

## **On Beauty and the Everyday: The Prints of James McNeill Whistler**

The graphic work of the American painter and printmaker James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) occupies a pivotal position in European printmaking. Unlike many painters, for whom an excursion into printmaking is a pursuit of secondary importance, Whistler was deeply engaged in making prints from his earliest years in the United States until shortly before his death in 1903. A few years later, *The New York Times* described him as “easily the greatest etcher of modern times.” He was also prodigious, executing during his nearly fifty-year career 442 etchings and 195 lithographs in which he gave rich expression to his distinctive artistic vision through his singular mastery of technique.

Whistler was an innovative [and expert] practitioner of both etching and lithography at a time when these media were seen as appropriate mostly for commercial purposes and was instrumental in reclaiming them as suitable vehicles for original artistic creation. In his exquisitely understated and nuanced depictions of everyday subjects he rejected the notion that a straightforward rendering of nature was the highest aim of art, seeking instead to capture the scene before him more poetically. He could create extraordinary beauty out of some seemingly unpromising motifs—the squalor of rough commercial docks in London, or moldering and dilapidated buildings on urban back canals in Venice and Amsterdam—recasting them into his subtle visual language and giving them a rarified aesthetic beauty. Many of the sites depicted in his etchings and lithographs were in the process of disappearing altogether, lending a further resonance to these images.

The University of Michigan Museum of Art is privileged to have in its collections an outstanding group of nearly 200 prints by Whistler, the vast majority coming to the University of Michigan from a single donor, Margaret Watson Parker, whose 1936 bequest, in addition to her important Whistler collection, included works of Asian lacquer, prints and ceramics, old master prints, drawings, and paintings, and Pewabic pottery. Her bequest remains the most significant single gift of artwork to the University to date. Because of their susceptibility to damage from light exposure, UMMA’s Whistler prints are rarely shown in large numbers. This exhibition of more than 100 works on paper constitutes the first time in more than fifteen years that a significant group of them have been shown in public.

This exhibition is made possible in part by the University of Michigan Health System, the University of Michigan Office of the Provost, the Friends of the University of Michigan Museum of Art, and the Doris Sloan Memorial Fund. (Use UMHS logo)

**Carole McNamara**  
*Senior Curator of Western Art*

### **Whistler’s Printmaking Training**

Though born in Lowell, Massachusetts, Whistler spent his childhood in Saint Petersburg, Russia, where his father, Major George Washington Whistler, had been commissioned by the Tsar to construct the Saint Petersburg to Moscow railroad; the younger Whistler later attended school in England. At an early age, he became interested in art and received instruction in it during his years overseas. After returning to the United States, Whistler followed his father’s example and enrolled at West Point, where, in 1854, he was discharged for “deficiency in conduct and chemistry.” His penchant for drawing caricatures of classmates found a more serious outlet during his employment at the United States Coast Survey, where he made maps of the coastline. His drawing talents were soon recognized, and he was transferred to the engraving division, where he made elevations of the coast for maps and learned the technique of preparing and etching a copper plate. In 1855, at the age of twenty-one, Whistler set off for Europe, determined to become an artist, and never returned to the United States.

In Europe, Whistler traveled back and forth between Paris, where he pursued formal training in painting, and London, where he devoted himself to mastering etching and studied the important print collection amassed by his brother-in-law, Francis Seymour Haden (1818–1910). Through Haden’s collection, Whistler became acquainted with many of the principal etchers of his day, both old masters and contemporary artists working in the medium. Haden’s comprehensive collection included 139 etchings by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), whose influence on the young Whistler was powerful. Haden and Whistler also experimented together with printmaking, working side

by side, taking proofs on the printing press in Haden's attic, and evaluating their results. Whistler and Haden were in the vanguard of efforts to reclaim etching as a vehicle for original artistic creation, a contribution for which Haden received a knighthood in 1894.

## Etching Tools

Etching is an *intaglio* process by which a design is created on a metal plate. A copper plate is covered with a protective *ground* that covers the surface; a stylus or *etching needle* is used to draw into the ground, exposing the copper underneath. The plate is then submerged in an acid bath, and the acid eats away, or *bites*, into the copper where the ground has been removed. The depth of the line is determined by the length of time in the acid: a brief exposure results in faint lines, and a more extended exposure results in larger, more deeply bitten lines. If the artist wants some lines to be deeper than others so that they will print more darkly, they may be exposed for a second time to the acid while the other lines are protected by acid-resistant varnish. To make alterations, the surface of the copper is scraped down and the scraped area beaten from the back to bring the surface of the copper up to the same level as the rest of the plate. The surface is then burnished before new lines are etched. When the ground has been cleaned off, the plate is ready for inking and printing in a heavy roller press, which forces paper into the lines with such strength that it is indented, creating a *plate mark*.

## Looking at Prints

**The labels and works of art in this** section introduce key vocabulary and aspects of printmaking in general and the two *intaglio* (from the Italian word for "carve") processes of printmaking—etching and drypoint. A third process, lithography, is covered later in the exhibition, as are other aspects of looking at and appreciating prints. Whistler's whimsical butterfly "signature" is used to designate these Looking at Prints panels. Around 1873, rather than writing out his name, Whistler created this butterfly cipher based on his initials, JMW; it subsequently served as a decorative component and signature in his work. The butterfly also appears throughout the exhibition on the labels of works that are regarded as masterworks of printmaking or otherwise show Whistler's mastery of the techniques of printmaking. The works thus highlighted can be used for a quick look at some of Whistler's greatest and most innovative works, as well as to understand the techniques and effects of printmaking as an art form.

## Etching

Etchings are produced on thin copper plates covered by a waxy, acid-resistant ground. The artist draws on this surface with a sharp etching needle, exposing fine paths or lines of metal that are corroded (or bitten) by immersing the plate in acid. The acid eats into the copper of the plate where the ground has been disturbed or removed by the etching needle. Printing ink is pressed into the incised lines but wiped away from the flat surface. A powerful press will transfer the ink in the lines of the plate onto a damp sheet of paper. The resulting print is a reverse image of the image created on the plate—this reversal is one of the technical and aesthetic challenges of the etching process. In addition, tonal effects—the creation of shadows, shading a figure—depend on the buildup of lines made by the artist as he or she painstakingly etches the plate.

## Drypoint

Drypoint is another way to create lines in a copper plate. Instead of covering the plate with a ground and using acid to bite lines into the underlying metal, the artist draws directly on the plate with an etching needle. A drypoint line displaces copper to either side, like a furrow created by a plow; the copper sitting on the surface of the plate is called *burr*, which gives drypoint its special character. When the plate is inked, the burr traps ink, resulting in a soft, velvety line. Each time the plate goes through the press, some of the burr is worn away, and eventually the rich effect is lost. Because drypoint allowed such directness in creating an image—it was possible to work directly on the plate without grounds and acid—Whistler sometimes used it for more experimental efforts or private images (such as a portrait of a close family member or friend). As he came to master the results produced by each technique, he enjoyed combining them to unique effect.

## Looking at Prints States

After a plate has been etched, the ground is cleaned off and inked. The artist then prints (or has printed) an *impression* of the image, called a *proof*, and decides whether or not to alter the plate further; to add lines, the areas that are complete are protected from further biting and new ones are bitten with acid; lines are subtracted by being pounded out from behind or burnished on the surface of the plate. Each time the plate is changed, a working proof is taken to see how the image is evolving; this—and any subsequent impression from this version—is called a new *state*. Whistler often repeatedly reworked images, creating numerous states of many of his plates.

It is of interest to see where a print's state falls in Whistler's process of working out the final image. The final image, however, is not always the most prized, because in reworking the plate the artist may lose qualities present in the earlier impressions. Also, in the case of etchings with complex and heavily worked plates and in all drypoints, the plate is worn down and, physically, early impressions are the best. Finally, artists and collectors do not necessarily agree on which state is the best version of the image and often early states, which are quite rare, are avidly sought after.

## Looking at Prints Printing

Whistler proofed and printed—or supervised the printing of—most of his plates himself and was often quite experimental. Instead of wiping the unetched areas of his plates clean, as was traditional, so that ink lay only in the etched lines, he left carefully controlled films of ink on the plate to create nuanced effects of lighting and atmosphere. Known as *plate tone*, this was generally considered the hallmark of a sloppy or inept artist. Whistler, however, who probably learned about artistic printing in the late 1850s from the Parisian master printer Auguste Delâtre (1822–1907), used it to outstanding expressive effect, particularly in the Venice etchings of 1879–80.

Whistler also varied the colors of his inks and used colored or textured papers to create different effects in the same state. Throughout his career, he was extremely particular about the kind of papers on which he printed his etchings and lithographs. He understood that certain papers, particularly ones from the eighteenth century or earlier, absorbed ink more beautifully and had a color, texture, or surface finish that was particularly appealing. Whistler constantly sought out special papers—he would cut out the fly leaves of old books to obtain choice sheets and send the artists who worked with him out on foraging expeditions—in an effort to make his prints unique and individual works of art in their own right.

### **The French Set, or Twelve Etchings from Nature**

Whistler's early study in Paris and in London culminated in his first published set of etchings, known as the *French Set* or *Twelve Etchings from Nature*, with which he hoped to bring his work to a wider audience. The series included studies from a walking tour of France, Luxembourg, and the Rhineland made in the summer of 1858; portraits of his niece and nephew executed in London; and portraits of bohemian characters he encountered on the Left Bank of Paris where he lived. Whistler was very aware of contemporary artistic trends, and his focus on such everyday subjects aligned him with contemporary avante-garde artists working in France. In these early works, Whistler may be seen exploring the repertoire of subjects for which he later would become known: the humble figure framed in a doorway, the effect of light on a subject, and nocturnal scenes. While the subject matter of these early works is varied, they give evidence of his great skill in drawing, his ability to grasp and express architectural detail, and his favored strategy of suggesting depth by leading the eye through the composition to a lit space beyond.

The *French Set* was printed by Auguste Delâtre (1822–1907), then the most prominent printer in Paris and a key figure in the etching revival in France, though Whistler was involved in all aspects of the process. It was Delâtre who exposed Whistler to the full range of print techniques and inspired in him a lifelong obsession with the effects unique papers could have on a print. The *French Set* had a limited circulation and few impressions were taken from each plate: twenty sets were printed in Paris in November of 1858, and the following month Delâtre printed an

additional fifty sets in London; these prints brought Whistler to the attention of key people. The plates were reprinted much later as interest in Whistler's early work grew among new collectors.

### **Whistler's Early Drypoint Portraits**

Beginning in the autumn of 1859, Whistler devoted himself to a new medium, drypoint. Within a few months he had created around a dozen drypoints, primarily portraits of friends, family, lovers, and himself. Whistler was very selective about whom he portrayed, and for the next twenty years he often employed drypoint for his most private images, no doubt because the visceral process of incising lines directly into a plate and printing without the intermediary step of an acid bath gave them the immediacy and directness he sought. The fact that drypoint is so very perishable—its raised burr wears down significantly after very few impressions are taken, literally causing the image to fade from the plate—also gives these intimate portraits their special quality.

The drypoint portraits executed immediately following the publication of the *French Set* give an early indication of Whistler's evolving interest in "art for art's sake," in which beauty and aesthetic considerations take precedence over straight reportage. The deeply etched lines of earlier portraits give way to a more suggestive and evocative line, enhanced by burr's potential for smudging and rich tones. Backgrounds are summarily indicated and the sitter's poses more aristocratic. These drypoint portraits are also of a larger scale, one that better approximates that of painting.

### **The Thames Set: "The Profound and Intricate Poetry of a Vast Capital"**

Whistler moved from Paris to London in 1859 and planned a new set of prints that would announce his arrival in the city. He took as his subject the commercial aspects of riverside shipping in the Pool, or original port, of London, seeking an insider's view by living in this noisy, dirty, dilapidated part of the city that a contemporary writer described as, "itchy and tarry and corny and coally, and ancient and fish-like." Whistler spent from August to October 1859, producing scenes of its wharfs and warehouses and the men that worked them. A decade earlier Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), the influential French art critic and poet, had called on artists to turn their attention to the modern urban experience and find timeless beauty in the everyday, even in commerce and industry. Several of Whistler's Thames views were shown in Paris in 1862, and Baudelaire recognized immediately the originality of these prints, which he called: "as subtle and lively as improvisation and inspiration," expressing with their "wonderful tangles of rigging, yardarms and rope; farragos of fog, furnaces and corkscrews of smoke; the profound and intricate poetry of a vast capital."

In the *Thames Set* etchings, Whistler worked in a clean, almost objective, linear style: his skill with the etching needle allowed him to render details with precision while simultaneously conveying an overall impression of a scene with only a few lines. These etchings often have the traits of a rapid, masterly sketch, and, indeed, to make them Whistler brought his copper plates to the places he intended to draw and worked directly on them without preliminary sketches.

In 1871, Whistler gathered a selection of sixteen plates dating back to 1859 and published them through Ellis and Green. The *Thames Set*, which was valued both for its historical and artistic qualities, received immediate acclaim, with critics comparing Whistler to Rembrandt; these prints helped to establish Whistler's reputation in France, England, and the United States. All of the *Thames Set* plates were steel-faced (a resurfacing technique that allowed them to continue being printed) in 1871, so that Ellis and Green could publish an additional one hundred sets. The *Thames Set* was quite popular and subsequent editions were printed over the years before the plates were canceled—preventing additional printing—in 1897.

### **Looking at Prints**

#### **The Correspondence between Whistler's Prints and Drawings**

Drawing was particularly central to Whistler's artistic practice and, though he lamented that his early training did not give him an adequate grounding in it, he was a prolific and consummate draughtsman, driven to constantly refine his technique. Even excluding his sketchbooks, more than 1700 drawings survive. Throughout his career, Whistler endeavored to translate the effects of one medium into another, working simultaneously in several and switching among them with great facility. In his prints, he sought to achieve the spontaneity and nuance of drawing

by a method that required working not directly on paper, but on another surface—be it copper plate or lithographic stone—and then printing that image on paper; he was master of a range of marks—from hard and linear to almost completely dissolved and evocative—and deployed them as a particular subject required.

37.

***The Storm***

1861

Drypoint

From canceled plate (Kennedy 81)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.351

38.

***The Guitar Player***

1875

Drypoint

Second state of five (Kennedy 140)

Gift of the Friends of the Museum of Art on the Occasion of their Twenty-fifth Anniversary, 1993/2.4

*The Storm*, a very rare drypoint, of which only four impressions are known, depicts Matthew White Ridley (1837–1888), also the subject of *The Guitar Player*, traversing an open field in driving rain. It was made during the summer of 1861, when Whistler and a group of artists and friends met in the country, spending time in the environs of Maple Durham and enjoying overnight excursions in a covered boat on the Thames. *The Storm* is drawn with quick, dark lines that describe with impressive economy the ferocity of the tempest. The rich burr gives it the effect of a vigorous pen and ink technique.

In the drypoint portrait of Ridley holding a guitar, his bearded face is not defined by outline as much as by parallel hatching that shapes its features. Contrasting linear patterns are used to differentiate the figure from the undescribed background: rich diagonal drypoint lines describe the figure while a loose network of vertical and horizontal lines defines the space behind him. Here, too, the rich burr of the drypoint is exploited to achieve an effect like that of a pen and ink drawing, in which dark pools of ink are used to create similar dense shadows.

## Looking at Prints

### Lithography

The last print technique Whistler explored was lithography, a comparatively new process invented in 1798. Lithography is based on the principle that oil and water do not mix. An image is drawn with a greasy medium—a crayon or oily liquid called *tusche*—on a prepared limestone, which absorbs the marks. The stone is then covered with water, and when printer's ink is applied, it adheres only to the greasy areas. Because the process was economical—prints were easy to produce and an almost unlimited quantity could be generated from a single stone—lithography was often used to copy paintings for commercial dissemination and for advertising, which made it even more artistically unfashionable in the mid-1800s than etching. The low status of this medium was a challenge for Whistler, who wanted printmaking to be fully recognized as a fine art practice. Indeed, Whistler, who started to experiment with lithography in 1878, was a leader in elevating its reputation. Though one of the key features of the lithographic process is its infinite reproducibility, he sought to keep his production exclusive; his lithographs were often printed in numbers as small as those of his etchings—from the single digits usually up to thirty or forty.

Lithography offered Whistler exciting new possibilities. Though less dimensional than etching (in which the ink is raised above the surface of the paper), it was also less laborious, so he could quickly fix a moment and achieve the spontaneity of a sketch. The ease with which broad, unbroken areas of dark tone could be produced in lithography and the medium's capacity for rendering shifts of tone and capturing fugitive effects also enabled Whistler to express the subtleties of fog and features of water. He frequently worked in *lithotint*, in which the image is drawn on a stone with a brush and *tusche* in the manner of a wash drawing. He labored over his stones, scraping and redrawing them and printing on colored papers to achieve a variety of nuanced effects. He was intent on mastering lithography, and though some of his most stunning achievements are in this medium, after twenty years he still called himself a beginner.

## Looking at Prints

### The Influence of Japanese art in Whistler's Prints

Japanese woodblock prints, which became more widely available in Europe after Japan opened to trade with Europe in 1854, introduced Whistler to a wholly different approach to space, composition, and color. The Japanese use of layered areas of unmodulated color challenged traditional notions of perspective and the creation of space, and the unexpected vantage points and asymmetry suggested new approaches to composition—ones that stood in stark contrast to the 500-year tradition in Europe in which linear perspective was employed to create a vivid facsimile of the physical world. Whistler *may* have been exposed to Japanese prints through Auguste Delâtre (1822–1907), the printer of the *French Set*, who had works by Hokusai (1760–1849) available in his shop as early as 1856. Regardless of when Whistler first encountered the art of Japan, by the early 1860s its influence on his art was profound and lasting. His growing admiration for Japanese art can be seen in his adoption of a flatter space in his prints, and the silhouetting and cropping of subject matter.

Margaret Watson Parker also had several Japanese prints in her collection, but pristine impressions of important Edo period (1615–1868) prints were probably as difficult for her to obtain as they would have been for nineteenth-century artists. Though a number of the prints from the Parker bequest have darkened or been trimmed, the striking qualities of color and design that had such an impact on Whistler and other Western artists in the later nineteenth century still may be readily seen.

### Margaret Watson Parker: Shaping a Collection

Nearly all the works presented in this exhibition once belonged to Margaret Watson Parker (1867–1936), who began collecting prints by Whistler in the 1890s, while the artist was still alive and she herself was in her late twenties; together they give a sense of her dedication to amassing an extraordinary body of fine and rare examples of Whistler's mastery of the print medium. The prints in this section are portraits of people Whistler knew extremely well: as images made for largely private purposes, their circulation was very limited. Thus, they were, by definition, relatively difficult for collectors to obtain. Of particular note is the wonderful selection of Whistler's drypoint portraits—all dark, early impressions. Margaret Watson Parker pursued such exceptional works with zeal, and her eye for the quality of a print was unerring.

Raised in Evanston, Illinois, Margaret Selkirk Watson was the youngest of three daughters of a prominent businessman and one of the first women to attend Northwestern University. After she began acquiring works by Whistler, Miss Watson met fellow Evanstonian Charles Morse, a noted collector of Japanese art who introduced her, in 1900, to Charles Lang Freer, the Detroit art collector and connoisseur and, later, founder of the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Freer became Parker's most influential art advisor and guide, acquainting her with top international art dealers and nurturing her interest in Whistler, Japanese culture, and, closer to home, Pewabic Pottery, a leading Arts and Crafts pottery in Detroit. After her marriage in 1907 to UM Professor of Ophthalmology Dr. Walter Parker, Margaret Watson Parker settled in Detroit and became known, along with her husband, for her patronage and support of local artists and cultural institutions including, the Detroit Museum of Art (now the Detroit Institute of Arts) and the Detroit Symphony Society.

Mrs. Parker amassed a true connoisseur's collection of Whistler's prints. An astute buyer, she acquired important Whistler etchings and lithographs as some early collections were dispersed at auction, including those of Queen Victoria and H. S. Theobald. She built her expertise with an extensive library of books on Whistler's art, now in the University of Michigan's Special Collections Library. After her death in 1936, the Margaret Watson Parker collection of 679 works of art came to UMMA, representing perhaps the single most formative bequest to the Museum in its history. Enviably in its breadth and diversity, it includes Japanese woodblock prints, nineteenth-century French paintings, Asian ceramics, Pewabic pottery, and 156 works on paper by James McNeill Whistler. The last two groups made UMMA the holder of one of the most significant collections of such works in the country. In a final tribute to this passionate collector, Margaret Watson Parker's husband endowed a fund for the acquisition of works of art in her name—a fund that enables UMMA to continue purchasing works of art in the areas of her interests.

## Whistler and His Critics: The Ruskin Trial

Whistler was very combative towards critics and criticism. In July 1877, he sued the eminent British art critic and author John Ruskin (1819–1900) for libel after the critic condemned his 1875 painting, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (now in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts). Ruskin charged that with this painting of minimally suggested bursts of fireworks against an otherwise dark blue canvas, Whistler had asked “two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face.” Whistler was eager for a trial, which he saw as a forum for debate on the nature of art itself as much as an opportunity to defend his reputation as an artist. Throughout it he insisted on calling his paintings “arrangements,” “nocturnes,” and even “a problem I attempt to solve”; he wanted the public to see them not as imparting information about an external world, but as something that “should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye.” Though he hoped for quick vindication, the trial was long and very costly; he won the judgment, but he was awarded only one farthing in damages. In the face of his mounting debts, Whistler was forced to declare bankruptcy in May 1879; his White House in Chelsea, designed for him by Edward W. Godwin (1833–1866) and completed only the previous year, had to be auctioned. He turned to printmaking to help restore his reputation and recoup his losses; before setting out for Venice, Whistler wrote to his mother that he would turn “copper into gold.”

## The Venice Sets: “A Venice in Venice That the Others Never Seem to Have Perceived”

On the heels of the Ruskin trial in 1879, the Fine Art Society in London contacted Whistler with a commission for a set of twelve etchings of Venice and offered funding to allow him to go there from September to December of that year. For Whistler this was a welcome opportunity to visit Venice, which he had long wished to see, and to escape his creditors while producing new work. He remained more than a year, returning to London in November 1880 with about fifty plates that conveyed a distinctive view of the city. Whistler claimed to “have learned to know a Venice in Venice that the others never seem to have perceived.” Traditional depictions of the city consisted of grand views of major monuments such as St. Mark’s Square, the Grand Canal, and the Rialto Bridge; Whistler preferred to find his subjects in little-known corners of Venice: the smaller piazzas, narrow back canals, and formerly-splendid Renaissance palaces that had become artisan workshops. Though such poor urban subjects may be seen as analogous to those of the *Thames Set*, he infused them with a lyrical poetry lacking in his etchings of London, evoking a world of shadows and thresholds, of watery reflection and melancholy.

Whistler would later refer to this as his “impressionistic” phase of etching, though this effect was the product of much labor. Some of the Venice plates went through as many as a dozen states. In these etchings Whistler also experimented with manipulating plate tone (leaving thin films of ink on the plate) during printing to create dark areas—an innovation that allowed him to achieve in them the nuanced tonalities of his lithographic nocturnes. He insisted on printing or supervising the printing of each impression, so that each was a unique work of art, and the sets took many years to complete. The *First Venice Set*, published in 1881, consists of twelve etchings exhibited at the Fine Art Society; a second group of twenty-six etchings (including five views of London) was shown in 1883 as the *Second Venice Set*. Initially criticized for their lack of defined form in comparison to his earlier etchings, the Venice etchings would later take their place among Whistler’s most admired prints.

## Looking at Prints Artistic Printing

With the *Venice Sets*, Whistler began to use what was called “artistic printing” in order to achieve in an etching the varied tonal effects of painting. This process, to which he was first exposed by Auguste Delâtre (1822–1907), the master printer of the *French Set*, involved leaving a thin film of ink—carefully manipulated with a cloth, a feather, or his hand—on the plate each time an impression was pulled; the resulting area of darkness could be used to convey atmosphere and the dark surface of water. Whistler could vary the effect considerably by the manner in which he wiped the plate, allowing him to evoke different moods and times of day from the same plate; he even designed some of the Venice plates to be completed by this manipulation of ink on the surface during printing.

No two of the *Venice Set* prints are alike, and sometimes they are radically different; indeed, each is a unique work of art in its own right. By the terms of his agreement with the Fine Art Society, Whistler was obliged to print one

hundred sets of the *First Venice Set*; as he insisted on printing or supervising the printing of every impression himself, this was a project that occupied him for twenty years.

### **The Second Venice Set**

Whistler was a master of self-promotion and involved with all aspects of the display and marketing of his work. For the second exhibition of Venice prints, entitled *Arrangement in White and Yellow*, the gallery was transformed: the walls were covered in white felt; the moldings, skirting board, floor, fireplace tiles, curtains, couches, and chairs were bright yellow; a yellow fabric ceiling diffused and colored the light; and the etchings were hung in white frames. The décor caused a sensation, but the hanging of the prints—widely spaced and in a single row at eye level rather than stacked floor to ceiling on the wall—was equally revolutionary and influenced display and exhibition design for years to come. To accompany the show, Whistler penned a catalogue with quotes from hostile critics of the first exhibition; never one to miss an opportunity to put forth his views about the nature of art, this publication also included his eleven propositions about etching. It was handed out by a man dressed in canary yellow and white livery.

### **Building from the Grid: Whistler's Views of Shops and Doorways from the 1880s**

During the 1880s and 1890s, Whistler returned to a motif that had occupied him even as a student—architecture as a structure of pictorial organization. He had used doorways in the *French Set* and *Thames Set* etchings to frame an image-within-an-image, usually focusing on a figure in an interior, but in this period he evolved a different way of combining figures and buildings: instead of projecting a deep interior space, he focused on the mural aspects of facades and street views of shop fronts, using the flat character of the exterior walls as a foil for figural scenes. Facades with figures interacting at the street level became one of Whistler's recurring themes, allowing him to explore the grid created by the arrangements of windows and doors in juxtaposition with freely drawn lines.

In his Venice etchings, Whistler used both buildings and their reflections to create a series of regular shapes as an underpinning to his compositional structure. Plate tone (the films of ink left on the plate to indicate shadowed area) helped meld solid structures and their mirrored reflections into a unified whole. In the Amsterdam etchings, he further developed this approach, filling the plate with a rectilinear grid-work of doors, windows, and the step-gabled facades of Dutch houses. The delicate webbing of lines united buildings and their shifting reflections into a single densely textured construction of rectangles that became a setting for his figures. Doorways, shop fronts, and street views persisted as a motif in Whistler's graphic art: two of the late etchings in the last section of the exhibition show the artist further reducing details and simplifying the grids of the prints from the 1880s into images that flirt with pure abstraction.

### **The Amsterdam Etchings: "Painted with Exquisite Line"**

Whistler himself divided his work into three periods: the realism of the *Thames Set*, the impressionism of the *Venice Set*, and the combination of the two in the Amsterdam etchings, which he thought his finest achievement as an etcher.

Like Venice, Amsterdam is a city of canals, and Whistler's approach to depicting it was similar to that found in his Venetian prints: rather than focus on major sites that would be familiar to travelers, he once again concentrated on the back canals with their dilapidated architecture and intimacy of scale. While exploring Amsterdam's back alleys Whistler had trouble with the locals and had a policeman accompany him to keep prying eyes at bay, particularly after a woman emptied dirty water over him as he was working from a boat on the canal.

In the eleven Amsterdam plates—his last great etching cycle—Whistler attempted to achieve through line work the kind of tonal nuance that he had attained through the manipulation of ink during printing in the Venice etchings. The plates, which went through many states, are covered with densely worked webbings of lines that simultaneously define the city's buildings and canals and create exquisite two-dimensional patterns from which the features of the buildings emerge. Indeed, in successive reworkings Whistler drew so many delicate lines on his plates that there was hardly any protective ground remaining when he came to etch them in acid. The lines were so fine that very few impressions could be taken before they wore down under the pressure of the press and became impossible to print.



Unwilling to produce inferior impressions of these complex works, Whistler abandoned them after printing no more than 30 impressions of any plate, and they are consequently very rare; it is a credit to Margaret Watson Parker's taste and determination that she acquired five of them. Although an exhibition of the Amsterdam etchings at the Fine Art Society was planned for 1890, it was postponed and finally canceled, and the etchings were never published in an edition. The prints, however, were reviewed for the *Star* by the playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), who wrote, "Had Mr. Whistler never put brush to canvas, he had done enough in these plates to be able to say that he will not altogether die."

### **Artistic Triumphs and Personal Tragedy**

In the 1890s, Whistler finally enjoyed critical successes with his paintings as well as his prints, receiving international recognition and honors. His 1888 marriage to Beatrix Philip Godwin had lent stability and felicity to his domestic life, and many of his late works, particularly those produced during their sojourn in Paris, depict his wife's sisters and mother in a rich family setting that Whistler greatly enjoyed. That happiness was short lived, however, as Beatrix became ill with cancer in 1894, and Whistler was consumed with caring for her for two years; his grief at her death was profound. Nevertheless, throughout this period he continued to push the boundaries of his art and to explore new media, particularly that of transfer lithography, to which he had been introduced in 1878 or '79 by the Ways. In the early to mid-1890s, he virtually abandoned etching to thoroughly explore the visual effects he could achieve in transfer lithography, which proved to be a medium perfectly suited to the restrained, understated effects he was seeking.

Whistler's late lithographs are some of his most abstract, experimental, and masterful works; while the images may seem nearly evanescent, they are the product of exacting technique. Whistler called his late works, which are often difficult to distinguish from drawings, "songs on stone," a phrase that suggests his aim to go beyond the descriptive capacity of pictorial imagery and to create a visual equivalent to music. These images, the most distilled of his career, are also some of his most personal; he often depicted people close to him, attempting to express "the intangibles of atmosphere, mood, and personality."

### **Looking at Prints**

#### **Transfer Lithography**

In lithography, an image is drawn directly onto a special stone with an oily medium and then printed. In transfer lithography the image is created on a special kind of non-absorbant paper, available in pads, that may be drawn on like sketching paper and then sent to a printer to be transferred to a lithographic stone. While images are reversed in etching and non-transfer lithography, those drawn on transfer paper are reversed when transferred to the stone and reversed again when printed, so the image is true to the original view. As Whistler preferred to work onsite or from the model, he welcomed the liberation from cumbersome limestones that transfer paper offered and the spontaneity of execution it allowed. Even in this new medium Whistler was an innovator. The transfer paper available in London, known as *papier viennois*, had a texture that created a mechanical dot pattern in the final print, and with increasing mastery he devised various means of texturing his paper to obscure this; later he discovered another transfer paper, *papier végétal*, that had no dot patterning. Whistler's desire to use media in innovative ways also led him to experiment with the use of stump in his transfer lithographs. Stumping, a technique adapted from chalk drawing, is the use of a roll of paper, felt, or leather to slightly smudge lines, increasing their softness and creating a sense of atmosphere; the smooth surface of *papier végétal* proved ideal for the use of stump, enabling him to achieve in his lithographs an unprecedented delicacy. In addition, both Whistler and Way sought out special papers to create a variety of effects in printing; individual impressions taken during Whistler's lifetime can vary so much in character as to be virtually monoprints of the same subject.

### **Whistler's Last Years: Late Works**

Whistler's enthusiasm for printmaking extended to the end of his life, and his late works are marked by continued innovation as well as a summation of long-held interests and preoccupations. During his last decade, he embarked on a handful of color lithographs that brought yet another facet to his print imagery; as ever, he went against contemporary trends towards saturated color and flat, decorative patterning, creating color lithographs that were delicate and intimate in character. His penchant for understatement also led to further simplification and distillation

of his imagery; many of the late prints are so reductive that they border on pure abstraction and seem more like memories or dreams than views. The 1896 lithograph *The Thames* revisits his earlier depictions of the river—it is drawn on a stone, not paper, as were his lithographs of the 1870s—and is possibly his consummate view of London; in it he employs the atmospheric nuance of his signature nocturnes to create one of his most subtle and masterful works.

*Two Doorways*, from the *Twelve Etchings*,  
or the *First Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching and drypoint  
Third state of six (Kennedy 193)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.380

*Two Doorways*, from the *Twelve Etchings*,  
or the *First Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching and drypoint  
Fifth state of six (Kennedy 193)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.381

This pair of impressions of *Two Doorways* from the *First Venice Set* allows the viewer to compare different states of the same plate. The earlier impression, a third state out of six, is printed in black ink, while the later one, a fifth state impression, is printed in dark brown ink. The third-state impression is on paper that is untrimmed and not signed in pencil with the butterfly signature, perhaps indicating that Whistler did not consider it sufficiently complete to merit signature and trimming; the artist often took trial proofs as he worked on a plate, making notes on the reverse side. The fifth-state impression, however, has had the margins trimmed to the edge of the plate mark and is signed on the tab that Whistler often left for his butterfly. On the reverse the artist noted, “Before last State.” As the title indicates, two arched doorways—one closed, the other open—are the focus of the composition, providing a glimpse of two figures behind the man on the steps of the water-door. Much of the difference between the two states is concentrated on the dark doorway at the left. In the third-state impression, the viewer is able to look more deeply into the space behind the arched opening. As Whistler developed the image, the space behind the figure became darker and more mysterious; although the child immediately behind the central figure becomes more prominent, the second figure recedes into the gloom, while the pervading darkness throws into relief the glowing presence of the lantern.

*Reading*  
1879  
Lithograph with scraping on china paper  
Fourth state of four (Way 13; Chicago 17)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.422

*Maud, Seated*  
1873  
Drypoint  
Second state of three (Kennedy 115)  
Gift of Alan and Marianne Schwartz, 1993/2.33

Maud Franklin, the subject of both of these prints, was a young model and artist who may have been a stand-in for Whistler's portraits of Frances Leyland in the early 1870s; she eventually became his mistress and bore him two daughters. Whistler made numerous portraits of her in all media—here lithograph and drypoint—often depicting her as a lady of leisure, although because of her relationship with him she was never accepted in society.

In *Reading*, Whistler unites figure and background using the same parallel diagonal hatching lines seen in *The Guitar Player* to create the shallow space in which Maud sits. He made several alternate views of this subject before zeroing in on this one. Though a lithograph, *Reading* seems so like a drawing that in 1889 *The Magazine of Art* mistakenly described it as “india ink and crayon.” In it, Whistler creates tones by using the lithographic crayon as he would charcoal or conté crayon to create shading and lines of varying density, and the print exhibits the immediacy of a rapidly executed sketch. Indeed, the lines that unite the figure of Maud with her background in *Reading* are closely related to an actual crayon drawing of a woman seated at a piano in which both figure and background are formed through sweeping diagonal lines.

The small drypoint *Maud, Seated* has the intimacy of Whistler’s chalk drawings of female models from the period. The work, which evokes a very private feeling, was never printed in an edition and very few impressions were taken from the plate.

*The Traghetto, No. 1*

1879–80

Etching

Second state of three (Kennedy 190)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.376

*The Traghetto, No. 2, from Twelve Etchings, or the First Venice Set*

1879–80

Etching

Fifth state of six (Kennedy 191)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.377

Whistler’s image of a ferry landing at the end of a dark passageway of the Ca’ da Mosto proved to be an instance when he ruined his copper plate at the urging of another artist, a “duffer,” according to Whistler, who complained that his first plate looked incomplete. Another colleague, Otto Bacher (1856–1909) tells of seeing a “glorious proof” impression of the first state of *The Traghetto*, pinned to the wall in Whistler’s room as a reference for further work on the plate. When he was shown the second and third states, he was stunned: the silvery delicacy of the benchmark impression had been ruined by subsequent work on the plate. Reading in Bacher’s face confirmation of his own fears, Whistler bitterly abandoned this first plate. He was able to salvage the composition by transferring the image to a new plate and beginning again; the second plate became known as *The Traghetto, No. 2*.

Although *The Traghetto, No. 1* was one of the first plates Whistler began in Venice, *The Traghetto, No. 2* was the last to be completed of the *First Venice Set*. Indeed, as the invitations to the Fine Art Society’s opening show of the prints had been sent out, Whistler continued to work on the plate. The printer Thomas R. Way (1861–1913), who was with Whistler in London as he continued to fret over *The Traghetto, No. 2*, described how, “he obtained the silvery quality he wanted, and the lantern with its reflected light at the end of the dark archway, and the leaves falling from the little trees in front—just in time.”

Mrs. Parker obtained one of the very few proofs of *Traghetto, No. 1* (albeit a second, not a first state), as well as an impression from the final plate that was shown at the Fine Art Society. Although UMMA’s *Traghetto, No. 1* is a second state impression, it retains some of the elusive silvery quality that Whistler was seeking.

*San Biagio, from Twenty-six Etchings, or the Second Venice Set*

1879–80

Etching and drypoint

Ninth state of nine (Kennedy 197)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.385

The low vantage point here suggests that Whistler may have been working from a boat—as he frequently did. An old gondolier was hired to help him locate the “bits of strange architecture, windows, piles, balconies, queer water effects, canal views with boats—very rarely figure subjects” that became his personal iconography of Venice. With his prepared plates tucked between the leaves of a book to prevent abrasion and his sketching materials loaded in the bottom of the gondola, Whistler could traverse the back canals and streets either by boat or on foot with the gondola following behind him, seeking out exquisite images to record.

In *San Biagio*, the passageway from the canal into the street beyond takes on the stature of a triumphal arch. The composition is reduced to its essentials: the focal point of the arch and flanking windows and balcony that punctuate the wall are balanced in the foreground by the two boats, one pulled up on shore, the other along the water’s edge. The dark barrel vault leading into the distance is prevented from overwhelming the delicate balance of the surrounding details and the hanging laundry breaks up the mass of the passageway, visually eroding it with the ghostly forms of hanging shirts. The play of light over the old brick and stone of the outer wall are masterful, and the plate tone in the water gives this work a powerful stillness and quiet lyricism—a beauty that Whistler described in a letter to his mother: “after the wet, the colours upon the walls and their reflections in the canals are more gorgeous than ever—and with sun shining upon the polished marble mingled with rich toned bricks and plaster, this amazing city of palaces becomes really a fairy land—created one would think especially for the painter.”

*Portrait of Whistler*  
1859  
Etching and drypoint  
Second state of two (Kennedy 54)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.341

Throughout his career, Whistler was acutely aware of his self-presentation. This early print shows him self-consciously evoking Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669)—an artist renowned for scrutinizing his own features in self-portraits, and considered then, and now, to be one of the greatest printmakers of all time. Whistler was already living abroad when this etching was made, but always an individualist, he depicts himself wearing a wide-brimmed hat “of an American shape not yet well known in Europe.” Rembrandt, too, famously depicted himself in a black hat, and through this accoutrement, Whistler is clearly paying homage to and identifying himself with this past master, suggesting the degree of his ambitions in the medium of printmaking.

For all the stories of his jaunty youth as an “idle apprentice,” here the artist is portrayed as critical, inquiring, and observant. The hands, pencil, and paper in this self-portrait are only summarily indicated; the focus is on the young artist’s features, rendered in delicate etched lines. Whistler’s concentration on the essential aspects of the composition, which he later described as “the secret of drawing,” is already visible in this early work. His followers Walter Sickert (1860–1942) and Mortimer Menpes (1855–1938) described how he would begin a composition by “seizing upon the chief point of interest.” After drawing that completely, he expanded outward, capturing the peripheral elements more broadly and summarily.

Please see the case in the exhibition’s Looking at Prints section for examples of etchings by Rembrandt.

*Seymour Standing Under a Tree*  
1859  
Etching  
Second state of three (Kennedy 31)  
Museum purchase made possible by the Jean Paul Slusser Memorial Fund, 1988/2.22

Sir Francis Seymour Haden

Great Britain, 1818–1910  
*Kensington Gardens*  
1859  
Etching and drypoint  
Museum purchase, 1990/2.36

Whistler's brother-in-law, Seymour Haden, a surgeon and amateur printmaker and collector, encouraged him to etch from nature, and they often sketched together. On excursions to the parks in and around London, they worked directly on their prepared etchings plates, which they later printed on the press in Haden's house. Whistler's portrait of Haden's son Seymour and Haden's etching of Kensington Gardens were most likely executed during such an excursion. While similarities between the subject matter and etching styles of the two men are readily apparent, the delicacy of Whistler's work shows that with his lighter touch he may already at this point have surpassed his mentor. This early work also shows his characteristic sharp focus on specific elements of the image and the rendering of others in a more summary manner, creating a more dynamic work than does Haden's very even rendering of the scene.

*The Music Room*  
1858  
Etching  
Second state of two (Kennedy 33)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.334

In the late 1850s, Whistler spent time in London with his half-sister, Deborah Haden, and her family, producing many scenes of domestic life as well as portraits of the Haden family. *The Music Room* shows the family at home, with Deborah, her husband Seymour, and Seymour's medical partner James Reeves Traer (Whistler's doctor and good friend) grouped companionably around a table, reading by lamplight.

Whistler's friendship with Seymour Haden did not last. First the strain of competition between the two men entered the relationship, as Haden received increased recognition of his prints in the British art world, while Whistler, the younger and more gifted artist, did not. Then, in 1867, during a medical convention in Paris attended by both Traer and Haden, Traer unexpectedly and suddenly died, and Haden decided to have him buried in France. When Whistler angrily confronted Haden about this peremptory decision, the argument ended with his pushing his brother-in-law through a plate-glass window. The two men never spoke again, and Deborah Haden was forbidden to see her brothers or stepmother. With some contrivance, they were occasionally able to meet at the homes of common friends.

Rembrandt van Rijn  
The Netherlands, 1606–1669  
*Christ and the Woman of Samaria Among Ruins*  
1634  
Etching  
Gift of Ruth W. and Clarence J. Boldt, Jr., 2008/2.408

*Self-Portrait with Saskia*  
1636  
Etching  
Gift of Ruth W. and Clarence J. Boldt, Jr., 2008/2.406

Whistler greatly admired the work of Rembrandt and his achievements as a print-maker. Rembrandt was particularly known for creating dramatic contrasts of light and dark, referred to as chiaroscuro (from the Italian for

*chiaro*—light, and *scuro*—dark); such tonal effects were extremely difficult to attain in the fundamentally linear medium of printmaking. In *Christ and the Woman of Samaria Among Ruins*, these oppositions of dark and light not only suggest the effects of natural light, but also heighten the drama of the scene.

In *Self-Portrait with Saskia*, the viewer confronts the artist himself, depicted as a young man with his bride, Saskia. Throughout his career, Rembrandt repeatedly painted, sketched, and etched images of his own face in addition to creating rich and penetrating portraits of others. In his self-portraits, the artist frequently assumed different guises and costumes, sensitively exploring his own personality and temperament at different ages. A recurring element was a broad brimmed hat; here it casts his eyes into shadow, heightening the psychological complexity of this self-portrait. It would have been clear to anyone familiar with Rembrandt's work that in Whistler's early self-portrait he is consciously "tipping his hat" to, and blatantly emulating, this revered old master.

*Jo's Bent Head*

1861

Etching and drypoint

Second state of two(a) (Kennedy 78)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.348

*Jo's Bent Head*

1861

Etching and drypoint

State two(a) of two(a) (Kennedy 78)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.350

Often the differences we encounter in impressions of Whistler's prints are due to the progression of the line work in different states, where additional lines (or the removal of lines or even of whole figures) creates a change in the composition itself. That is not the case here: these are two impressions of the *same state*. The differences are in the papers used, the color of the ink, and the way the artist has applied the ink. Even in this early work, Whistler was already experimenting with how the application of ink to a plate could vary the effect of the final image. The impression that is cleanly wiped and printed in black ink leaves the focus solely on the delicate rendering and rich drypoint of the head of Whistler's mistress and muse, Joanna Hiffernan, whose seated form is indicated by a handful of faint lines. The other impression is quite different in effect: Whistler opted for brown ink and during printing left films of ink in the margins of the plate outside the delineations of Jo's skirt and back. The effect is warmer, richer, and more atmospheric, and the surrounding ink conveys more the sense of the mass of the model's body. Collector Margaret Watson Parker acquired *three* impressions from this plate—a great testament to her discerning eye for the subtleties of Whistler's prints.

*The Lime-burner, from Sixteen Etchings,  
or the Thames Set*

1859

Etching and drypoint on laid Japan tissue

Second state of two (Kennedy 46)

The Alfred E. Pernt Memorial Fund, in honor of Dr. of Technical Sciences Max H. J. Pernt and his wife Anna Pernt (née Mueller), 1986/2.14

Unlike the straightforward dockside panoramas of London's commercial shipping district, this etching presents a complex examination of light and shadow worthy of Rembrandt, whom Whistler greatly admired. Here dramatic chiaroscuro effects are used to render a contemporary image of working-class London. As in the *French Set*, figures are seen in an interior from a doorway: one man stands in the middle distance under a shaft of light, while at the far end of the building another sits looking out towards the river; the scene is framed on three sides by intricately hatched wooden timbers. The man regarding the viewer is bathed in sunlight from an overhead opening while the

framing passage and the more distant space containing the other figure are dark, conveying spatial recession. The alternation of light and dark extends to the ladders: the pair behind the standing man are as brightly lit as is the nearby figure, while the pair closer to the viewer are in comparative shadow. This print was originally exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1860 with the title, *W. Jones, lime-burner, Thames Street*, which underscores its portrait-like quality.

*The Forge*, from *Sixteen Etchings*, or the  
*Thames Set*

1861

Drypoint on laid Japan tissue

Third state of four (Kennedy 68)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.347

Whistler felt free to include in the *Thames Set* images

made in France, such as *Becquet* and *The Forge*. Compared to earlier plates in the set (like *The Pool* or *Eagle Wharf*), which are characterized by tightly structured views along the river, some of the latest plates signal a shift in Whistler's artistic interests. *The Forge*, the only print from the *Thames Set* executed entirely in drypoint, depicts a scene in a smithy in Brittany, and the evocation of atmosphere and mystery—a challenge that will increasingly occupy Whistler—is quite different from the more objective riverside scenes.

The subject of a figure by a furnace—whether a farrier, glass-blower, or cooper—is one to which Whistler frequently returns; here the spectral light from the furnace is used as an opportunity to create dramatic chiaroscuro effects in an interior. The smith's commanding stance conveys confidence, skill, and judgment, but the brilliant light effects lend the figure the mystery of an alchemist or conjurer; his features, rendered in the most delicate lines, disappear into the shadow of the surrounding darkness.

This impression of *The Forge* is an especially rich one. The raised burr of the drypoint retains the ink to create dark, velvety accents described in broad, free strokes. The plate is carefully wiped so that the edge of the furnace where the light is brightest retains no trace of ink to diminish the effect of blinding light.

*Limehouse*

1878

Lithotint with scraping and incising, on a prepared half-tint  
ground

Second state of three (Way 4; Chicago 7)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.412

Whistler eventually settled in the Chelsea region of London, which had extensive views of the Thames; it was from a barge on the river that *Limehouse* was drawn. The printer Thomas Way (1837–1915), who was aware of developments in art lithography in France and foresaw a market for it in England, was keen to recruit artists to work in the medium; Way arranged for Whistler to draw on limestone blocks and had them transported to the sites where he wanted to work—he even sat beside him as he produced this lithotint.

Whistler experimented with all aspects of the lithographic process to achieve the results he desired. In creating this image, he employed a half-tint tonality to create an overall middle value, and then he scraped through this layer to produce highlights; over this half-tint area he layered additional lines to create darker areas and included tusche to emulate ink wash drawings. This is one of only about thirty-five impressions taken of the second state, after these changes had been made.

*Nocturne*

1878

Lithotint with scraping on a prepared half-tint ground printed  
on blue-grey paper  
Second state of two (Way 7; Chicago 8)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.413

Whistler had an extraordinary ability to see and accurately describe through line, but he could also synthesize and recall a subject without having it in front of him. Unlike *Limehouse*, which was sketched on a limestone block on site, this image was produced in the offices of Thomas Way entirely from memory at a single sitting. By this time, Whistler had painted numerous canvases depicting the region of Chelsea and Battersea at night—observing a scene in the dark and then drawing it in the studio.

Whistler's views of the Thames at dawn or dusk, which he called nocturnes, are more tonal and aestheticized depictions of the river than the linear works of the *Thames Set*. In this lithotint of the slagheap of the plumbago works and the lighted clock tower of the Morgan Crucible Company, he exploits lithography's capacity for tone to render these industrial buildings along the Thames poetically cloaked in mist. Here, too, a half-tint ground was applied and the stone was scraped to produce highlights; the image is also printed on blue paper, which further contributes to the impression of a nocturnal scene.

Ando Hiroshige  
Japan, 1797–1858  
*Gyôsho Tôkaidô Series: Okazaki, Yahagi Bridge over  
the Toyokawa River*  
Edo period (1615–1868)  
circa 1841–42  
Color woodblock print  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1948/1.132

Ando Hiroshige III  
Japan, 1843–94  
*Famous Places of Edo: Ryogoku Bridge, Evening Fireworks*  
Edo period (1615–1868)  
circa 1865–75  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1948/1.143

Whistler's views of Battersea Bridge, which he depicted in paintings and prints in the 1870s, are in some ways an homage to Japanese prints. Not only does he take a venerable bridge as his subject in lithographs such as *The Tall Bridge* and *The Broad Bridge* and the etching *Old Battersea Bridge* (on the walls adjacent to this case), it is evident that he was experimenting with Japanese visual conventions in his portrayals. The compositional similarities to Japanese prints include the low vantage point; the structure of the bridges themselves, with their gently arcing profiles, wooden piers, and pedestrian railings; the presence of sailboats under the spans; and the low open boats in the foreground. Whistler's works, however, are never merely imitative of Japanese prints—instead the visual strategies found in them are employed in the service of his distinctive aesthetic approach to subject and medium.

*Speke Hall, No. 1*  
1870  
Etching and drypoint  
Fifth state of ten (Kennedy 96)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.354

Whistler's most important patron in the 1870s was the Liverpool shipping magnate Frederick R. Leyland; he became a close friend of the Leyland family and painted portraits of Leyland, his wife Frances, and their daughters. It was for their London dining room that Whistler created the Peacock Room now in the Freer Art Gallery in Washington, DC.



Though eventually conflict over that commission ended their relationship, prior to this Whistler stayed for extended periods at the Leyland's home, Speke Hall, a sixteenth-century Tudor manor house near Liverpool.

In this work, Whistler can be seen applying his understanding of the handling of space in the Japanese prints he admired to a very traditional subject: a portrait of a manor house and its mistress. A screen of leafless trees interrupts the view of the distant half-timbered house, while in the foreground Mrs. Leyland is shown standing in the drive of Speke Hall. Whistler uses the untouched copper at the center of the image—reminiscent of the use of blank spaces in Japanese prints—to convey the desolate winter weather as well as a kind of visual silence. This also flattens the composition, an effect enhanced by the high horizon line, and creates a spatially ambiguous relationship between Mrs. Leyland and the building. This was Whistler's first etching in nearly a decade, and his rekindled interest may have been sparked by Leyland's own interest in Whistler's etchings.

*Irving as Philip of Spain, No. 1*

circa 1876–77

Etching and drypoint

Second state of three (Kennedy 170)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.368

In choosing this print, Margaret Watson may have enjoyed it as an oddity: Whistler normally had no interest in historicizing depictions and this is his only known costume piece. Sir Henry Irving, director and manager of the Lyceum Theatre in London, was for many years the most renowned actor on the British stage. In 1876, Whistler saw Irving perform the role of Philip of Spain in Tennyson's historical drama, *Queen Mary*, written in 1875. Whistler asked the actor to sit for him in his costume and produced three works depicting Henry in this guise: the painting, *Arrangement in Black, No. 3: Sir Henry Irving as Philip II of Spain*, and two etched versions of this composition were the result.

Recalling the aristocratic portraits of Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641) and Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), Irving is shown standing with hat and cape, sharp diagonal hatched lines differentiating the figure from the background. Irving was known for saying that proper stage lighting was more important than scenery; Whistler's rich plate tone, created by employing residual layers of ink that obscures the figure's legs, recalls the uneven lighting of theatres prior to the introduction of electricity.

*Little Venice, from Twelve Etchings, or the First Venice Set*

1879–80

Etching

Only state (Kennedy 183)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1955/1.122

*Little Venice* presents the panorama of the Venetian skyline as it might be seen from a boat approaching from across the lagoon. The major monuments of the city are identifiable, if minute. Just as Whistler's views along the Thames included dories and other small boats plying the river, so gondolas and the poles to which boats are tied up allow Whistler to punctuate the large passages of untouched copper with decorative accents that flatten the space, recalling Japanese prints. But Whistler rejects the clarity and descriptive quality of the Thames views, playing instead with the inherent tension of creating a flat decorative pattern while simultaneously conveying recession and depth.

This impression has just a hint of plate tone at the lower edge of the sheet and the margins of paper outside the plate mark are cut away, leaving a small tab at the bottom for Whistler's signature—a practice he adopted in the Venice prints in protest against the common practice in Britain of leaving very wide margins around the printed image. Whistler viewed wide margins as a kind of aggrandizement and preferred to let the image stand forth without this presentational device. The artist Mortimer Menpes (1855–1938), who worked with Whistler as he printed the plates, said Whistler would lay the proof on a sheet of glass and carefully cut along the plate mark by hand, never

using a ruler, which might give the print a hard-edged effect. He described how the artist wished “the knife to follow sympathetically the edge of the proof,” resulting in a print that was “vibrated and full of colour.”

*Nocturne*, from *Twelve Etchings*, or the  
*First Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching and drypoint  
Fourth state of five (Kennedy 184)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.372

In this extremely understated image of a ship at anchor and the church of San Giorgio Maggiore, the skeletal line work clustering along the waterline is enhanced by the incorporation of drypoint, which evokes the palpable humidity of the Venetian lagoon. Gondolas executed entirely in drypoint dance below the fringe of vertical hatching describing the horizon and more extremely faint drypoint lines are used to describe the ghostly lights hung in the rigging and on the deck of the ship. These atmospheric details are augmented by the way Whistler manipulated the ink on the plate during printing: the dark areas at the top and bottom of the image not only evoke the gloom of nighttime, but also create a sense of depth.

In the different impressions of *Nocturne*, the bare matrix of etched lines that so minimally describes this scene is varied by colors of ink, types of papers, and, most significantly, the inking and resultant plate tone that give the image its rich atmospheric quality. The manipulation of these factors allowed Whistler to explore different effects and evoke various times of day; indeed, he achieved such a tremendous range of effects that each impression is almost a monoprint—a non-reproducible kind of print that is regarded as essentially a unique object.

*Nocturne: Salute*  
1879–80  
Etching and drypoint  
Second state of five (Kennedy 226)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.393

*Nocturne: Salute*, which was not part of either of the Venice Sets, is even more minimal and understated than the *Nocturne* from the *First Venice Set*. The evanescent, almost opalescent, quality of the print, with its brown ink and plate tone at the top and bottom, renders the church of Santa Maria della Salute, a landmark on the Venice lagoon, all but unidentifiable. Whistler once stated that paint should be applied thinly to a canvas, “like breath on the surface of a pane of glass”; this subtle and reductive image along the Grand Canal achieves this effect in a print.

This impression comes from Queen Victoria’s collection at Windsor Castle. It was purchased directly from Whistler, who naturally ensured that the impressions in the royal collection were of outstanding quality; they are considered to be among the very best he printed. Early in the twentieth century, the librarian at Windsor Castle seems to have had little appreciation for Whistler’s prints, and a number of them were put on the market, enabling Margaret Watson Parker to add truly choice impressions to her collection. In an article in November 1906, the *New York Times* lamented the dispersal of so many outstanding impressions from the royal collection with a description that Whistler himself would have applauded: “A gathering like this impresses the most careless observer with a power in handling of etching very close to that of Rembrandt and a delicacy of touch, a daintiness and charm which Rembrandt did not possess. Whistler is easily the greatest etcher of modern times.”

*The Riva, No. 2*, from *Twenty-six Etchings*, or the  
*Second Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching and drypoint

First state of two (Kennedy 206)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.389

This is one of two views Whistler created of the sweeping Riva degli Schiavoni, the broad promenade that extends eastwards from the Piazzetta and Doges' Palace; the domes of St. Mark's cathedral are visible at the extreme right. The *Riva, No. 2* was drawn from the window of Whistler's new, cheaper lodgings at the Casa Jankovitz, to which, on the recommendation of Otto Bacher, another American artist whom he met in Venice, Whistler and Maud Franklin had relocated from their rooms on the Grand Canal. Both Bacher, also a guest there, and Whistler, who hated being distracted by others when he was working, liked to sketch from the windows. Bacher had with him a small printing press that he made available to Whistler for taking proofs of his plates, and his account of Whistler in Venice provides much interesting detail about his working methods and concerns.

Margaret Watson Parker, who was interested in Whistler's variations in printing, acquired three impressions of this view (two of *The Riva, No. 1* and this impression of *The Riva, No. 2*). This one has the stamp of the Royal Library at Windsor, indicating that it is an impression from Queen Victoria's collection.

Frank Duveneck  
United States, 1848–1919  
*Laguna, Venice (View of Shipping from the Riva)*  
1880  
Etching  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.279

Duveneck studied at the Royal Academy in Munich, and by 1878 he was teaching painting in Germany. He gathered around him a coterie of other Americans studying in Germany—including William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), John Twachtman (1853–1902), and Otto Bacher. During the summer of 1879, these artists arrived together in Venice and soon became acquainted with Whistler. *Laguna, Venice* was drawn from the Casa Jankowitz, where Duveneck, Bacher, and, eventually, Whistler resided, and shows the same view that Whistler sketched in his *Upright Venice* and *The Riva, No. 2*.

Whistler had a profound impact on the other American artists residing at the Casa Jankowitz—so much so that when Duveneck showed his Venice etchings at an exhibition in London in 1881, Seymour Haden, whose bitter estrangement from Whistler nettled both artists, thought they were by Whistler. Believing that his brother-in-law and former friend had violated his contract with the Fine Art Society, he quickly brought these etchings to the attention of officials at the Society; the error was pointed out and Haden was forced to apologize.

*Balcony, Amsterdam*  
1889  
Etching and drypoint  
Third state of three (Kennedy 405)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.405

Of all the Amsterdam etchings, the composition of *Balcony, Amsterdam* most vividly recalls Rembrandt—in particular, his famous etching *Christ Presented to the People*. In each artist's etching, a two-story building defined by a balcony or stage-like expanse that occupies the center of the image is grounded by an immense darkness below. In the Rembrandt, however, the building is the setting for a dramatic moment from the New Testament, whereas Whistler creates an intensely private view of figures half-seen in a doorway and on a balcony.

Whistler was superbly gifted at imbuing the day-to-day world with drama and immediacy. Shaw described the Amsterdam etchings as, “studies of very undesirable lodgings and tenements on canal banks, old crumbling brick houses reflected in sluggish canals, balconies with figures leaning over them, clothes hanging in decorative lines, a marvelously graceful figure carelessly standing in the great water-door of an overhanging house, every figure filled with life and movement, and all its character expressed in half a dozen lines.”

*Yellow House, Lannion*

1893

Transfer lithograph with scraping, printed in five colors

Third state of three (Way 101; Chicago 67)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.453

Whistler’s handful of color lithographs—all executed in France and printed by Henri Belfond, one of the leading printers in late nineteenth-century Paris—have a subtle quality that stands in contrast to the bold prints of his French contemporaries working in the medium. Color printing is a complex process requiring multiple stones: a keystone with the main drawing and separate stones for the various colors. Whistler collaborated with Belfond to develop this color lithograph from a keystone drawing he had executed in Brittany. Belfond created an additional five stones—one for each color seen in the print—each of which was printed separately over the lithographic matrix of the keystone. In order to achieve the muted palette of this print he used a grey-black ink for the keystone to soften the contours and also diluted the intensity of the colors. Whistler’s color prints build on harmonies of tones and hues gauged to complement one another; here, of the five colors in the final print—green, yellow, grey, medium grey, and greenish gray—three are versions of grey.

Whistler had a falling out with Belfond later in 1893 after Belfond sold an impression of *Yellow House* given to him by the artist. As a result of this breach, Whistler no longer had access to the stones, and not many impressions were printed; many of those that were remained in Belfond’s possession. This fine impression came from Queen Victoria’s collection at Windsor Castle.

*Rue Vauvilliers*

circa 1892–93

Etching on laid Japan tissue

Only state (Kennedy 439)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.410

Whistler’s commitment to transfer lithography was so thoroughgoing in the 1890s that etchings like this one are extremely rare. Here he returns to the theme of street views, paring the building down to its essential elements in a depiction so minimal that the work borders on pure abstraction; his command at this stage was such that he achieved what he sought in a single state. Near musical in its play of theme and variation, the four-story building becomes an opportunity to juxtapose pairs of windows; the theme varies on each floor, from window boxes on the top floor through a series of balconies on the floors below. Pairs of dogs and milk cans on the street level playfully complete the image on the ground floor where the visual masses of the windows are anchored by the iron fence near the facade. Whistler creates a sense of the wall of the edifice through the placement of his butterfly signature, which is balanced on the right by the abstracted dark knob of a join between two sections of downspout.

These late Paris plates often suffered from negligent care. Whistler carried the prepared plates around wrapped in paper, which abraded the ground; the resultant pitting to the surface meant he had to exert extraordinary control when biting the plate, and rather than submerge it in an acid bath, he used a feather to selectively direct a controlled stream of acid. When Whistler turned to the American artist Frank Short (1857–1945) to print them for him, he directed him to wipe the plates cleanly, eschewing the atmospheric effects contributed by plate tone. He justified

this rejection of his characteristic use of plate tone by saying, “what was good enough for Rembrandt is good enough for me.”

*The Thames*

1896

Lithotint with scraping on a prepared half-tint ground

Third state of three (Way 125; Chicago 161)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.463

The Thames is considered one of Whistler’s most accomplished lithographs, and in many ways is a summation of ideas first explored in his printmaking two decades before. It was drawn on a lithographic stone with a prepared half-tint ground, the same process used in Whistler’s views of the Thames from the 1870s, and recalls the atmospheric nocturnes of London and Venice that he produced in those years. The bridges and buildings on the far bank of the river seem suspended in mist and the failing light of late winter. Whistler further dematerializes the scene by obscuring the roadway of the Embankment at the bottom of the image by visually breaking up the depiction of the road, replete with hansom cabs and pedestrians, with a screen of leafless tree trunks.

The views of London executed during Whistler’s wife’s decline have a very private character, and they assume an elegiac poignancy. Whistler sought both treatments and new locations in an effort to make Beatrix more comfortable as her illness progressed, remaining by her side and sketching views from their balcony overlooking the sweeping curve of the Thames. When her condition permitted, Beatrix’s bed was moved near the windows so that she, too, could take in the bustle and life of the city and river. Beatrix finally died in May of 1896; Whistler lived to see the new century, dying in 1903.

*The Draped Figure, Seated*

1893

Transfer lithograph with stumping

Only state (Way 46; Chicago 72)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.441

Whistler, who had executed a number of works of draped female figures in the 1860s based on ancient Greek terracotta Tanagra figurines, returned to the theme of the draped figure in the 1890s while living in Paris. When he was approached by the French publisher André Marty for the contribution of a lithograph to Album IV of *L’Estampe originale*, which was to include works by Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), Whistler considered a number of works, including *Nude Model, Reclining* and *The Steps, Luxembourg*, before settling on *The Draped Figure, Seated*. Although drawn in Paris, Whistler had the work printed in London by T. R. Way on heavy Japanese vellum paper sent to him for that purpose. In addition to the one hundred impressions in the published edition, there were about forty-four additional impressions pulled either before the edition or afterwards, in neither case carrying the letter imprint of the Way firm that appears in the published impressions.

Whistler himself was very pleased with this effort, which was the first time he used stump in a figural work. As he wrote to Way: “Do you see I am getting to use the stump just like a brush—and the work is beginning to have the mystery in execution of a painting.”

Katsushika Hokusai

Japan, 1760–1849

*Surimono: The Lover in the Snow*

Edo period (1615–1868)

circa 1817–58

Color woodblock print

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1948/1.152

This image showing a solitary figure walking in a snowy landscape may be the kind Whistler had in mind as he developed his print of Frances Leyland walking in the foreground of her home in *Speke Hall, No. 1* (on view in the adjacent section on Margaret Watson Parker). In addition to the slender, downward-looking figure, the unifying tonalities and large untouched areas of paper in that work show a kinship with Japanese prints.

*Weary*

1863

Drypoint on laid Japan tissue

Second state of three (Kennedy 92)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.353

This languorous and sexually charged drypoint portrait of Joanna Hiffernan reclining in a chair is printed on a thin, translucent Japan paper that beautifully echoes the fragility of the figure. Here Jo's face, hair, and bodice are the focus of the print, her delicate features luxuriously framed by her cascading hair, known to be auburn from Whistler's paintings, as well as by the arched chairback against which she leans; her skirt, in contrast, is rendered in summary lines.

Excellent impressions such as this one are quite rare, since drypoint lines are very perishable and repeated passes through the printing press flattens the burr, compromising the rich blacks and slightly blurry lines. Because so few impressions can be taken with the burr intact, the first ones are the most important—and consequently the most sought after and expensive. *Weary* was also one of the last etchings Whistler made before temporarily giving up printmaking from 1863 to 1870.

*Lady with a Fan*

circa 1871–73

Black and white chalk on brown wove paper

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.266

Although she concentrated on Whistler's prints, Margaret Watson Parker also occasionally acquired other works by Whistler, including the Museum's painting *Sea and Rain* (1865), and this chalk drawing—a study of pose and dress related to the development of a full-length portrait of Frances Leyland now in the Frick Collection in New York City. This drawing of an elegantly dressed woman is also an example of Whistler's keen interest in fashion.

*Fanny Leyland*

1873

Drypoint

Fourth state of six (Kennedy 108)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.355

*Florence Leyland*

circa 1873

Drypoint

Eighth state of nine (Kennedy 110)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.356

Whistler spent considerable time at Speke Hall working on commissions, including portraits of the family. As with his prints of the Haden children, he chose to use drypoint exclusively for these touching portraits and strove to define the character of his sitters through their poses and by the quality of his line. The eldest daughter, Fanny, is shown sitting in a pose reminiscent of Whistler's famous portrait of his mother, but instead of the severe profile of

the painting, Fanny's demeanor speaks to her quiet, introspective personality. In contrast, Florence, two years younger than Fanny, is shown standing holding a hoop; her more outgoing personality is reflected in the animated line and sharper drypoint accents. Such fine impressions of these drypoint portraits are extremely rare.

*Lord Wolseley*

circa 1877

Drypoint with ink wash

Undescribed state between second and third of four (Kennedy 164)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.365

Viscount Garnet Joseph Wolseley was a field marshal in the British army and had served in the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny, as well as in Sudan, Burma, and China. During the 1870s, he was one of the group of people whom Whistler invited to his Sunday morning "American breakfasts"—a gastronomic and social event that had no equivalent in British traditions. On these occasions, Whistler sometimes sketched his guests, as he did Lord (then Sir) Wolseley, making this a rare example of an etching executed during a social event at the artist's house.

This extremely rare impression is an intermediate state between the second and third previously unrecorded by scholars. In it Whistler has added ink wash behind the figure's head to indicate how the plate should be changed in the next state, making it a unique touched proof and demonstrating Mrs. Parker's discriminating eye and interest in securing exceptional or unusual impressions.

*The Beggars, from Twelve Etchings, or the First Venice Set*

1879–80

Etching and drypoint

Seventh state of nine (Kennedy 194)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.382

Canals, bridges, and *sottoporticos*, or street-level passageways that cut through buildings, shape Venice's pedestrian pathways, and, along with the grand views, give the city its character. This etching of a dark passageway near the Campo Santa Margarita recalls Whistler's early interest in depicting figures in doorways and darkened interiors in such prints as the *Marchand de Moutarde* and *The Kitchen* from the *French Set*; here he positions figures at the edge of a dark doorway and silhouettes another against the bright exit at the other end.

For the most part, Whistler ignored the tourist views of Venice, depicting instead the city's intimate back canals and narrow streets ending in small squares. And his Venetians are not reduced to the happy peasant stereotypes that people the work of other artists active in the city in the period; the woman and girl depicted in *The Beggars* are portrayed with sympathy and without condescension.

*The Doorway, from Twelve Etchings,*

or the *First Venice Set*

1879–80

Etching and drypoint

Seventh state of seven (Kennedy 188)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1955/1.124

While Ruskin's recently published *Stones of Venice* would have sensitized visitors of the period to appreciate Venice's gothic past, Whistler tended to ignore these structures in favor of Renaissance buildings such as the Palazzo Gussoni, depicted here. Dense patterning animates the facade while allowing the interior to take on a mysterious character.

The square panes of the transom and arched windows above the door are echoed in the shadowy upper reaches of the interior. This was a dyer's shop where chairs were also repaired and the pale, regular grid just below the

ironwork over the doorway is composed of the legs of chairs suspended from the ceiling. Whistler returned to the motif of doorways and passageways throughout his career and in this period often used this subject to experiment with surface patterns that emphasize the flatness of the page against darker interiors that suggest depth.

Whistler often made significant changes to the states of his plates; here the figures were redrawn and poses altered several times.

*The Mast*, from *Twelve Etchings*, or the *First Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching  
Undescribed state later than six (Kennedy 195)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.383

A flagpole surmounted with the lion of St. Mark dominates this quiet scene of women making lace in a small square near Santa Marta. This picturesque part of Venice was demolished to make way for a large cotton factory soon after Whistler returned to London. The focus here is selective: although the figures at the bottom of the image are rendered with a lively interest, the ground level details of the buildings beyond are incomplete. The vertical format and the way that the mast is used to divide the composition recall *The Tall Bridge* and are evidence of the influence of Japanese art on Whistler.

*The Palaces*, from *Twelve Etchings*, or the *First Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching  
Third state of three (Kennedy 187)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1955/1.123

To make what is perhaps his sole topographical view of palaces along the Grand Canal, Whistler positioned himself directly across from two historic buildings on Venice's main artery, the Palazzo Pesaro and the larger Palazzo Sagredo, and depicted a full view of their facades. The Ca' d'Oro, the best known of Venice's opulent *palazzi* fronting on the Grand Canal, was immediately to the right of these buildings, but Whistler has omitted any identifying reference to that landmark. In this print he has not used plate tone to darken the passages of water or sky, thus lending the work a sense of limpid full sunshine.

*The Palaces* may reflect the influence of frontal, portrait-like photographic views of the monuments of Italy produced by firms such as Frattelli Alinari and readily available in Venice.

*Nocturne: Furnace*, from *Twenty-six Etchings*,  
or the *Second Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching  
Fourth state of seven (Kennedy 213)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.392

From his earliest prints, Whistler showed an interest in depicting men working. Here his image of *The Forge* from the *Thames Set* is essentially relocated to the humid gloom of the Venetian night and combined with his repeated motif of doorways. This nocturne gives the viewer little actual information, revealing only two figures in their respective pools of light—the person looking out from the window at the left and the man at work revealed by the blast of heat and light from the furnace deep within the interior space.

Here the deep chiaroscuro effects and nighttime setting recall Rembrandt, but Whistler has created an atmospheric image of spectral loneliness that is uniquely his. As fellow artist Otto Bacher (1856–1909) observed, "He made etched lines feel like air against solids; that is the impression that some of his rich doorways of Venice gave me."



*Nocturne: Palaces*, from *Twenty-six Etchings*, or the  
*Second Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching and drypoint  
Seventh state of nine (Kennedy 202)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.387

In this print, rather than minutely describing the buildings with an etching needle, a sense of pervading mystery was accomplished through the application of the ink to the plate. As with the *Nocturne* from the *First Venice Set*, the lines on the plate served as a fixed matrix, and films of ink were applied to shape the sense of darkness on the water and sky and the dim reflected glow of lamps; such carefully gauged gradations of plate tone flouted the accepted convention of cleanly wiped etching plates. *The Nocturne* and *Nocturne: Palaces* were re-inked for each impression, so that each is essentially a monotype, a contemporary practice that involved an artist's brushing ink directly onto a printing plate and making from it a single, unique print.

*The Rialto*, from *Twenty-six Etchings*, or the  
*Second Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching  
First state of two (Kennedy 211)  
Gift of the Friends of the Museum of Art on the Occasion of Their Twenty-fifth Anniversary, 1993/2.3

One of Venice's chief attractions is the large Rialto Bridge that spans the Grand Canal. In traditional views of the city by eighteenth-century painters and nineteenth-century photographers, the majestic bridge is depicted in classical symmetry with the canal. Whistler gives us an unexpected—and unrecognizable—view of the stairs ascending the bridge and the bell tower of San Giovanni Elemosinario on the opposite side, drawn from an elevated vantage point in a second-floor window. The buildings flanking the steps nearly fill the top of the plate and plate tone has been eschewed in order to diminish the sense of recession in depth, flattening the composition.

*Upright Venice*, from *Twenty-six Etchings*, or the  
*Second Venice Set*  
1879–80  
Etching and drypoint  
Second state of four (Kennedy 205)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.388

The dome of Santa Maria della Salute dominates the upper portion of this etching of the point where the Grand Canal empties into the basin of the lagoon opposite the Doges' Palace. The lower portion of the image shows the embankment below Whistler's vantage point, near his rooms in the San Biagio region. In the center of the composition, the water is indicated by a large expanse of untouched copper. Close examination reveals that each vignette has a somewhat different sense of weather: the upper half shows the Salute under blustery clouds, while the scene along the embankment shows men standing along the bank talking comfortably in small groups. Whistler worked on the plate at two different points, beginning it when he arrived in Venice in the autumn of 1879 and completing it roughly six months later.

*Drury Lane*, from *Twenty-six Etchings*, or the  
*Second Venice Set*  
1880–81  
Etching  
Only state (Kennedy 237)  
Gift of Nesta R. Spink, 2001/2.136

*Drury Lane* is one of a handful of London views chosen to round out the *Second Venice Set*. The composition reflects Whistler's preference for partial depiction of a scene, and the spatial construction—a dark passageway with a view beyond—is reminiscent of Venetian etchings such as *The Beggars*. At the same time, the frames-within-frames view through a passageway to the street echoes *The Lime-Burner* from the *Thames Set*.

Otto Henry Bacher  
United States, 1856–1909  
*San Vio, Venice*  
1880  
Etching  
Gift of Mrs. Charles F. Weber, 1977/2.145

Bacher's view of the Campo San Vio, in the Dorsoduro district of Venice between the Grand Canal and the Giudecca, is full of local color, with Venetian women gathered around a well decorated with reliefs of putti and garlands. Despite the picturesque setting, the scene lacks the delicate poetry of Whistler's depictions of Venice. Though the wet pavement reflects forms, much as Whistler's canals reflect his figures, the women are depicted according to conventions and stereotypes found in academic painting of such subjects and the figures are not handled with the same sympathy as Whistler's.

*Gran' Place, Brussels*  
1887  
Etching  
Only state (Kennedy 362)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.401

Whistler traveled to Belgium in 1887 with his brother and sister-in-law, Dr. and Mrs. William Whistler. His views of Brussels are largely shop fronts and cropped views of houses, with the exception of this depiction of the Maison des Ducs de Brabant, one of the impressive public buildings on the Grand Place; designed around 1696 by Guillaume de Bruyn (1649-1719), it united seven different houses behind a single classical facade. The fine etching, balanced at the bottom by a subtle use of plate tone, describes the features of the facade with a light touch—the mass of the building that occupies the entire east side of the square is treated as a filigree of lines.

While sketching this structure in the heart of Brussels, Whistler was surrounded by curious onlookers, whom he scattered by pointing his etching needle at them as if it were a sword and emphatically saying, "Ha! Ha!"

*Cottage Door*  
circa 1884–86  
Etching  
Second state of two (Kennedy 250)  
Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.395

In this scene of children in the doorway of a cottage, the recurring motif of figures in a darkened doorway is infused with an intimacy of subject and scale; the image has all the verve of a quickly captured sketch. The small size of the plate and the near view are complemented by the shapes of the doorway, street, and window: the loosely drawn girls lounging at the threshold contrast with the rectangular structures, which bring the viewer into a close encounter with the figures.

*Clothes-Exchange, No. 1*  
1886–88

Etching

Second state of two (Kennedy 286)

Gift of Gilbert M. Frimet, 1985/2.119

In *Clothes-Exchange, No. 1*, Whistler portrays the poor Houndsditch district in London's East End as a distant view. It is part of a group of modest-sized etchings that explore street views of London, many of which concentrate on shop fronts and include images of women and children gathered in front of buildings or in doorways. Here, instead of portraying buildings frontally, Whistler telescopes back to give us a sweeping view with deep spatial recession of this poor region of London where ragpickers worked.

*Maunder's Fish Shop, Chelsea*

1890

Transfer lithograph printed on laid Japan tissue

Second state of two (Way 28; Chicago 37)

Gift in memory of John Holmes, 1993/2.5

Maunder's was a shop in Chelsea that Whistler depicted in several media, including this lithograph. His distillation of a street facade into a nearly abstract image of overall rectilinear patterning—which first appeared in the Venice etchings and reached its apogee in the Amsterdam plates—is also at work in this print of two women surveying the fish at an open-air counter; though the shapes of the buildings are regular, they do not yet fill the entire image with a claustrophobic grid.

*Maunder's* is a wonderful example of the blond tonalities that Whistler sought in his lithographs; in December 1890 it was published in the periodical *The Whirlwind* as part of a set of images Whistler called "songs on stone."

*The Embroidered Curtain*

1889

Etching and drypoint

Seventh state of seven (Kennedy 410)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.407

The title of this print, *The Embroidered Curtain*, both refers to its subject and characterizes the composition's carefully structured interplay of pale and dark areas filled with an intricate web of lines. The shapes of the windowpanes—the predominant geometric forms—are repeated by the upright rectangles of the windows and the similarly proportioned rectangle of the plate itself. The strictly frontal view, the cropping of the image, and the shallow space all contribute to the highly abstract effect. Even Whistler's butterfly signature at the upper left, always used as an opportunity to insert a decorative element, is treated in much the same way as the reliefs set into the fabric of the brick second story. The dark aquatic environment conveyed through the intricate line work is enhanced by the use of warm black or brown ink.

*Pierrot*

1889

Etching and drypoint

Fifth state of five (Kennedy 407)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.406

This was one of Whistler's favorites of the Amsterdam etchings. The dilapidated doorway of the house, possibly a dyer's establishment, is consumed in shadow and the play of light and dark recalls the chiaroscuro of seventeenth-century Dutch prints, while the water-door and reflections bring to mind Whistler's own etchings of Venice (such as *The Doorway*). As in the other Amsterdam views, the dark, tonal areas are no longer created by selective wiping of the ink on the plate, but rather by dense networks of overlapping lines.

*Steps, Amsterdam*

1889

Etching and drypoint

Second state of four (Kennedy 403)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.403

Whistler's Amsterdam etchings often have a darkness and closeness that borders on claustrophobic. Here he zeroes in on the motif, cropping the upper stories of the buildings and using the stagnant water of the back canals to mirror them with little differentiation between structure and reflection. In spite of the humble subjects and the sense of confined space, the Amsterdam prints, with their delicately etched lines, subtle printing in brown ink, and beautifully observed details of daily life, are works of unparalleled beauty. The laundry line and playing children are anecdotal touches that draw the viewer into the world of the image. The gaze becomes absorbed by the interplay between the complex rectangular forms that make up the facade of the house, the cobbled street, and the reflections on the surface of the canal in the foreground, where representation becomes pure form.

*Square House, Amsterdam*

1889

Etching and drypoint

Second state of two (Kennedy 404)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.404

The title of this print suggests that it was the geometry of the building that attracted the artist. The marks are detailed, and although it is clear what they represent, they form an overall texture into which the third dimension dissolves. The projecting balcony on the left, the wooden structure above, and the dark recesses, all seem to function as pattern more than to describe depth in space. Whistler wrote to Marcus Huish at the Fine Art Society, who had commissioned the Venice etchings, of his enthusiasm for the Amsterdam prints: "what I have already begun," he said, "is of far finer quality than all that has gone before—combining a minuteness of detail...with greater freedom and more beauty of execution than even the Venice set..."

*Beatrice Whistler*

circa 1888–94

Drypoint

Second state of two (Kennedy 441)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.411

This charming portrait depicts Whistler's wife Beatrice (who signed herself Beatrix), whom he married in 1888; Whistler had a number of pet names for her, including Trixie, Luck, and Wam. Beatrix was considered a handsome woman and was Whistler's junior by more than twenty years. This portrait shows her luminous eyes framed between the curling locks over her forehead and the cupped hand that supports her chin. A quiet intimacy suffuses this drypoint, which was most likely drawn during the early years of their marriage.

A private family image such as this will exist in only a handful of impressions, most likely made for family members and others within Whistler's immediate circle; only about five of this one are known. Until recently, the plate was thought to depict Beatrix's sister, Ethel Philip, and to exist in a single state; we now know there are two states—of which this is the second—indicating that Whistler worked on the plate on more than one occasion.

*Gants de Suède*

1890

Transfer lithograph

Only state (Way 26; Chicago 35)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.426

Whistler made several lithographic portraits of his sister-in-law, Ethel Philip. This one was drawn in the autumn of 1890 when she was 29 years old; it is closely related to a painting of the sitter in the same pose entitled *The Felt Hat*. Whistler's titles for his portraits—here he singles out the sitter's suede gloves—are sometimes based on formal qualities or accoutrements of dress rather than the identity of the sitter. The geniality that suffuses this print nevertheless suggests the character of Whistler's relationships with his wife's sisters; he affectionately referred to Ethel as "Bunnie."

One of the rare exceptions to Whistler's practice of limiting his editions of lithographs was an edition of 3,000 of *Gants de Suède* that he prepared for inclusion in the new periodical *The Studio*; this impression, however, comes from the discrete group of about thirty printed by hand by Thomas R. Way.

*The Garden*

1891

Transfer lithograph

Only state (Way 38; Chicago 40)

Museum purchase made possible by the Margaret Watson Parker Art Collection Fund, 1994/2.14

Whistler's marriage completed the artist's close group of friends and family. This work, which conveys the genial social associations that characterized his inner circle, is set in the garden of the couple's house in London's Cheyne Walk. The figures depicted include the artist Walter Sickert (1860–1942), Beatrix, and her sister, Ethel. The silvery tonalities and light notational character of the lines underscore the comfortable familiarity of this gathering. Scenes of domestic tranquility and intimate conversation were also featured in a number of prints that Whistler executed in Paris several years later, including scenes set in the garden of their house on the rue du Bac and in the more public setting of the Luxembourg Gardens.

*Stéphane Mallarmé*

1892

Transfer lithograph on China paper

Only state (Way 66; Chicago 60)

Gift of Mildred R. Hartsook, 1993/2.34

Whistler executed two lithographs of his good friend, the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898); this one served as the frontispiece to a volume of his poetry, *Vers et Prose*, published in 1893. Mallarmé himself thought it: "a marvel, the best thing that has ever been done of me," and people acquainted with him found that the sitter's essence was captured so perfectly that he could be heard to actually speak. The evanescent quality of the portrait was also remarked upon: "the image exists only as a breath. It is built up by the most rapid pencil strokes. It is an improvisation, and yet one does not improvise so striking a rendering of a human being; it is necessary to have penetrated him profoundly to give him with this intensity of life and character." Though the image conveys a sense of having beautifully captured Mallarmé's likeness as if on the fly, it was, in fact, the product of several sittings. Though it was drawn on smooth transfer paper without a grain, Whistler worked on the thin paper with a leather book cover underneath in order to subtly incorporate the cow grain as part of the image.

*The Steps, Luxembourg Gardens*

1893

Transfer lithograph with stumping

Only state (Way 43; Chicago 68)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.437

Like his impressionist contemporaries in this period, Whistler was interested in depicting public life in the modern city, here in an important public garden in Paris. These spare pictures use a nuanced approach that suggests, rather

than fully describes, the subject, and in them he uses a remarkable range of touches. Here a combination of manmade structures and luxuriant foliage is delicately softened by an innovative use of the stump.

*Nursemaids: "Les Bonnes du Luxembourg"*

1894

Transfer lithograph

Second state of two (Way 48; Chicago 81)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.443

During the time that Whistler spent in Paris in the early 1890s, he worked in lithography and etching, in several instances rendering the same subject in both media. This is often the case with his views in the Luxembourg Gardens that feature groups of women and children, shown either on the terrace overlooking the gardens or along the paths bordering the large basins and fountains. For this lithograph, Whistler executed a nearly identical etched scene that incorporates the same arc of pathway, though oriented in the other direction due to the reversal of the image that occurs when printing etchings.

The formal arrangement of the Luxembourg Gardens' statuary, trees, and walkways provided Whistler with a visual structure against which to situate his figures. He used the untouched paper to evoke the white gravel walk surrounding the large basin. Images of women and nursemaids attending young children provide a touching domestic character to these scenes in a large public garden.

*Conversation Under the Statue, Luxembourg Gardens*

1893

Transfer lithograph with stumping

Only state (Way 44; Chicago 69)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.438

This scene in the Luxembourg Gardens does not focus on the geometry of its formal basins and walkways, but rather on a quiet part of the park where groups of people are gathered at the foot of a statue. Two seated women engaged in quiet conversation are seen from behind, as if the viewer has just strolled into their small cul-de-sac. Peripheral details are suppressed, as is often the case in these Paris prints, and the intimacy of the scene is underscored by the softness of the foliage in the background. This fine impression is another work that came from Queen Victoria's collection at Windsor Castle.

*La Belle Dame Paresseuse*

1894

Transfer lithograph

Only state (Way 62; Chicago 98)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.449

Upon seeing the proof of this print, Whistler claimed it was one of his most beautiful: "fair and silvery" and with velvety blacks that rivaled those of drypoint burr, it seemed to him to have the character of a charcoal drawing "more than anything that had ever been printed." This portrait of Whistler's wife seated on a couch resting her head on her hand is, in fact, a harbinger of great sorrow. After Beatrix's diagnosis of cancer in Paris in 1894, Whistler took her to several doctors hoping for a different diagnosis and eventually brought her back to London for her final months. Though the title, which translates as the beautiful lazy woman, implies that the figure is merely idling away her time, this is not the case.

*Unfinished Sketch of Lady Haden*

1895

Lithograph with scraping

Second state of three (Way 143; Chicago 116)

Gift of the Family of Albert Kahn: through Dr. Edgar A. Kahn; Mrs. Barnett Malbin; Mrs. Martin L. Butzel, 1973/1.735

After the rupture with Seymour Haden in 1867, it proved difficult for Whistler and the rest of his family to maintain contact with his sister, Deborah, and the siblings often resorted to subterfuge, meeting at friends' houses without her husband Seymour's knowledge. Despite the perhaps ironically intended formality of describing his sister in the title to this print as Lady Haden (Haden was knighted in 1894 for his role in the etching revival), this is clearly a very private image, tenderly depicting Deborah at the age of sixty-nine.

*Needlework*

1896

Transfer lithograph

Only state (Way 113; Chicago 149)

Gift of Ruth W. and Clarence J. Boldt, Jr., 2008/2.390

The carefree years of Whistler's marriage came to an end when Beatrix was diagnosed with cancer in 1894. As the disease progressed, members of her family would sit with her while she slept or keep her company when she was awake. This lithograph, most likely sketched by Whistler in January or February of 1896, shows the youngest of the Philip sisters, Rosalind, doing needlework at her sister's side. We may read in this image the pathos of Whistler's life during his wife's terminal illness. However, like most of Whistler's work, it suggests feelings and ideas without telling a specific story; it also demonstrates superb technical finesse.

Rosalind was quite a young woman when Beatrix died, and she became Whistler's ward following her sister's death, living with her brother-in-law and becoming the executrix of his estate; when he died in 1903, Rosalind was responsible for the disposition of his art work, including posthumous printings of plates and the sales of the many works still in his possession at the time of his death.

*Vitré—The Canal*

1893

Transfer lithograph with stumping

Only state (Way 39; Chicago 63)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.435

The Whistlers traveled to Brittany during the summer of 1893, and the lithographs that resulted from that trip were among the artist's most innovative. *Vitré* was one of the first in which he experimented with soft crayons and very fine-grained transfer paper in conjunction with stumping. The capacity of stump to further soften lines allowed Whistler to create delicate tonal ranges in lithography that correspond to the soft networks of minute lines that characterize his Amsterdam etchings.

When the drawing arrived in London, the printer Way and his associates were surprised to see this use of stump on lithographic paper and doubted that it could be successfully transferred to a stone. Whistler, too, feared that the image was too amorphous and would appear "coarse" when transferred. The Ways, however, were able to capture all the subtlety and nuance of Whistler's drawing and he was delighted with the results. After this first success, Whistler often incorporated stump in his lithographs.

*The Forge, Passage du Dragon*

1894

Transfer lithograph with stumping

Third state of four (Way 72; Chicago 102)

Gift of Mr. & Mrs. David P. Tunick, 1992/1.143

The theme of a forge returns in this late work, although here the focus is not on figures illuminated by a furnace in a dark interior but on figures silhouetted against the darkness of the interior. This forge was in a district of copper-, tin-, and ironworkers off the rue de Rennes in Paris, an area demolished early in the twentieth century. The image is

divided into three horizontal strata: the lower zone of the street, the flickering forms seen against the enveloping darkness, and the lovely domestic vignette above.

*Café Corazza, Palais Royal*

circa 1892–93

Etching

Only state (Kennedy 436)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.409

Whistler's long-standing interest in focusing only on the essentials of a motif, which he described as the secret of drawing, is in evidence here. In *Café Corazza* he evokes a whole through an understated partial representation, creating a delightful and abstract play of pattern out of the building facade. This noted café in the Palais Royal in Paris is rendered by the merest description of its doorway and flanking windows. The image is divided into three parts by the trunks of the trees that are closest to the viewer, almost like a Japanese folding screen. The bottom of the plate is untouched, lending the image a floating character that also recalls Japanese art.

*Blue and Silver: The Thames*

1882

Watercolor

Private collection

Whistler had long sought to translate into lithography the kind of nuanced atmospheric effects seen in this fresh and expansive watercolor of the Thames from the early 1880s; he masterfully achieved his objective in the adjacent lithograph.

T

hough Whistler had a vigorous antipathy to Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), possibly the most important British painter and watercolorist of the time and an artist whom Whistler perhaps saw as a rival to his claim to being the painter of the century, this watercolor shares many qualities found in Turner's luminescent landscapes, including the low horizon line and the majestic sweep of sky populated by clouds described with the most delicate and sparest touches of color. The view was painted from the offices of Edward W. Godwin (1833–1886), the architect who had built Whistler's celebrated White House in Chelsea; Whistler lost both the house and the collections of Asian art around which it was designed following his bankruptcy in 1879. Two years after Godwin died, Whistler married his widow, Beatrix.

*Draped Figure, Reclining*

1893–94

Transfer lithograph, printed in six colors, on laid Japan tissue

Second state of two (Way 156; Chicago 56)

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.468

This delicate lithograph shows how expertly Whistler combined the elements of his work to create the richest resonance among color, image, and medium. Working with the master printer Henri Belfond in Paris, he oversaw the color mixing and printing of this image himself, adjusting the color of each impression to harmonize with that of the paper being used—warmer hues on cream paper, cooler colors on white or ivory papers. This impression is particularly light and luminous; Whistler's ability to convey the diaphanous quality of the drapery is superbly matched to the translucent and gossamer quality of the paper.

*Nude Model, Reclining*

1893

Transfer lithograph with stumping

Third state of three (Way 47; Chicago 73)



Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.442

Reclining female nudes go back to Whistler's early work in the 1860s. Here the woman's sinuous form is animated through the use of drapery that creates a dark foil for the curve of her hip as well as a lilting line; stump has been used to soften the modeling of the figure. Whistler had explored the idea of adding lithotint to the image, but the Ways thought the delicacy of the work would be irreparably compromised, and it was printed without it, to the satisfaction of all.

*The Piazzetta, from Twelve Etchings, or the  
First Venice Set*

1879–80

Etching and drypoint

Third state of five (Kennedy 189)

The Alfred E. Pernt Memorial Fund in honor of Dr. of Technical Sciences, Max H. J. Pernt and his wife Anna Pernt (née Mueller), 1987/2.41

The Piazzetta in front of the Doges' Palace and immediately adjacent to St. Mark's Square is one of the most well-known public squares in Venice, but Whistler chose to depict it from an unusual vantage point: the column in the foreground masks the Byzantine domes of the cathedral and the very oblique view of Sansovino's Biblioteca Marciana obscures the identity of this familiar building. Indeed the only recognizable monument is the clock tower in the distance. This is as close as Whistler came to a standard view of the famous square.