

Whistler, Nature and Industry

Public symposium,
30th September– 1st October 2020,
The Hunterian, University of Glasgow

Peer through the fog in Whistler's *Battersea Reach from Lindsey Houses* – one of the earliest of Whistler's iconic 'fog' paintings – and a sliver of vibrant green grounds the view. This is the artist's garden by the Thames. Is nature here a riposte to the slagheap looming in the distance, or its accomplice? Victorians used ammonia-rich water from gasworks like those at Battersea to fertilise their lawns. And what of the women who stroll in the garden, parasols open like flowers: are they 'real' or hallucinatory? - or echoes of Japanese prints, those images felt to embody a perfect, pre-industrial, existence? Whistler's father was an engineer, the builder of railways for the Russian Czar, and nature and industry complement each other already in his son's early cartographical etchings for the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, and an etching of fields punctuated by telegraph poles. In the sulphurous vapour of *Battersea Reach from Lindsey Houses*, they physically co-mingle.

Taking its cue from these and other works featured in *Whistler, Art and Legacy*, a major exhibition at The Hunterian (11 June - 4 October, 2020) showcasing the unique riches of the University's Whistler Estate, the symposium will explore the relationship between nature and industry in his art and life. A sequel to our interdisciplinary *Whistler, Nature and Science* study day at the Fitzwilliam Museum in 2019, it will not only explore Whistler's family background in early 19th century industrial innovation, but ways in which his artistic vision may be linked to scientific debates of the period 1850-1914. To that end, our Plenary Lecture will be delivered by David Howes, Professor of Anthropology at Concordia University, Montreal, Director of the Concordia Sensoria Research Team (CONCERT) and author of landmark studies on the history, theory and culture of the senses. The symposium also marks the official launch of Prof. Margaret MacDonald and Dr Grischka Petri's online catalogue raisonné, *The Paintings of James McNeill Whistler*, an achievement that epitomises a sixty-year tradition of interdisciplinary approaches to Whistler scholarship at the University of Glasgow. This will be part of a dedicated session on current and future research on Whistler.

Glasgow's status as the first British city to purchase Whistler's art was, arguably, born of a spirit of enterprise that made it one of the leading industrial cities of the 19th century world. We welcome papers examining Whistler's relations with industrialist collectors such as William Burrell and F. R. Leyland, and that explore the collision or conjunction of nature and industry in his art, writings, and/or critical reception, whether in the form of case studies, or from wider historical, theoretical, or scientific/technological perspectives. This might include consideration of Whistler's achievements in the light of 19th century technological advances (e.g., communications networks/transport, and around the home), that led to the transformation or manipulation of the natural environment.

Papers should be 20 minutes in length. Posters are welcome for informal presentation during our planned session on current/future research. Please email proposals to the symposium organisers, Dr Patricia de Montfort and Prof. Clare A.P. Willsdon by 17th April 2020 (300 words max and indicating clearly whether a paper or poster is being offered). Speakers and poster contributions will be confirmed by 8th May. Bursaries are offered to cover the expenses of up to two UK-based postgraduate speakers/poster contributors.

Dr Patricia de Montfort,

History of Art/Research Curator for Whistler Studies, The Hunterian,
School of Culture and Creative Arts, 8 University Gardens,
University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QH, Scotland, UK.

E-mail: Patricia.de-Montfort@glasgow.ac.uk

Tel: + 44 (0)141 330 3268. Fax: +44 (0)141 330 3513

Prof. Clare A.P. Willsdon

Professor of the History of Western Art,
School of Culture and Creative Arts, 8 University Gardens,
University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QH, Scotland, UK.

Email: Clare.Willsdon@glasgow.ac.uk

Tel. +44 (0) 141 330 6331. Fax + 44 (0) 141 330 3513