edward G. Kennedy

# Correspondence

## Whistler, Kennedy, and Lithography

**E**dward Guthrie Kennedy (1849–1932) immigrated to Boston from Ireland at the age of eighteen, and immediately went into the art business. By the late 1870s, he was in New York and in the employ of Hermann Wunderlich & Co., a gallery specializing in Old Master and contemporary prints. After Wunderlich died in 1892, Kennedy assumed leadership of the company (renamed Kennedy and Co. in 1906). He was corresponding with Whistler by the mid-1880s, and continued to do so nearly until the artist's death. Kennedy preserved the lion's share of Whistler's letters to him in three albums, which he donated to The New York Public Library in 1927. These spirited letters have been mined by generations of art historians for information on the dating and provenance of Whistler's art, as well as his attitudes about making and marketing it. For this exhibition, we have chosen a sampling of letters relating to Whistler's involvement with lithography, which was especially intense in the early 1890s. An unpublished letter from Whistler to his lithographic printer, Thomas Way, from the Library's Berg Collection, is also included.

Kennedy handled Whistler's paintings, pastels, and prints and, as the artist's primary agent in the United States, was instrumental in establishing his American reputation. He recreated in New York, for example, the 1883 *Arrangement in Yellow and White* exhibition of etchings originally mounted at the Fine Art Society in London. His most monumental service to the artist was his compilation of the still-standard catalogue of Whistler's etchings, an extravagant publication originally issued, after much delay, in 1910. Whistler's 446 etchings and drypoints were reproduced, often in multiple states, on over one thousand plates, an unheard-of achievement for the early days of photomechanical reproduction.

Autograph letter, signed, to Edward Guthrie Kennedy, December 20, [1893]  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Autograph letter, signed, to Edward Guthrie Kennedy, n.d.  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Autograph letter, signed, to Edward Guthrie Kennedy, February 4, 1894  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Autograph letter, signed, to Edward Guthrie Kennedy, September 22, 1894  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Autograph letter, signed, to Edward Guthrie Kennedy, March 25, 1896  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Edward Guthrie Kennedy (Irish, 1849–1932)  
Autograph note, March 25, 1896  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Autograph letter, signed, to Edward Guthrie Kennedy, n.d.  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Autograph letter, signed, to Thomas Way, August 29, 1894  
Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature

Autograph letter, signed, to Edward Guthrie Kennedy, May 1896  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Autograph letter, signed, to Edward Guthrie Kennedy, June 5, 1900  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Edward Guthrie Kennedy (Irish, 1849–1932)  
Autograph note, June 10, 1900  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Giovanni Boldini (Italian, 1842–1931)  
*Whistler Asleep*  
Drypoint, 1897  
A. E. Gallatin Collection

# The Second Venice Set

Below:  
*The Bridge*. Etching and drypoint,  
first state of eight, 1879–80.  
S. P. Avery Collection

In 1883, the Fine Art Society held a second exhibition of Whistler's etchings, on the condition that he would not repeat works from the first. Whistler therefore made selections from the remainder of his Venice prints and included several new prints of London subjects. The exhibition was a tour-de-force, conceived by Whistler as a work of art entitled *Arrangement in Yellow and White*, which in turn inspired the wall color for this exhibition. Whistler exerted total artistic control: he decorated the gallery in yellow and white, made the attendants wear yellow, and created silk butterflies for friends to wear at the opening. Culling from harsh reviews of his earlier exhibitions, he printed negative quotations in the exhibition catalogue (these quotations are included on the labels in this section), intending to expose and ridicule the pomposity and foolishness of his critics.

The Fine Art Society, reeling from debates over the cost of the first exhibition and waiting for the completion of the printing of the *First Venice Set*, stopped publishing sets of Whistler's prints. The firm Dowdeswell and Dowdeswell stepped in and in 1886 published a selection of the remaining Venice etchings, along with five London subjects, as *A Set of Twenty-six Etchings*, known as the *Second Venice Set*. The proposed edition of thirty sets, with twelve additional impressions from each of fifteen selected plates, was to be printed by Whistler himself. He kept the firm waiting for almost a year, but with the assistance of his current studio assistants, Mortimer Menpes and Walter Sickert, Whistler completed the printing in 1887. During this process he developed the technique of trimming each sheet to the edge of the platemark, leaving only a small projecting tab, signed with his butterfly.



## *Garden*

Etching and drypoint,  
fifth state of eight,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Long Venice*

Etching and drypoint,  
fifth state of five,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Upright Venice*

Etching and drypoint,  
fourth state of four,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Quiet Canal*

Etching and drypoint,  
fifth state of five,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *San Biagio*

Etching and drypoint,  
ninth state of nine,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Rialto*

Etching and drypoint,  
second state of two,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Lagoon: Noon*

Etching and drypoint,  
third state of three,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Lobster Pots*

Etching and drypoint,  
second state of three,  
1880–81  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Fruit-Stall*

Etching and drypoint,  
sixth state of seven,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Nocturne:*

### *Furnace*

Etching and drypoint,  
fourth state of seven,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Turkeys*

Etching and drypoint,  
second state of two,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Drury Lane*

Etching and drypoint,  
only state, 1880–81  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Wheelwright*

Etching and drypoint,  
fifth state of five,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Temple*

Etching and drypoint,  
only state, 1880–81  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Little Court*

Etching and drypoint,  
only state, 1880–81  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Nocturne:*

### *Palaces*

Etching and drypoint,  
third state of nine,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *Ponte del Piovan*

Etching and drypoint,  
sixth state of six,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

### *La Salute: Dawn*

Etching and drypoint,  
fourth state of four,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Long Lagoon*

Etching and drypoint,  
first state of two,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Bead-Stringers*

Etching and drypoint,  
eighth state of eight,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Bridge*

Etching and drypoint,  
first state of eight,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Doorway and Vine*

Etching and drypoint,  
fifth state of ten,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *Fishing-Boat*

Etching and drypoint,  
third state of five,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *San Giorgio*

Etching, fourth state  
of four, 1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Riva, No. 2*

Etching and drypoint,  
first state of two,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

## *The Balcony*

Etching and drypoint,  
eighth state of eleven,  
1879–80  
S. P. Avery Collection

Back cover, top: detail from Edward Tennyson Reed. *The Mephistophelian Whistlerian Butterfly "On the Pounce" at Antwerp*. Wood engraving from *Punch*, June 28, 1890. A. E. Gallatin Collection; bottom: butterfly drawing by James McNeill Whistler, from his *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (London: W. Heinemann, 1890). Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature.

front cover (detail) and below: *Annie Haden*. Drypoint, second state of three, 1860. S. P. Avery Collection



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# Exhibition Hours

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