



Large
Print

**Whistler's
Woman in White:
Joanna Hiffernan**

Sackler Galleries

To help you make the most of your visit to the Royal Academy, our large print exhibition guides are on display in the galleries - and also available as PDFs. For the latter, no app is required. They are freely available in each exhibition's section of our website. Simply download the file to your device, then read – or follow the below instructions to listen to the introductions and labels as you go round.

iOS devices

- On your iPhone, go to "Settings". Next, tap "Accessibility".
- Hit "Spoken Content", then tap the toggle switch for "Speak Selection" to switch it on.
- You can now customise the speech rate, default language and listen to an audio sample.
- After that, go to your iOS PDF reader, and open a PDF file.
- Highlight the text that you want to read and tap "Speak".

Android devices

- To use Google Text-to-speech on your Android device, go to “Settings”. Next, tap “Language & Input”.
- Select “Text-to-speech output”, and then choose Google Text-to-speech Engine as your preferred engine.
- You can now customise the speech rate, default language and listen to an audio sample.
- To hear items read aloud, tap the Select to Speak icon, then click on a specific word, or drag your finger across the screen to select a longer passage of text, and tap the play button to begin the text-to-speech playback. Alternatively, you can tap the play button to hear everything on screen.

Depending on your device, the following free apps may prove useful. But you won't need to download any app to read the PDF or listen to the introductory text and labels.

iOS devices – PDF Voice Reader Aloud

Another method to hear large print text read aloud on iOS devices is to use PDF Voice Reader Aloud – a text-to-speech app which you can download for free from the App Store. It offers 31 different languages and makes it easy to adjust the speed of speaking rate. Follow the steps below and start reading PDF files on your mobile.

- Get the application from the App Store.
- Open the PDF file inside the app.
- Tap the upper right corner to choose the languages, select the voice, hit the button left to the play button to adjust the speed of the speaking rate.
- Lastly, tap the play button to read the PDF out loud on iPhone or iPad.

Android devices – Voice Aloud

- First, download the free Voice Aloud app in the Google Play Store.
- Download the PDF version of the large print guide.
- Select the folder icon and navigate to the downloaded file.
- You will be prompted with a set of text import options.
- Click “Open file” once you have selected your settings and Voice Aloud will begin reading your file.

Whistler's Woman in White: Joanna Hiffernan

Sackler Galleries

26 February 2022 - 22 May 2022

Contents

Introduction	Page 3
London in the 1860s	Page 6
List of Works	Page 8
Symphonies in White	Page 16
List of Works	Page 18
Whistler and Hiffernan:	
The Prints	Page 28
List of Works	Page 30
Japonisme	Page 43
List of Works	Page 45
Hiffernan, Whistler and Courbet	Page 52
List of Works	Page 54
Women in White	Page 59
List of Works	Page 61

Exhibition supported by

TERRA
FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART

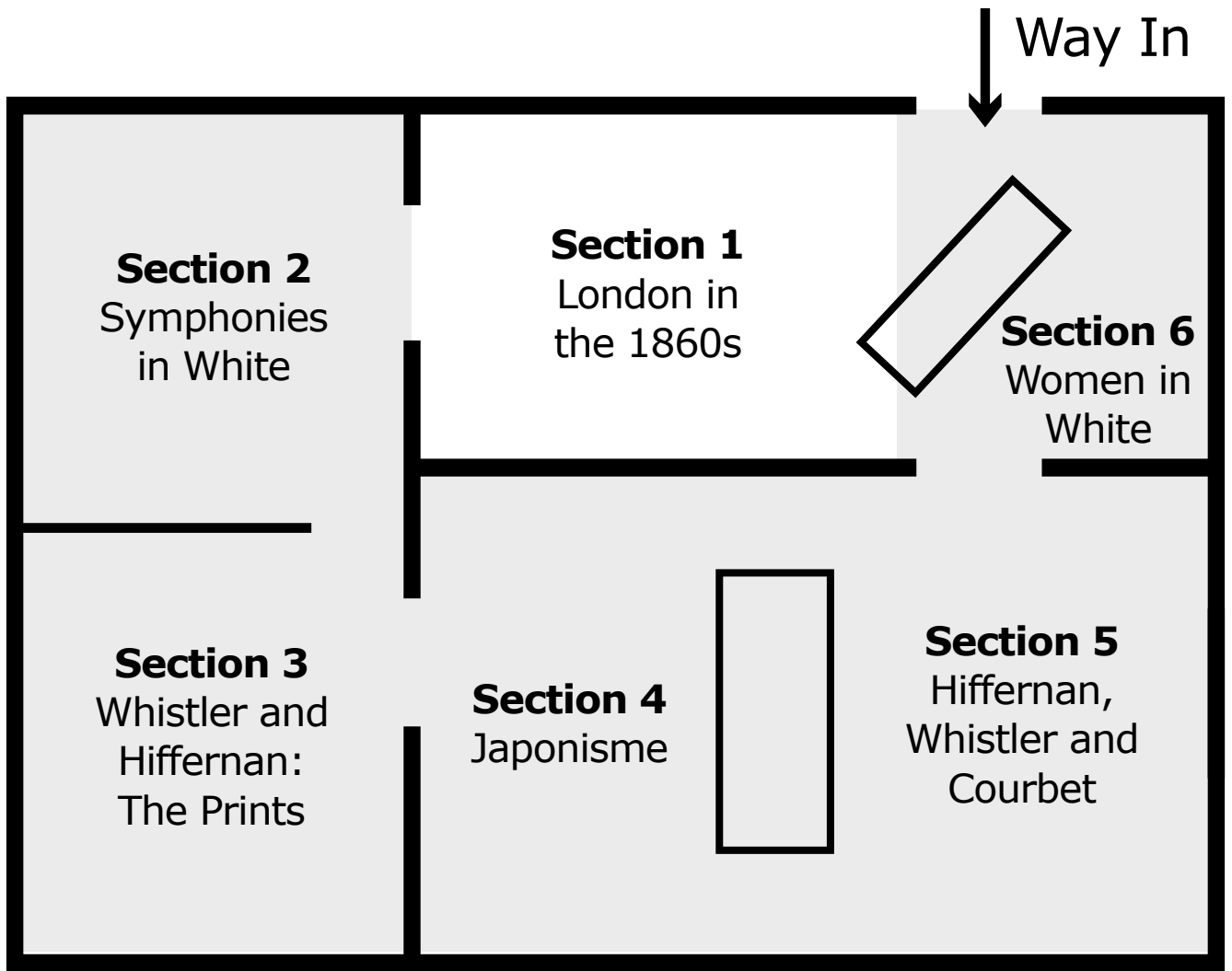


Please feel free to take
photos for personal,
non-commercial use.

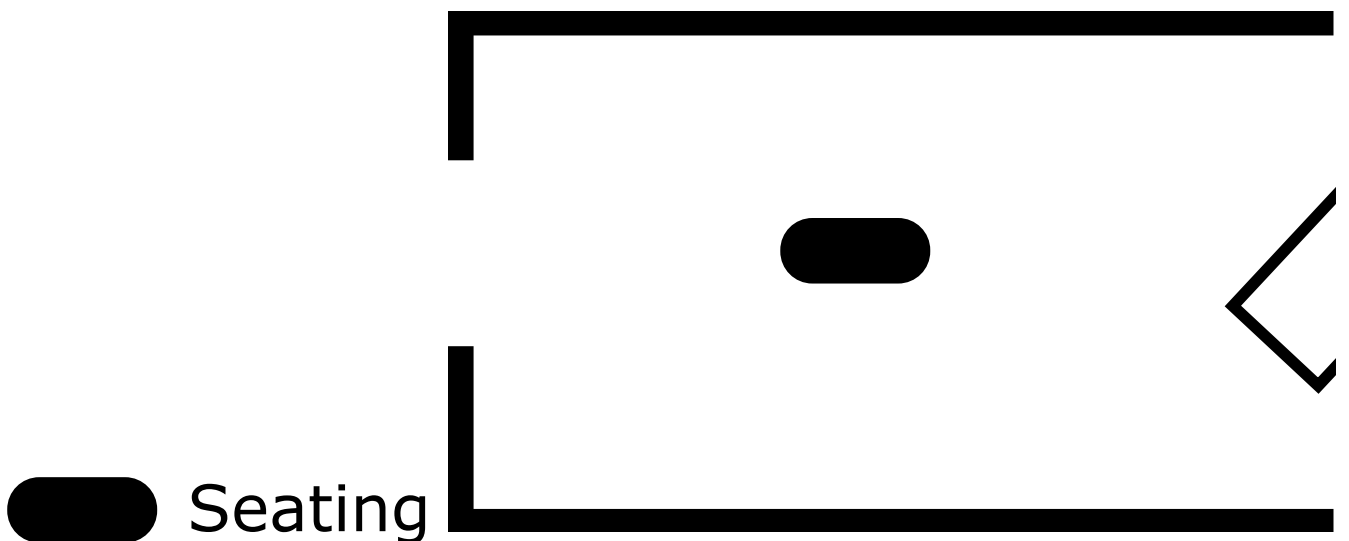
This exhibition has been made possible as a result of the Government Indemnity Scheme. The Royal Academy of Arts would like to thank HM Government for providing indemnity and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity.



Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport



London in the 1860s



Whistler's Woman in White: Joanna Hiffernan

Joanna Hiffernan was central to James McNeill Whistler's early years as an artist. His chief model, muse and partner throughout the 1860s, she remained his close friend until her premature death in 1886. This exhibition presents nearly all known images of her and explores, for the first time, the fruitful collaboration between artist and model and the remarkable works of art that this creative partnership produced.

In addition to oil paintings, including the three 'Symphonies in White', the exhibition presents intimate studies of Hiffernan in drawings and in the subtle and beautiful prints, of which Whistler was an acknowledged master.

Joanna, daughter of Catherine Hannan and Patrick Hiffernan, a schoolmaster, was baptised in Limerick, Ireland, in 1839, but by 1843 the family had joined thousands of poor Irish immigrants in Victorian London. James was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1834, son of Anna M. McNeill and G. W. Whistler, a railway engineer.

In 1855, Whistler left America to study art in Paris before moving to London, where, in 1860, the striking red-haired Hiffernan became his model and lover.

Dressed in white, she posed for Whistler's most celebrated portrait of her, 'The White Girl' (1861–63), which he later renamed 'Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl'. The ambitious young artist submitted the portrait to the Royal Academy's prestigious summer exhibition in 1862.

However, Whistler's emphasis on the painting's abstract qualities was totally alien to an audience accustomed to narrative painting. The painting was rejected but came to stand for a modernist view of art that proved a potent inspiration for many artists in Europe and America in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

London in the 1860s

Whistler arrived in London in 1858. He initially lived in respectable Sloane Street with his half-sister, Deborah Haden, but soon moved east to rooms near the docks and commenced a set of Thames etchings.

His friend the illustrator George du Maurier described him, in 1860, as “working hard and in secret down in Rotherhithe, among a beastly set of cads and every possible annoyance and misery”.

‘Rotherhithe’ (1860) shows two sailors or boatmen on the balcony of The Angel, a public house. From the same viewpoint, he etched ‘The Little Rotherhithe’ (1861), and painted Hiffernan in ‘Wapping’ (1860–64). He told his friend Henri Fantin-Latour: “She has the most beautiful hair that you have ever seen! a red not golden but copper – as Venetian as a dream!”

Another friend, the Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti, called 'Wapping' "the noblest of all the pictures he has done", while his brother William M. Rossetti declared Whistler "native to America, yet in such subjects so happily English".

Whistler forged strong links with artists in Britain, particularly D. G. Rossetti, whose radical revision of a religious subject, 'Ecce Ancilla Domini!' (1850), is often cited as inspiration for Whistler's 'White Girl'. A secular influence may have been the elegant simplicity and restraint of George Frederick Watts's 'Lady Dalrymple' (1851–53).

List of works

James McNeill Whistler

Battersea Reach

1862/63

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC Corcoran
Collection

Bequest of James Parmelee, 2014.79.35

In 1863, Whistler moved to 7 Lindsey Row in Chelsea, where he completed 'Wapping' and painted 'Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl'.

James McNeill Whistler

Study for 'Wapping'

1860/61

Pencil on paper, notebook in Whistler's leather-covered passport

University of Glasgow Library ASC, MS Whistler NB10

Hiffernan, with her long red hair and white dress, appears in the foreground of this view of the Thames, painted from the house one autumn evening.

James McNeill Whistler

Wapping

1860–64

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

John Hay Whitney Collection, 1982.76.8

Judging by a sketch in the notebook attached to his passport (displayed nearby), Whistler initially planned to paint a couple leaning on the pub balcony, looking out on the crowded waterway, but changed this to three seated figures, including Hiffernan and the French artist Alphonse Legros.

Her seductive expression and low neckline were modified before the 1864 Royal Academy exhibition, but some art critics were still concerned by the scene's lack of a story or moral.

James McNeill Whistler

Rotherhithe

1860

Etching and drypoint on ivory laid paper, 3 of 4 states

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC Gift of John

Nichols Estabrook and Dorothy Coogan Estabrook, 1987

James McNeill Whistler

Ratcliffe Highway

1859/61

Drypoint on pale grey wove paper, only state

The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:53567

Whistler was drawn to recording the lower depths of city life. Ratcliffe Highway was a street north of Wapping lined with seedy places to eat, gamble and dance as well as public houses and brothels.

The art critic Frederick Wedmore described these figures as foreign sailors and prostitutes, but they could equally be Whistler's companions.

James McNeill Whistler

The Little Rotherhithe

1861

Etching on Asian laid tissue paper, 1 of 4 states

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.8446

Jo

1861

Drypoint on ivory laid paper, only state

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Rosenwald Collection, 1949

Frederick Sandys

Gentle Spring

1865

Oil on canvas

The Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Presented by Captain R. Langton Douglas in memory of his son, Lt Archibald Douglas killed in action, 1916, 1923

George Frederic Watts

Lady Dalrymple

1850–51

Oil on canvas

Watts Gallery

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Ecce Ancilla Dominei! **(The Annunciation)**

1849-50

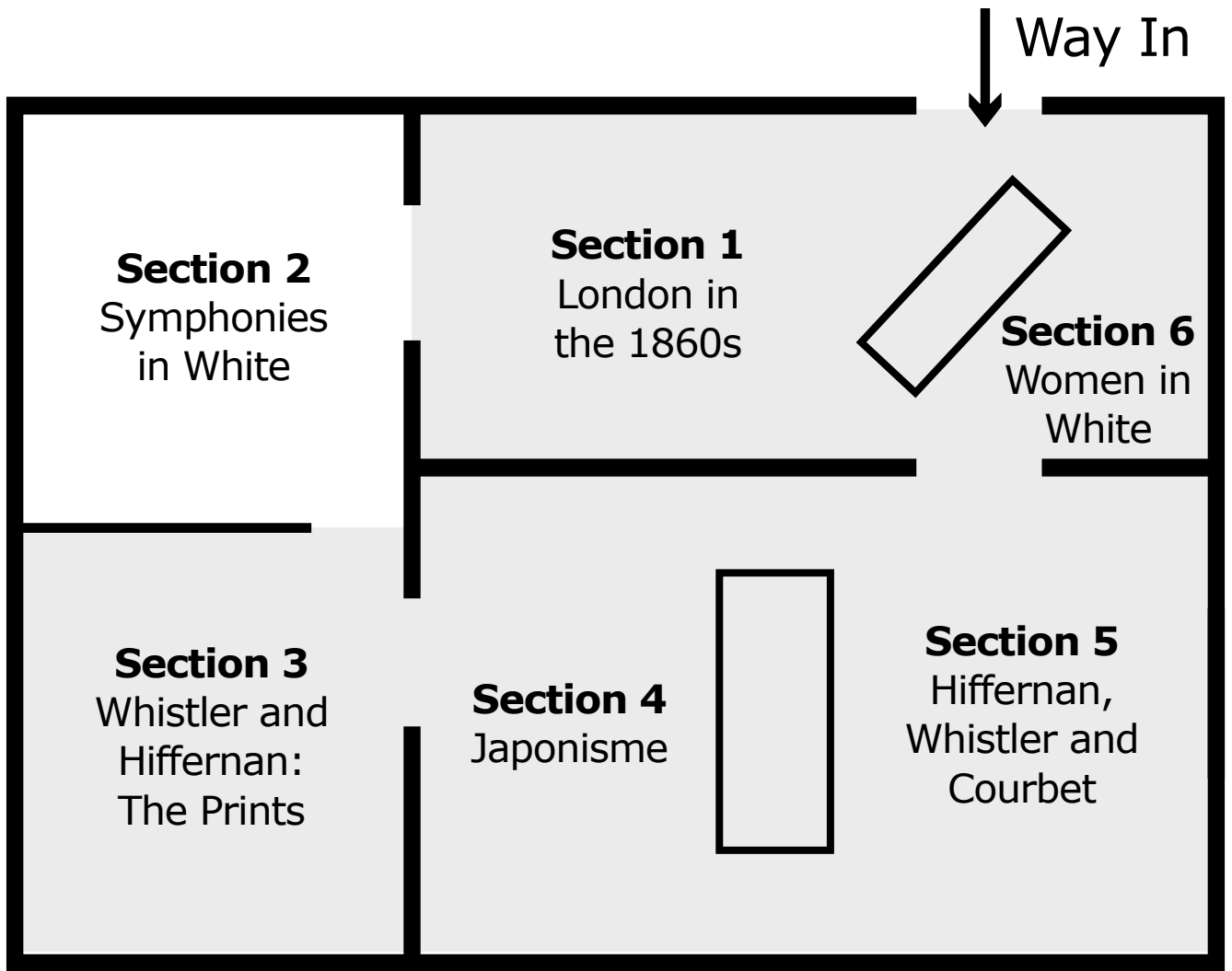
Oil on canvas

Tate

Purchased 1886

In a radical reinterpretation of the biblical story, Rossetti's Virgin sits rigid with shock, hair falling over her white nightdress, as the angel announces her transformation from chastity (symbolised by white lilies) to pregnant woman.

Whistler could have had his close friend Rossetti's unconventional painting in mind as he worked on 'The White Girl' over a decade later. The stark realism of 'Ecce Ancilla Domine!' unsettled viewers, as did Whistler's painting later.



Symphonies in White



Symphonies in White

Whistler's iconic portraits of Hiffernan, the three 'Symphonies in White', marked a turning point in his career.

He started 'The White Girl' (as it was originally titled) in December 1861 in a Paris studio and submitted it to the Royal Academy annual exhibition in May 1862. "The White Girl has made a great sensation – for and against," Hiffernan wrote. Rejected by the Academy, it was exhibited at the Berners Street Gallery as 'The Woman in White'.

The following year it was rejected by the Paris Salon and displayed in the Salon des Refusés, where one critic, baffled by the painting's lack of narrative and the white-on-white palette, deemed the model a "charming phantom".

In Whistler's second portrait of Hiffernan in white, 'The Little White Girl' (1864), she holds a fan by the Japanese artist Hiroshige and poses before a fireplace and mirror in Whistler's house at 7 Lindsey Row, Chelsea. The painting's favourable reception at the Royal Academy in 1865 encouraged him to develop the third and last of his white compositions.

In the third portrait in the series, Hiffernan reclines on a white sofa, accompanied by a professional model, Emelie Jones, also dressed in white. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1867 as 'Symphony in White, No. 3', prioritising colour and harmony over subject.

The title aroused considerable comment. One critic called it "an exquisite chromatic study", related to earlier 'symphonies' painted by Whistler. The two earlier paintings thus became known as 'Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl' and 'Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl'.

List of works

James McNeill Whistler

Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl

1864

Oil on canvas

Tate

Bequeathed by Arthur Studd 1919

Hiffernan posed wearing a fine white muslin dress, holding a fan featuring a colour woodcut by the Japanese artist Hiroshige. Her left arm rests on the mantelpiece, displaying a wedding ring, although she was not married. The fan and blue-and-white porcelain were part of Whistler's expanding collection of Asian artefacts, a passion shared by many contemporary artists. This aesthetic environment was a room in Whistler's house in Chelsea.

Poem by Algernon Charles Swinburne sent to James McNeill Whistler

4 March 1865

University of Glasgow Library ASC, MS Whistler S267

Letter from Algernon Charles Swinburne to James McNeill Whistler

2 April 1865

University of Glasgow Library ASC, MS Whistler S265

White rose in red rose-garden

Is not so white;

. . .

My hand, a fallen rose,

Lies snow-white on white snows, and takes no care.

. . .

Come snow, come wind or thunder

High up in air,

I watch my face, and wonder

At my bright hair

'Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl' inspired the Pre-Raphaelite poet Algernon Charles Swinburne to compose 'Before the Mirror', a poem "suggested to me by the picture, where I found at once the metaphor of the rose and the notion of sad and glad mystery in the face languidly contemplative of its own phantom."

Whistler was delighted and had the poem printed on gold paper and pasted onto the frame.

Bill from P. Hardy-Alan, Paris, to James McNeill Whistler

28 August 1862

Ink on wove lined paper

University of Glasgow Library ASC, MS Whistler H127

This account from the Parisian colour merchant Hardy-Alan lists the impressive range of materials that Whistler bought between 20 September 1861 and 28 February 1862: paper, chalk and charcoal, brushes, linseed oil and paints including Venetian red and yellow ochre, plus a large canvas acquired on 18 November. Finally, from 28 November 1861 to 10 March 1862, Whistler hired an easel suitable for the painting that became 'Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl'.

James McNeill Whistler

Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl

1861–63, 1872

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Harris Whittemore Collection, 1943.6.2

Hiffernan was well aware of the furore created by 'The White Girl in 1862'. "Some stupid painters don't understand it at all", she wrote, "while Millais for instance thinks it splendid, more like Titian and those old swells than anything he has seen – but Jim says that for all that, the old duffers may refuse it altogether."

Rejected by the Royal Academy and the Salon, it hung in 1863 at the Salon des Refusés, where the art critic Paul Mantz described it as a "symphonie du blanc".

Whistler later renamed it 'Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl'.

Study for 'Symphony in White, No. 3'

1865/67

Pencil and crayon on off-white laid paper

Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute,

Museum of Art, Utica, NY

James McNeill Whistler

Symphony in White, No. 3

1865–67

Oil on canvas

The Henry Barber Trust, the Barber Institute of Fine Arts,
University of Birmingham

Hiffernan posed with Emelie Jones, the model for Frederick Sandys's 'Gentle Spring' (displayed in the previous gallery).

Sandys wanted to paint Hiffernan, but Whistler refused to "lend" her. Whistler experimented with different poses and positions for the figures in preparatory drawings, sending one to his friend Henri Fantin-Latour (on view nearby). In 1867, the painting was taken to Paris and admired by several artists including James Tissot and Edgar Degas, who made a sketch of it (see next page).



Edgar Degas, Deux études de personnage féminin
(Sketch after Symphony in White, No. 3), 1867
Pencil on paper
Musée d'Orsay, Paris, RF5634-Ter14-folio9

Letter from James McNeill Whistler to Henri Fantin- Latour with sketch of 'Symphony in White, No. 3 '

16 August 1865

Pen and brown ink on cream laid paper

Pennell-Whistler Collection, Manuscript Division, Library
of Congress, Washington, DC

(continued over)

“This is where I have got to
very delicate grey background
[sketch]
white couch
very delicate light blue
Jo in a very white linen dress, the same
dress as the white girl earlier – the figure is
the purest I have done – charming head.
The body, legs, etc., can be seen perfectly
through the dress . . . fair hair, yellowish
white silk dress – what is known as
foulard – some dark purple flowers on the
ground next to the yellowish dress.

James McNeill Whistler

A White Note

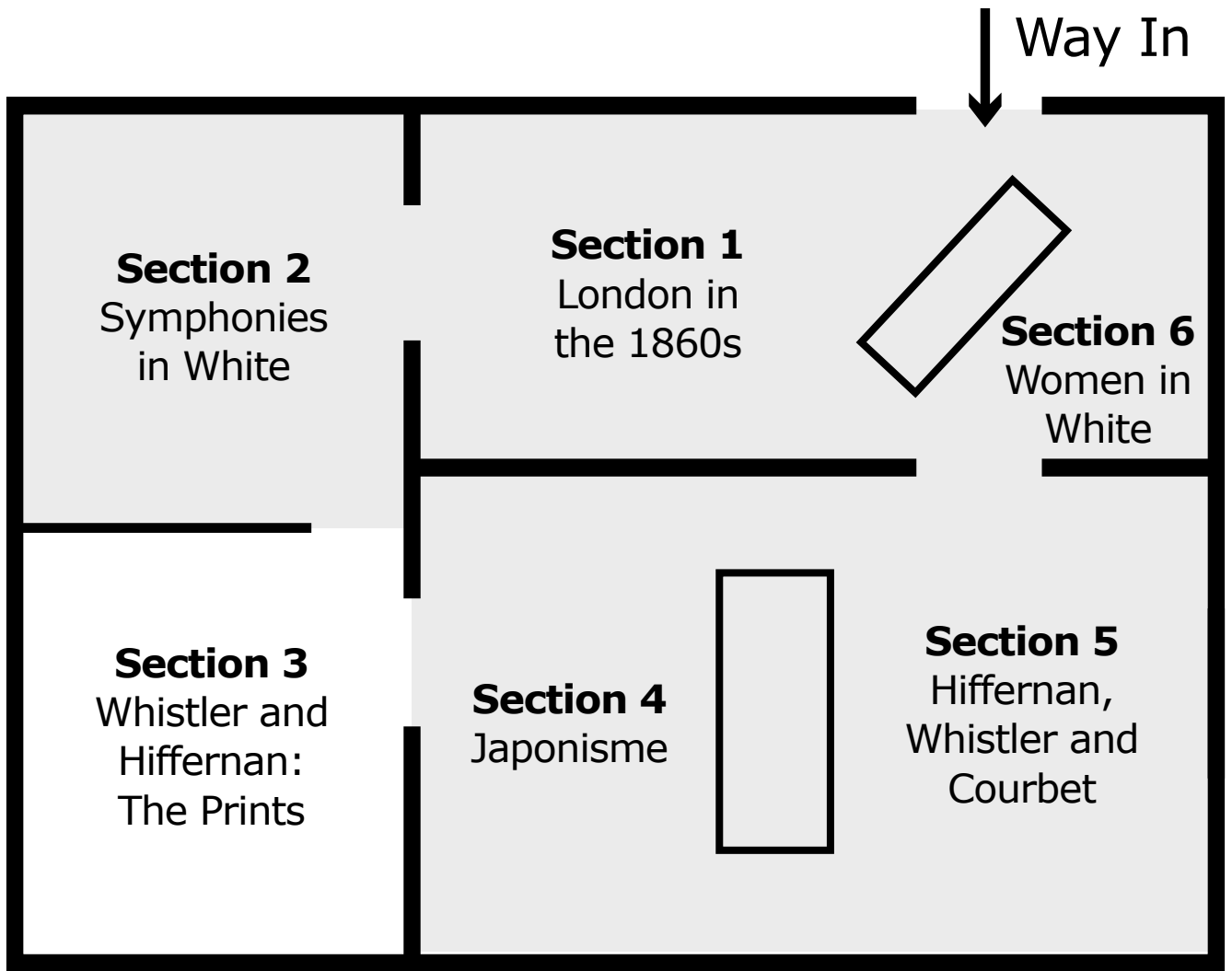
1862

Oil on canvas

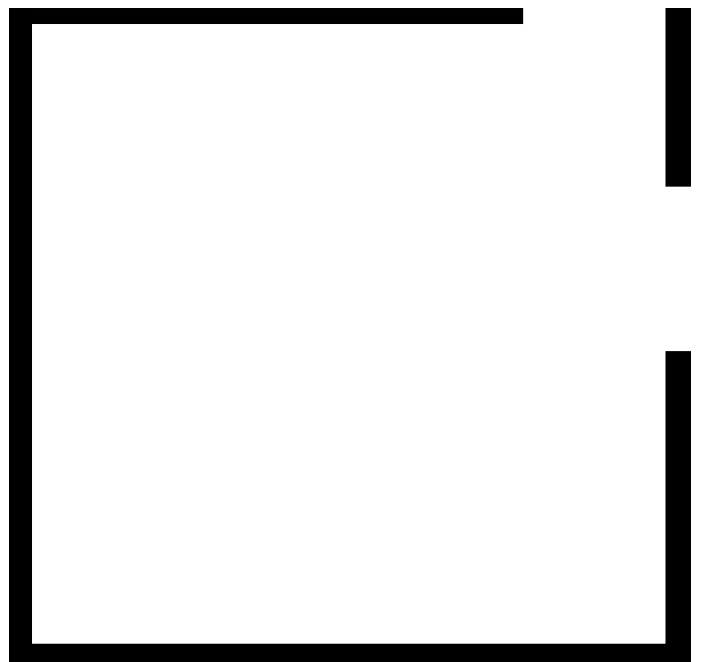
The Lunder Collection, Colby College Museum of Art,
021.2011

In 1862, Hiffernan and Whistler planned to visit Madrid to see the paintings of Diego Velázquez but stopped instead in the Basque Pyrenees in southwest France. Hiffernan posed en déshabillé, her abundant red hair loose around her shoulders, beside a window overlooking a rural landscape with a train in a distant railway cutting.

With the arrival of cold weather, they abandoned this painting and returned to Paris to complete the more ambitious *White Girl*.



Whistler and Hiffernan: The Prints



Whistler and Hiffernan: The Prints

Whistler was a major figure in nineteenth-century printmaking, creating 490 etchings and drypoints in all. He learnt to etch at the US Coast and Geodetic Survey in Washington, DC, in 1854, and his first set of prints was published while he was an art student in France.

By the time he was living in London, etchings were a significant aspect of his practice, and the 1860s marked a particularly productive period.

Many of Whistler's prints were based on the people and places around him; they included artists, family and friends, such as 'Fumette', Hiffernan's predecessor as model and lover; Josephine Durwend, alias 'Finette', a can-can dancer; and his half-sister, Deborah Haden.

To create an etching, a copper plate, covered with an acid-resistant ground, is smoked, producing a shiny black surface. Fine lines are scratched with a steel needle, which are 'bitten' by dipping the plate in acid. Ink is rubbed into the etched lines, and finally paper is laid on the plate and it is pulled through the printing press.

Where etching requires acid to bite into lines drawn by the etching needle, drypoint is more direct: the needle draws straight onto the copper, throwing up a burr that creates a fine or furry line, depending on the manipulation of ink and paper in printing. Mistakes could be burnished out, the plate reworked and reprinted to create a new 'state'.

Whistler used drypoint to create some of his finest portraits of Hiffernan, such as 'Weary', which shows her glorious hair spilling sumptuously around her like a halo.

List of works

James McNeill Whistler

Jo's Bent Head

1861

Drypoint on cream laid paper, 3 of 3 states

The Baltimore Museum of Art Gift of Blanchard Randall,
1941.239

James McNeill Whistler

Jo's Bent Head

1861

Drypoint on cream laid paper with Arms of Amsterdam
watermark, 3 of 3 states

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Rosenwald Collection, 1943

James McNeill Whistler

Jo's Bent Head

1861

Drypoint on cream laid paper, 3 of 3 states

Collection of the University of Michigan

Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.350

James McNeill Whistler

Jo's Bent Head

1861

Drypoint on tan laid paper, 2 of 3 states

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress,
Washington, DC

James McNeill Whistler

The Open Book

1861, cancelled and printed 1879

Etching and drypoint on ivory laid paper, only known state

The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:49940

James McNeill Whistler

Sleeping Woman

1863

Chalk and charcoal on cream wove paper mounted on paperboard

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Rosenwald Collection, 1948

James McNeill Whistler

Weary

1863

Drypoint and roulette on cream Asian laid paper, 4 of 6 states

Collection of the University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.353

James McNeill Whistler

Weary

1863

Drypoint on ivory Japan paper, 4 of 6 states

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Gift of Myron A. Hofer, 1947

James McNeill Whistler

Weary

1863

Drypoint on buff Asian laid paper, 4 of 6 states

The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:54093

Gift of Patricia Cornwell, 2001

James McNeill Whistler

Weary

1863

Drypoint on cream Japan paper, 5 of 6 states

The Art Institute of Chicago, Clarence Buckingham
Collection, 1938.1942

James McNeill Whistler

Weary

1863

Drypoint on cream Japan paper, 2 of 6 states

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of
Cambridge

Hiffernan sat for several drawings and drypoint studies for 'Weary'. It was largely completed in the first state but through five further states Whistler reinforced the fine lines, distinguishing the halo of lustrous hair.

Over forty impressions were printed, many on thin, glossy Asian papers. One hung at the Royal Academy in 1863 and another in Whistler's 1874 one-man show, interpreted as 'A "Portrait" of an apparently invalid lady of much beauty of countenance . . . exquisite in the delicate portrayal of the features and the contours of the bust and the figure.'

James McNeill Whistler

Kenneth and Lena Graeme in 'The Trial Sermon' and Joanna Douglas in 'The Trial Sermon' for 'Good Words'

1862

Wood engravings: black carbon ink on machine-made wove paper

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

After James McNeill Whistler

The Relief Fund in Lancashire,
The Major's Daughter, The
Morning Before the Massacre
of St Bartholomew, and
Count Burkhardt (for 'Once
a Week')

1862

Wood engraving; proofs

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1922, 22.
112.2-.5

Whistler drew illustrations to be engraved for popular Victorian journals. Hiffernan posed for five such illustrations, in subjects ranging from an appeal for aid for starving workers to moral tales and historical poems. They show Hiffernan's adaptability as a model and Whistler's skill as a draughtsman.

James McNeill Whistler

Brushing the Hair

1863, cancelled and printed 1879

Drypoint on ivory laid paper, only known state

The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:46766

Bequeathed by Rosalind Birnie Philip, 1958

The Hiffernan sisters were very close.

'Brushing the Hair' shows Joanna with her sister Ellen.

Later portraits, displayed nearby, include 'The Boy' – Charlie, the son of Louisa Hanson and Whistler, born in 1870 – and Joanna's younger sister, 'Agnes'.

Joanna undertook Charlie's upbringing, and they often stayed with Agnes in Thistle Grove. Agnes cared for Joanna in her final illness. In 1903 she attended Whistler's funeral with Charlie, where mourners mistook her for Joanna.

James McNeill Whistler

Agnes

1875/78

Drypoint on cream Asian laid paper, 3 of 3 states

Collection of the University of Michigan Museum of Art,
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.357

James McNeill Whistler

The Boy (Charlie Hanson)

1875/76

Drypoint on off-white laid paper, 6 of 8 states

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Rosenwald Collection, 1943

James McNeill Whistler's last will and testament

James McNeill Whistler's power of attorney

31 January 1866

Pennell-Whistler Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC

On 22 January 1866, Whistler's mother suggested that he should give money to "your Model . . . to promote a return to virtue in her".

Just over a week later, Whistler legally asserted his commitment to "Joanna Hiffernan of No. 7 Lindsey Row", by leaving everything to her in this will, while he travelled to Chile. At the same time, Whistler's power of attorney entitled Hiffernan to manage his affairs while he was away.

Although Whistler and Hiffernan never married, these documents mark a significant confirmation of their partnership.

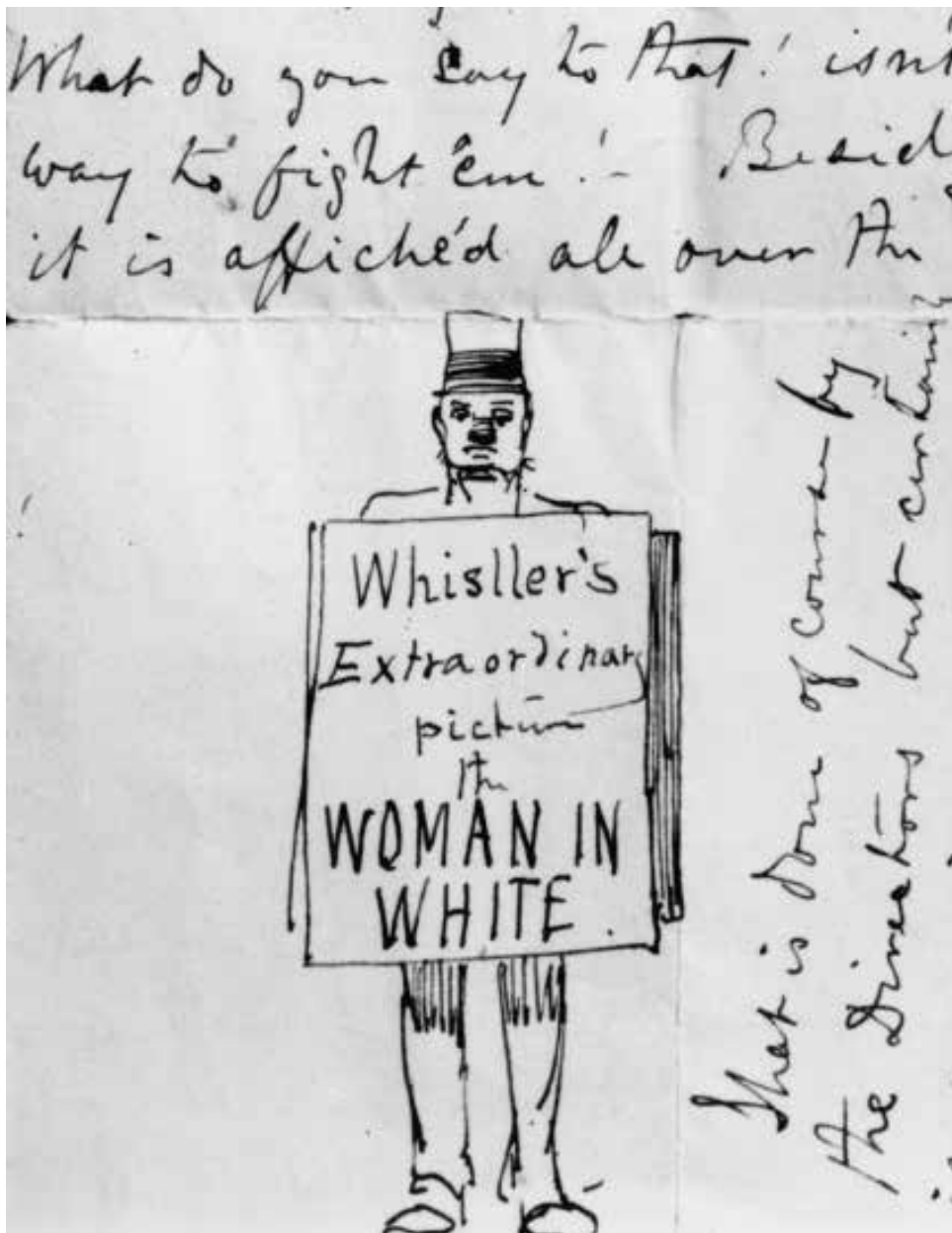
Whistler and Wilkie Collins

Rejected by the Royal Academy, 'The White Girl' was exhibited during the summer of 1862 at the commercial Berners Street Gallery.

A review published in The Athenaeum linked the picture with Wilkie Collins's popular 'sensation' novel 'The Woman in White', published in 1859.

Whistler emphatically denied the association: "I had no intention whatsoever of illustrating Mr Wilkie Collins's novel; it so happens, indeed, that I have never read it. My painting simply represents a girl dressed in white standing in front of a white curtain."

However, Whistler enjoyed the publicity, writing to his friend George A. Lucas that his picture had been advertised as 'Whistler's Extraordinary picture, The WOMAN IN WHITE', illustrating the point with a sketch of a sandwich-board man.



Letter from James McNeill Whistler to George A. Lucas,
26 June 1862

(detail, sketch of man wearing sandwich-board)

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, Gift
of John F. Kraushaar, 1925.539

Frederick Walker

The Woman in White

1871

Gouache on paper

Tate

Presented by Sir Claude Phillips in memory of his sister
Eugenie Phillips 1906

This life-size poster of a mysterious woman, dramatically seen from the back, was made to advertise a play based on Wilkie Collins's novel 'The Woman in White', which was performed at the Olympic Theatre, London, in 1871.

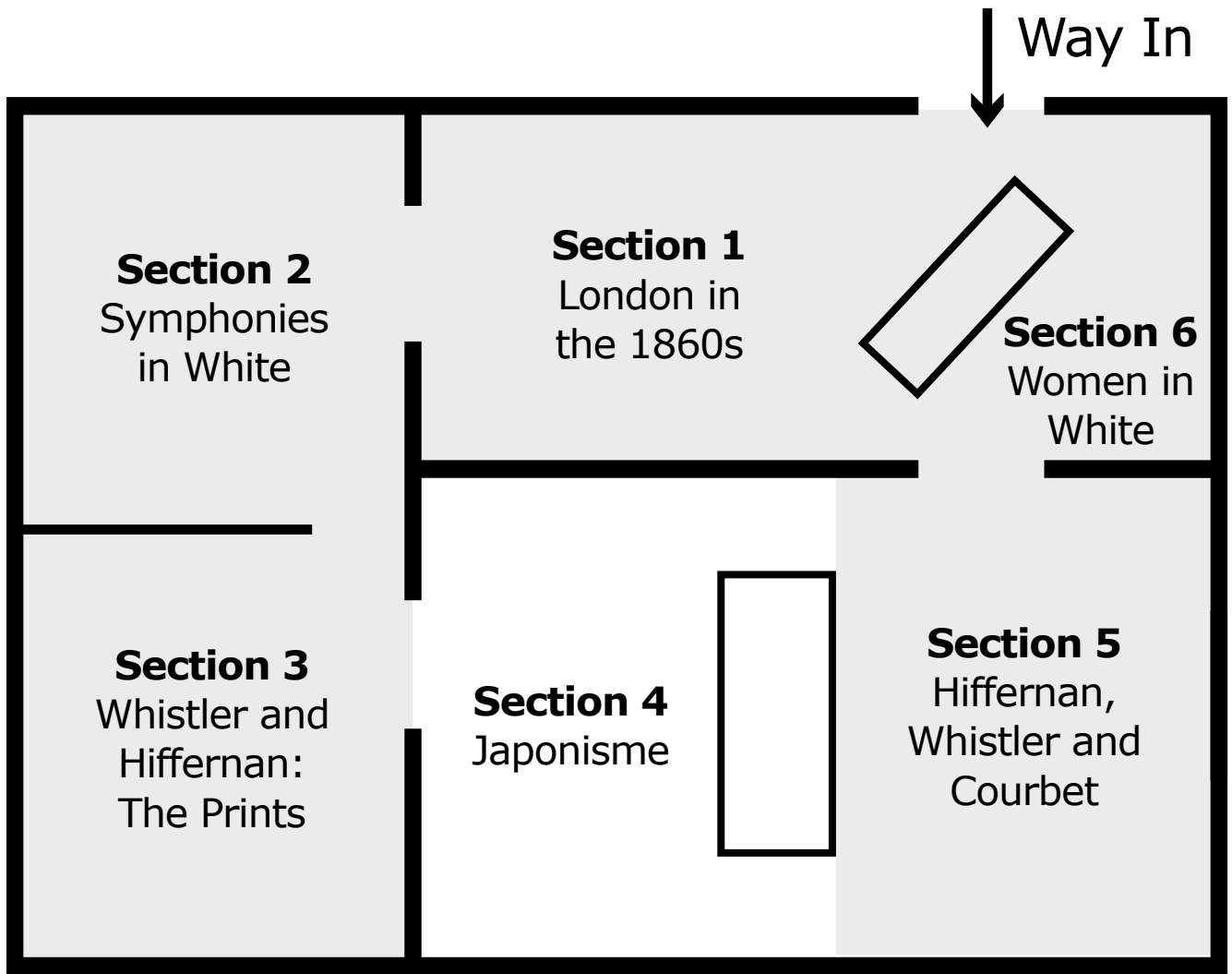
Wilkie Collins

The Woman in White

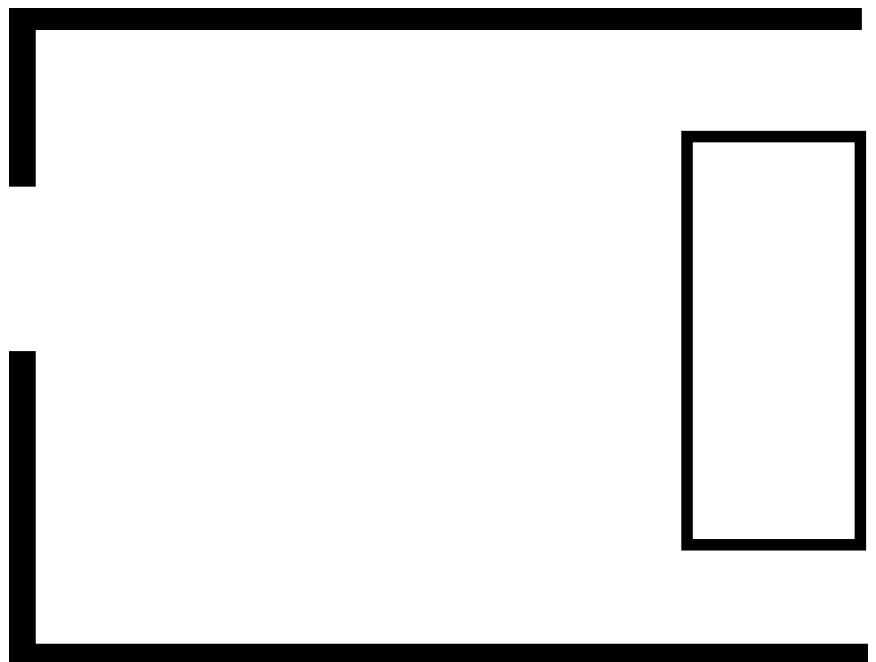
1861

Published by Sampson Low, Son & Co, London

The British Library



Japonisme



Japonisme

While living in London with Hiffernan, Whistler shared the general enthusiasm for collecting Asian art and design, writing in 1863 to a friend: “I have just come from another runaway journey into Holland and have ruined myself in old Japanese China!!”

Japonisme was often used as a blanket term to refer to artworks and curios from East Asia; Whistler could differentiate between objects from China and Japan, but many (including his mother), could not.

A growing collection of Asian art – prints, paintings, china, rugs, fans – adorned Whistler’s house, admired by fellow artists and friends, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, an equally keen collector. The Chinese porcelain in this gallery was originally owned by Whistler.

The prints by Hiroshige are alternative impressions of woodblock prints that are known to have been in Whistler's collection since they were included in paintings such as 'Caprice in Purple and Gold: The Golden Screen' (1864).

Whistler's collection often made its way into his paintings. Hiffernan appears in many of these japoniste works, wearing colourful robes and kimonos, in marked contrast to the white dresses in which she also posed.

List of works

James McNeill Whistler

Study of a draped reclining woman

1865/68

Pencil on off-white laid paper with watermark DEDB (De Erven de Blauw)

The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:46013

Bequeathed by Rosalind Birnie Philip, 1958

James McNeill Whistler

Draped figure seated, holding a fan

1865/68

Crayon on off-white laid paper with watermark DEDB (De Erven de Blauw)

The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:46014

Bequeathed by Rosalind Birnie Philip, 1958

James McNeill Whistler

The Artist in His Studio (Whistler in His Studio)

1865/72, 1895

Oil on paper mounted on panel

The Art Institute of Chicago,

Friends of American Art Collection, 1912.141

Hiffernan poses in her white dress, in a composition reminiscent of Velázquez's 'Las Meninas' (1656). Whistler combines Japonisme – including shelves of Chinese porcelain and a woman in a kimono holding a fan – with Aestheticism – emphasising “art for art’s sake”, without moral or narrative.

The pale, harmonious shades used in this painting, along with the sensuous yet apparently unposed figures, typify this style.

James McNeill Whistler

In the Studio

1865

Watercolour, gouache and black chalk on tan wove paper mounted on thick paper board

Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Merrill Fund, 51.223

James McNeill Whistler

Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks

1864

Oil on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection, 1917

Whistler described this painting as “filled with superb porcelain from my collection . . . It shows a porcelain dealer, a Chinese woman painting a pot.”

The figure, representing both artist and merchant, is Hiffernan. Whistler plays on the Dutch phrase lange lijzen, literally 'long lines' but commonly mis-interpreted as 'long Elizas', referring to the tall women on blue-and-white Chinese porcelain. The 'six marks' of the title are the potter's marks, giving the signature and date, and these decorate the roundels on the frame.

Saucer

17th/18th century

Chinese porcelain with cobalt blue underglaze

The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:57169

Bequeathed by Rosalind B. Philip, 1958

Plate

1662/1722

Chinese porcelain with cobalt blue underglaze

The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:54004

Bequeathed by Rosalind B. Philip, 1958

Vessel adapted for use as a caster

1662/1722, adapted 1850

Chinese porcelain with cobalt blue underglaze,
Dutch silver

The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA:57719
Bequeathed by Rosalind B. Philip, 1958

Utagawa Hiroshige

Suruga Province: Miho Pine Grove

1853

Colour woodblock print
Victoria and Albert Museum

Utagawa Hiroshige

Iyo Province: Saijô

1855

Colour woodblock print
Victoria and Albert Museum

Utagawa Hiroshige

Etchû Province: Toyama, Pontoon

1853

Colour woodblock print

Victoria and Albert Museum

Utagawa Hiroshige

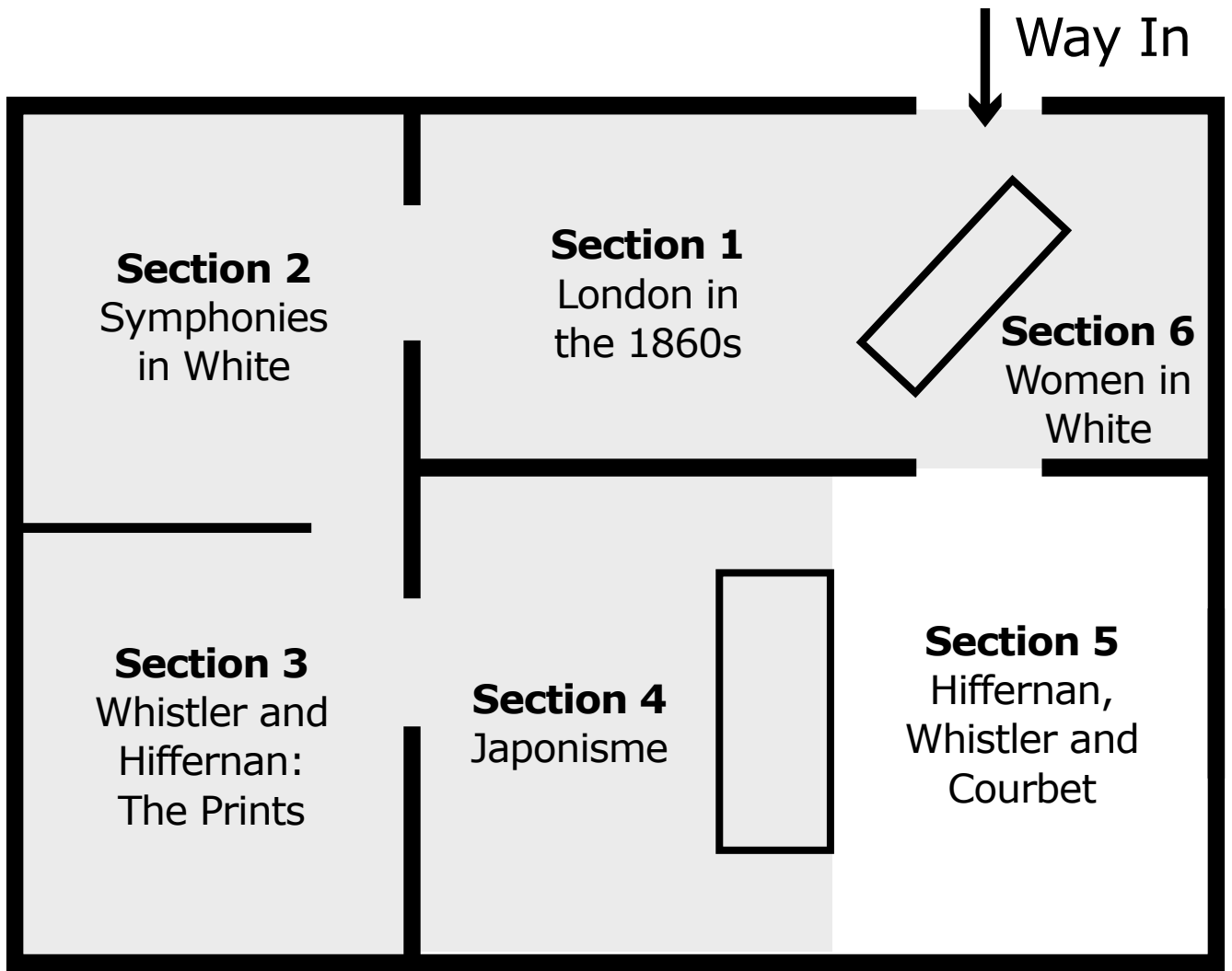
The Banks of the Sumida River

1857

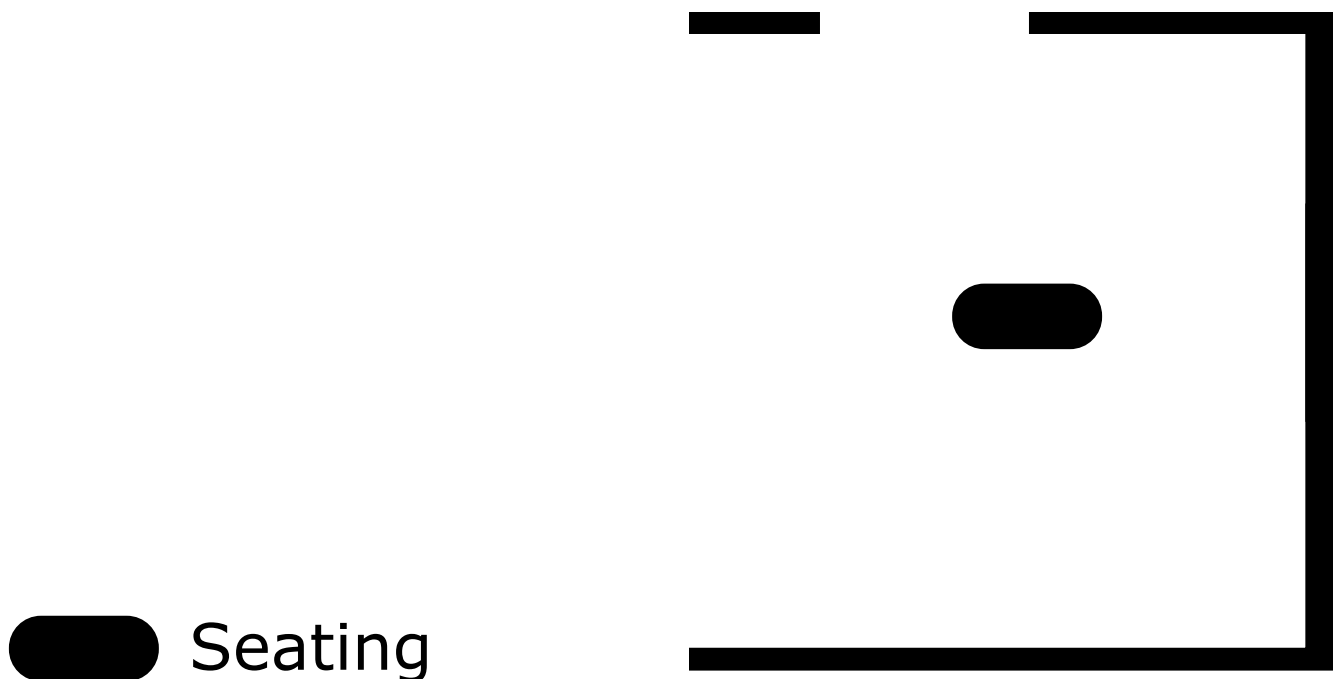
Colour woodblock fan print

Victoria and Albert Museum

This fan, made for the European market, is another impression of the one held by Hiffernan in 'Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl' (displayed in a previous gallery).



Hiffernan, Whistler and Courbet



Hiffernan, Whistler and Courbet

In the autumn of 1865, Hiffernan and Whistler joined Gustave Courbet at the Hôtel du Bras d'Or in Trouville on the Normandy coast. Both artists produced seascapes of unusual beauty, capturing the subtle shifts of light in sea and sky.

Courbet wrote to tell his father that he had painted "25 seascapes, autumn skies, each more free and extraordinary than the last", and later reminisced about painting "the space, the sea . . . to the horizon".

Courbet's technique is more robust than Whistler's evanescent veils of colour, but as they painted on the deserted beaches, their subjects and styles often converged. Courbet also painted Hiffernan, describing her as "a superb redhead".

In *Portrait of Jo, la belle Irlandaise*, he depicted her pale eyes and copper-gold hair with unusual care. He refused to sell the original but painted three copies for sale, each showing minor variations in detail and technique.

Opinions differ as to whether the version in Stockholm's Nationalmuseum is the original, or the more highly finished one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The latter is signed and dated 1866 and may have been painted or completed back in Paris with a different model.

Shortly before his death in 1877, Courbet recalled Hiffernan in a nostalgic letter to Whistler: "In the evening she sang Irish songs so well because she had the spirit and distinction of art."

List of works

Letter from Gustave Courbet to James McNeill Whistler

14 February 1877

University of Glasgow Library ASC, MS Whistler C196

Do you remember Trouville and Jo who played the clown to amuse us? In the evening she sang Irish songs so well because she had the spirit and distinction of art.

I remember . . . the hotel by the sea where we took baths in the icy water and the salad bowl of prawns in fresh butter without counting the cutlet at lunch which let us paint together the space, the sea . . . to the horizon, we paid ourselves with dreams and space.

I still have the portrait of Jo which I will never sell everyone admires it.

James McNeill Whistler

Green and Grey. Channel (The Sea)

1865

Oil on canvas

Montclair Art Museum Museum purchase, Acquisition Fund

Gustave Courbet

Jo, la belle Irlandaise

1865–66

Oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art,

H. O. Havemeyer Collection

Bequest of Mrs H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.63

Gustave Courbet

Jo, the Beautiful Irish Girl

c. 1866–68

Oil on canvas

Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

Gustave Courbet

Jo, the Irish Woman

c. 1866/68

Oil on canvas

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri

Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 32-30

Gustave Courbet

Calm Sea

1866

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Collection of Mr and Mrs Paul Mellon, 1985.64.10

Gustave Courbet

The Beach

1865

Oil on canvas

Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Cologne

Gustave Courbet

Low Tide at Trouville

1865

Oil on canvas

National Museums Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery

Purchased by the Walker Art Gallery with the assistance of the Art Fund 1961

James McNeill Whistler

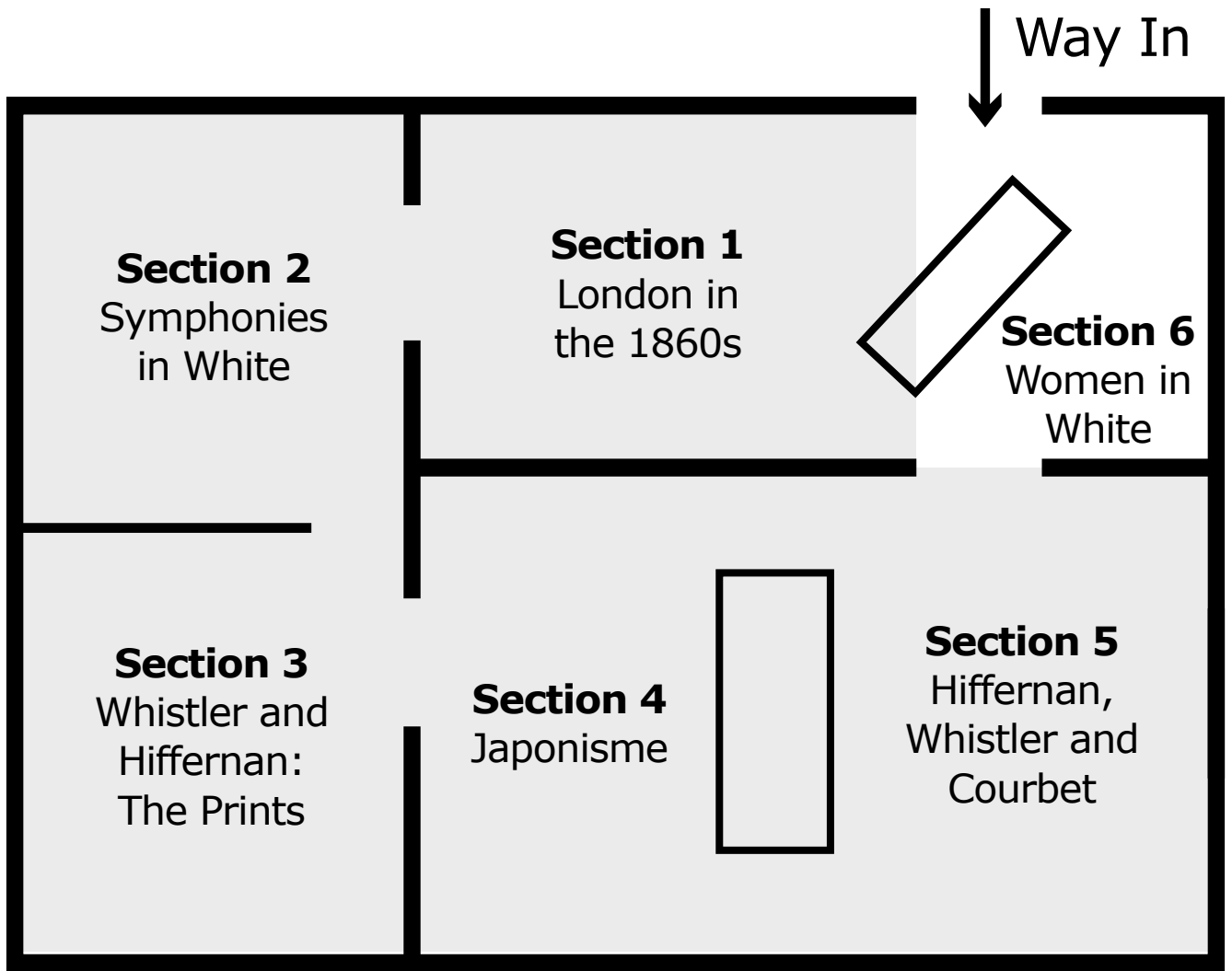
Sea and Rain

1865

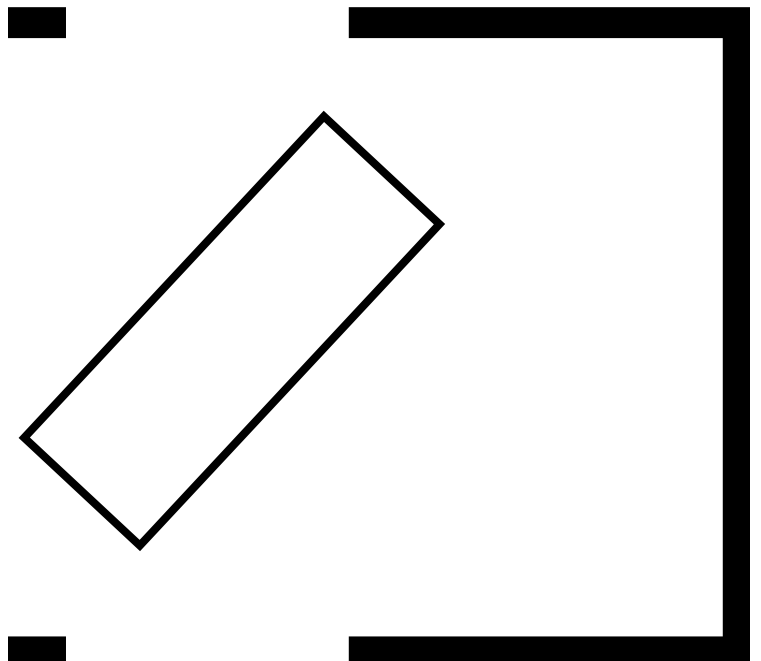
Oil on canvas

Collection of the University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Bequest of Margaret Watson Parker, 1954/1.89



Women in White



Women in White

Exhibited in Europe and America, Whistler's 'Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl' resonated widely in the late nineteenth century and beyond, inspiring many artists to tackle the subject of women in white against a white or neutral ground, with the different emotional and aesthetic registers that this implied.

Hiffernan herself recorded John Everett Millais's enthusiasm for the picture. Millais's painting of a girl in white, 'The Somnambulist' (1871), has obvious links to Whistler's portrait, both in technique and composition, but he takes the subject in a quite different direction with its implicit dramatic narrative.

Fernand Khnopff's 'Portrait of Madeleine Mabile' (1888), combines the simplicity of a near abstract setting with a limited, light colour scheme, and a contained, inscrutable model.

The American Albert Herter's 'Portrait of Bessie (Miss Elizabeth Newton)' (1892) directly quotes Whistler's bearskin rug and lilies.

Gustav Klimt's 'Portrait of Hermine Gallia' (1904) captures the high society sitter's elaborate white dress in a cascade of flickering brushstrokes.

One of the most strikingly direct homages, however, is Andrée Karpelès's 'Symphonie en blanc' (1908). Borrowing Whistler's lean abstraction and palette of creams and whites, the young painter pays tribute to the famous artist and his influential model.

List of works

Fernand Khnopff

Portrait of Madeleine Mabile

1888

Oil with pencil on mahogany panel

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh

Heinz Family Acquisition Fund, 93.120

Andrée Karpelés

Symphonie en blanc

1908

Oil on canvas

Musée d'Arts de Nantes

John Everett Millais

The Somnambulist

1871

Oil on canvas

Private Collection, Delaware, Courtesy of the Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DE

Millais greatly revered Whistler's art and particularly admired 'Symphony in White, No. 1'. However, the implied narrative in this scene distinguishes it from the emotional neutrality of Whistler's 'Symphony in White, No. 1'.

A barefoot woman in a nightgown, carrying a lantern in which the candle has blown out, sleepwalks along the top of a cliff, perilously close to the edge. A keen opera lover, Millais may have taken his theme from Vincenzo Bellini's romantic opera *La sonnambula* (1827).

Gustav Klimt

Portrait of Hermine Gallia

1904

Oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London

Bought, 1976

Hermine Gallia was a Jewish patron of avant-garde art and design in early twentieth-century Vienna.

Her fashionable white dress, though far more sophisticated than Hiffernan's simple gown in 'Symphony in White, No. 1', nevertheless suggests Klimt's awareness of the famous prototype.

Here, Whistler's animal rug and blue Chinese carpet are replaced by a modernist carpet with a geometric pattern that is possibly the work of Josef Hoffmann, whom the Gallias had hired to design their home.

Albert Herter

Portrait of Bessie (Miss Elizabeth Newton)

1892

Oil on canvas

High Museum of Art, Atlanta

Purchase with funds from the Margaret and Terry Stent Endowment for the Acquisition of American Art and High Museum of Art Enhancement Fund, 2000.162

Your feedback, please

As we are committed to access for all, we would like your feedback on our large-print provision. Feedback forms are available from the Information Desk on the ground floor.

We also offer one-to-one audio descriptive tours of the exhibitions with trained volunteer audio describers.

Wheelchair users can also benefit from our volunteers, who can assist with taking you around the galleries so you can enjoy our exhibitions at your leisure. With prior notice we can arrange these at a time that fits with your schedule. Please contact us for more information.

E: access@royalacademy.org.uk

T: 020 7300 5732



InTouch  **at the RA**

Design & typography by WfS Create: mail@wfscreate.com

© Copyright Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2022.