

**Whistler's Woman in White: Joanna Hiffernan**  
**The Jillian and Arthur M. Sackler Wing of Galleries**  
**26 February – 22 May 2022**

Supported by



*Whistler's Woman in White: Joanna Hiffernan* will be the first exhibition to examine the important role played by the Irish-born model Joanna Hiffernan (1839?–1886) in establishing the reputation of the American artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) as one of the most influential artists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Consisting of over 70 works, the exhibition will bring together nearly all of Whistler's depictions of Hiffernan, and will include paintings, prints, drawings, and related art works and ephemera. *Whistler's Woman in White: Joanna Hiffernan* will explore the pair's professional and personal relationship over more than 20 years and examine how the artwork resulting from their collaboration has influenced and resonated with artists into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The exhibition will be arranged thematically in six sections. *London in the 1860s* will feature depictions of London including Whistler's *Wapping*, 1860-64 (National Gallery of Art, Washington) and other paintings from the 1850s and 1860s by British artists that portray the theme of the woman in white in various archetypal guises, including Dante Gabrielle Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domine!* [*The Annunciation*], 1849-50, (Tate, UK).

The following section, *Symphonies in White*, will be devoted to the artistic collaboration between Whistler and Hiffernan in the 1860s. A key highlight will be Whistler's three *Symphony in White* paintings that are rarely shown together: *Symphony in White, No. I: The White Girl*, 1862, (National Gallery of Art, Washington), *Symphony in White, No. II: The Little White Girl*, 1864, (Tate, UK) and *Symphony in White, No. III*, 1865-67, (Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham). This section will also include other important images of Hiffernan from 1860 to 1866, the period when the young American artist was forging a reputation as one of the most innovative artists of his generation.

*Whistler and Hiffernan: The Prints* will demonstrate Whistler's skills as a printmaker, especially in his exquisitely nuanced images of Hiffernan. The following section will examine the influence of Japonisme on Whistler, in works such as his *Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks*, 1864, (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia), which shows Hiffernan wearing a kimono and surrounded with Asian objects from Whistler's collection. Items from Whistler's porcelain collection and Woodblock prints such as *The Banks of the Sumida River*, 1857, by Utagawa Hiroshige (Victoria and Albert Museum) will also be included.

*Whistler and Courbet* will present the works of Gustave Courbet, who painted Hiffernan when she and Whistler joined Courbet in 1865 in Trouville, Normandy. Whistler's restrained, atmospheric seascapes will be contrasted with Courbet's more robust 'paysages de mer'. Several of Courbet's depictions of Hiffernan will also be presented, including *Jo, La Belle Irlandaise*, 1865–66, (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

Whistler and Hiffernan's legacy will be revealed through the final section entitled *Women in White*, which will include paintings from the late 1860s until just after the turn of the century by a group of international artists, many of whom knew Whistler and were directly influenced by his revolutionary treatment of the theme. Highlights will include John Everett Millais' *The Somnambulist*, 1871, (Private Collection), Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Hermine Gallia*, 1904, (National Gallery, London) and Andrée Karpelès' *Symphonie en blanc*, 1908, (Musée Des Beaux-Arts De Nantes, Nantes).

### **Biography of Joanna Hiffernan**

The third daughter of John Hefferman (Hiffernan), a school master, and Catherine Hannan was christened "Johanna" in Limerick, Ireland, in 1839. The family had emigrated to London by 1843. Joanna Hiffernan, possibly studying art and modelling, met James Abbott McNeill Whistler in 1860 and posed for *Wapping* in that same year. In March 1861 "Ann Hiffernan" was listed as Whistler's "wife", living in Greenwich. Work started on a full-length portrait of Hiffernan dressed in white, in Paris in December.

She posed for many works during the early 1860s for Whistler, from *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, 1862 and *Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks*, 1864 to *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*, 1864, and *Symphony in White, No. 3* in 1865. In the autumn of 1865, Whistler and Hiffernan joined Gustave Courbet in Trouville where Courbet painted Hiffernan. In the following year, Whistler made a will in her favour and gave her Power of Attorney while he was absent in Chile.

Joanna and her sister Agnes Hiffernan took charge of Whistler's son Charlie Hanson (b. 1870) and raised him. In 1879 Maud Franklin, by then Whistler's chief model and companion, accompanied Whistler to Venice leaving 'Auntie Jo' and Agnes to look after his son. After several months suffering from bronchitis, Joanna Hiffernan died in Holborn, with her sister, Agnes by her side, on 3 July 1886.

### **Biography of James Abbott McNeill Whistler**

James Abbott McNeill Whistler was born in 1834 in Lowell, Massachusetts. In 1842, the family moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, where Whistler studied drawing at the Imperial Academy of Science. In 1855 Whistler settled in Paris, where he studied at the Ecole Impériale et Speciale de Dessin, before entering the Académie Gleyre. He quickly associated himself with avant-garde artists, and was influenced by Courbet's realism, as well as the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch and Spanish schools.

In 1859 he moved to London, meeting Joanna Hiffernan the year later, where she became his model and muse. He achieved international notoriety when *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, 1862 was rejected at both the Royal Academy and the Salon, but was a major attraction at the famous Salon des Refusés in 1863. *Symphony in White, No. II: The Little White Girl*, 1864 was hung at the RA in 1865 and *Symphony in White, No. III*, 1865-67, in 1867.

During the early 1870s Whistlers' work exerted a strong influence on the Aesthetic movement's interior design. In 1877 the critic John Ruskin denounced Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, c. 1875 as being tantamount to "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." The artist successfully sued Ruskin for libel, but was awarded minimal damages and was declared bankrupt in 1879. After his bankruptcy, Whistler and Maud Franklin took refuge in Venice. Throughout the 1880s he exhibited his work widely and proclaimed his aesthetic theories in print and lectures.

During the late 1880s and 1890s Whistler achieved recognition as an artist of international stature. His paintings were acquired by public collections, and he received awards at exhibitions. He was elected to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, and received the Légion d'Honneur. In 1888 he married Beatrice Godwin, living between Paris and London. After his death in 1903, memorial exhibitions were held in Boston in 1904, and, in 1905, in London, Paris, and Rotterdam.

### **Organisation**

The exhibition is organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London and by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The exhibition has been curated by Margaret F. MacDonald, Professor Emerita and Honorary Professorial Research Fellow, University of Glasgow, in collaboration with Ann Dumas, Curator, Royal Academy of Arts, London and Consulting Curator of European Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and Charles Brock, Associate Curator, department of American and British paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

### **Accompanying Publication**

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with essays by the curators and leading scholars in the field.

### **Dates and Opening Hours**

**Press view**                      **Wednesday 23 February 10am – 1pm**

**Open to public:**                **Saturday 26 February – Sunday 22 May 2022**

10am – 6pm Tuesday to Sunday (last admission 5.30pm)

### **Admission**

From £17; concessions available; under 16s go free ([T&Cs apply](#)); Friends of the RA go free.

### **Tickets**

Advance booking is essential for everyone, including Friends of the RA. All visitors must have a pre-booked timed ticket to enter the building. Tickets can be booked in advance online ([royalacademy.org.uk](http://royalacademy.org.uk)) or over the phone (0207 300 8090).

### **Images**

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