

# Whistler, Nature and Industry

Online study day

Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021

The Hunterian & History of Art, 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 Tsar Nicholas I, 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 (9 July - 31 October 2021) showcasing the unique riches of the University's Whistler Estate, this online study day 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 explore Whistler's background in early 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial innovation and ways in which his artistic vision may be linked to scientific debates of the period 1850-1914. To that end, a 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.

We welcome papers that explore the collision or conjunction of nature and industry in Whistler's 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 no more than 20 minutes in length. Please email proposals to the event organisers, Dr Patricia de Montfort and Prof. Clare A.P. Willsdon by 1 July 2021 (300 words max). Speakers will be confirmed by 1<sup>st</sup> August.**

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