

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 13, 1995

CONTACT: Ruth Kaplan
Deborah Ziska
(202) 842-6353

HISTORIC RETROSPECTIVE OF ART BY JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER

OPENS AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, MAY 28, 1995

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The most important gathering of art by renowned American expatriate James McNeill Whistler since the memorial exhibitions of his work in 1904-1905 will come to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, after critically acclaimed showings in London and Paris. The Gallery will be the only venue in the United States for the exhibition, which will be on view in the West Building, May 28 through August 20, 1995. Among the 200 works presented will be the famous Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother (1871)--often referred to as "Whistler's Mother"--which has not been seen in the United States in more than a decade.

James McNeill Whistler is made possible by a generous grant from NYNEX Foundation, the philanthropic arm of NYNEX Corporation. Supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, the exhibition has been organized as a collaboration of the Tate Gallery, London; the Réunion des Musées Nationaux and the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, and the National

-more-

whistler . . . page 2

Gallery of Art, Washington.

"Thanks to the magnanimity of the many lenders and NYNEX, visitors to Washington will have the rare opportunity of seeing the astonishing breadth of Whistler's genius," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "This historic exhibition of paintings, watercolors, pastels, and prints from public and private collections on both sides of the Atlantic will illustrate why Whistler was one of the most influential figures in the visual arts of the nineteenth century."

"As an international company, NYNEX Foundation is delighted to help bring these treasures to the nation's capital for the enjoyment of visitors from around the world," said Suzanne DuBose, executive director, NYNEX Philanthropy.

In addition to James McNeill Whistler, the Gallery will present Prints by James McNeill Whistler and His Contemporaries, June 16 through September 24, 1995. Two other shows of works by Whistler will be on view in Washington during the summer months. They are In Pursuit of the Butterfly: Portraits of James McNeill Whistler at the National Portrait Gallery, April 7 through August 13, and Whistler & Japan at the Freer Gallery of Art, May 14 through December 31, 1995.

Whistler was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1834, the son of Major George Washington Whistler, a civil engineer. In 1843 the Whistler family moved to Russia. James attended drawing classes at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg

-more-

whistler . . . page 3

while his father worked on the railroad for Czar Nicholas I. In spite of James' ambition to be an artist he later went to West Point military academy, leaving after three years. By 1855 he was in Paris where he continued his art training and came in contact with Courbet, leader of the realist avant-garde. In 1859 he moved to London but, particularly in the 1860s, shuttled constantly between London and Paris forming a bridge for the ferment of new ideas developing in the two capitals. He died in London in 1903.

The exhibition at the National Gallery will survey every aspect of Whistler's career: his early realist seascapes and genre scenes, innovative experiments with Japanese motifs of the mid-1860s, beautifully restrained and elegant portraits of the early 1870s, decorative designs associated with the rise of the aesthetic movement, the famous nocturnes and Venetian pastels, and intimate sketches of shop fronts, seascapes, and female nudes of the 1880s and 1890s.

There will be sixty-four paintings on view, including the Detroit Institute of Arts' Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket (1875), which the prominent nineteenth-century English critic John Ruskin attacked as "a pot of paint" flung in the public's face.

Whistler is considered by many to be the greatest etcher since Rembrandt. Among his etchings will be Jo (1861), from the The New York Public Library, regarded as one of the artist's most

whistler . . . page 4

dazzling portraits. Lithographs will include two poignant portraits of Whistler's wife Beatrice in her last days, The Siesta (1896) from the collection of Paul E. Walter, and By the Balcony (1896) from the National Gallery of Art.

More than eighty drawings and sketches will represent all stages of Whistler's career, with subjects ranging from intimate portraits and interiors to outdoor scenes, such as Canal, San Cassiano (1879-1880), from the Westmoreland Museum of Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

The curators of the exhibition are Richard Dorment, writer and critic; Margaret F. MacDonald, research fellow at the Centre for Whistler Studies, the University of Glasgow; Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., curator of American and British paintings and deputy senior curator of paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington; and Geneviève Lacambre, conservateur général du patrimoine at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

The exhibition catalogue contains 205 color and 128 black and white illustrations, a chronology, and essays on the artist's life written by the curators, as well as contributions by Cikovsky, Lacambre, and Ruth E. Fine, curator of modern prints and drawings, National Gallery of Art. The book will be available in softcover for \$29.95 and hardcover for \$75.00 in the National Gallery of Art shops in late May.

For information about special appointment tours of James McNeill Whistler, call (202) 842-6247. For information about

whistler . . . page 5

lectures and other programs related to the exhibition, call (202) 842-6680. The National Gallery of Art is open to the public free of charge Monday through Saturday, 10 to 5, and Sunday, 11 to 6. For general information, call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) line at (202) 842-6176, weekdays, 9 to 5.

#