

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Glasgow
Unit of Assessment: D34 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
Title of case study: First online catalogue raisonné of Whistler etchings and techniques is used by artists and art professionals worldwide
1. Summary of the impact

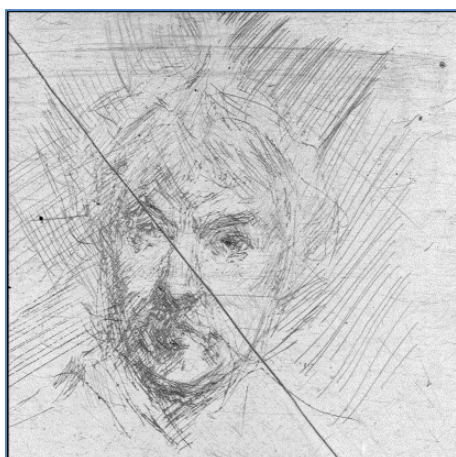
University of Glasgow research has delivered an online, searchable and fully annotated database providing unprecedented access to a comprehensive collection of etchings, drypoints and mezzotints by James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903). Access to over 5,000 images of 490 etchings and their copper plates accompanied by all documentary or published records has transformed understanding of Whistler's art and his techniques. This catalogue raisonné has received over 27,000 visits each month since it launched in October 2011 and is used by artists, curators, art critics and collectors, auctioneers and others in the UK and abroad. Consultations sparked by the catalogue's profile and authority have resulted in the authentication of key Whistler works for purchase at auction houses, including Sotheby's and Doyle's, and input to exhibitions in the UK and abroad.

2. Underpinning research

The research team, led by Margaret MacDonald (Honorary Professorial Research Fellow, 2011-2013; Professor, 2004-2011, 2013-), concentrated on establishing, illustrating and analysing the extent and nature of Whistler's oeuvre in the context of 19th century art and the art market. Whistler's technique and style, draughtsmanship, printing methods, use of inks and papers, were studied in detail, with input from printmakers, who were fascinated by Whistler's experimental techniques. New information on the publication of etchings, using print dealers' records, helped to establish the size and content of editions.



Studying the details in individual impressions, the team established the sequence of state changes during the creation of Whistler's prints, which is of particular interest to curators and dealers as well as collectors. For instance, 17 impressions of *The Dance House: Nocturne* (G.455, detail reproduced) were located and six states identified (whereas, in his 1910 catalogue, E.G. Kennedy recorded two states, in the wrong order).



The Etchings Project was carried out between 2004 and 2012 and aimed to include a wide range of impressions from major public and private collections, and art dealers in Europe, the USA and Asia. 96,500 impressions of Whistler's 490 etchings, drypoints and mezzotints were recorded. The entries on each etching are fully annotated and cross-referenced, and include relevant historical, bibliographical, biographical and visual material. Information from Whistler's *Correspondence* (10,000 documents and letters), published online in 2003, was linked to the Etchings website. High quality digital photographs of the etchings and scans of copper plates, plus digital images derived from the plates, were processed for research; 5000 images were published on the website. These included making virtual impressions

of previously unknown images, giving a much fuller and more accurate representation of Whistler's work than was previously available. For instance *Château pres Paimpol* (G.472) is the only known Paimpol subject and *Head of Whistler* (G.318, shown here) is a previously unknown self-portrait.

The project was the product of collaboration with numerous galleries, collectors and scholars in Europe and America, and benefited from advice from a distinguished Editorial Board and the

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assistance of students, interns and volunteers. After the initial major research grant from the AHRC, additional funds permitted new research (including the creation of virtual impressions) and extending the contracts for Research Fellows in Chicago and Bonn, enabling more coverage of international connections, including collections and archives in the USA and Europe, including at the Bibliothèque Nationale and in Munich.

The Research Fellows for the Etchings Project were MacDonald (full-time), Grischka Petri and Meg Hausberg (part-time 2005-11), Joanna Meacock (part-time 2005-08). The co-editors of the *Correspondence* were MacDonald, Patricia de Montfort and Nigel Thorp. The team included Graeme Cannon, computing consultant.

Research on Whistler was originally generated by generous gifts and bequests to the University of Glasgow, including works from the artist's estate, 1935-1958. Major exhibitions and a series of publications, including hardback catalogues raisonnés of Whistler's paintings (A McLaren Young, MacDonald, Spencer, Yale University Press, 1980) and watercolours, pastels and drawings (MacDonald, Yale University Press, 1995), plus the cataloguing by the Hunterian and University of Glasgow Library of their extensive collections of art works, letters, publications and photographs, formed a basis for current research and teaching.

3. References to the research

- MacDonald, M.F., Grischka Petri, Meg Hausberg, and Joanna Meacock (2011-12), *James McNeill Whistler: The Etchings, a catalogue raisonné*, University of Glasgow, online publication at [The Etchings: Catalogue Raisonné](#). [REF 2] Including online exhibition, [Whistler: The Gentle Art of Making Etchings](#)
- MacDonald, M.F., de Montfort, Patricia, (2013) *An American in London: Whistler and the Thames*, Dulwich Picture Gallery, Addison Gallery of American Art, Freer Gallery of Art/Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. ISBN-10: 1781300062 | ISBN-13: 978-1781300060 [REF 2]
- MacDonald, M.F. (2013), 'Collecting Whistler' in *The Lunder Collection: A Gift of Art to Colby College*, Waterville, Maine: Colby College Museum of Art, pp. 108-43, ISBN 978-0-9822922-5-9 [REF 2]
- MacDonald, M.F., (2013) 'James McNeill Whistler: The Etchings, a Catalogue Raisonné', in *Palaces of Art: Whistler and the Art Worlds of Aestheticism*, ed. Lee Glazer and Linda Merrill, The Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC : Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2013; ISBN 978-1-935623-29-8 print book, 978-1-935623-31-1 online edition. DOI: [10.5479/si.9781935623311.0](https://doi.org/10.5479/si.9781935623311.0) [available from HEI]
- MacDonald, M.F., de Montfort, Patricia, and Nigel Thorp (eds.) (2004-12). *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler, 1855-1903*; including *The Correspondence of Anna McNeill Whistler, 1855-1880*, edited by Georgia Toutziari. [Link to online edition](#), University of Glasgow.
- Hermens, E., and MacDonald, M.F. (2009) 'En plein soleil: Whistler, nature and memory'. In: Hermens, E. and Townsend, J.H. (eds.), *Sources and Serendipity: Testimonies of Artists' Practice*, Archetype, London, UK. ISBN 9781904982524 [available from HEI]

Grants for the Etchings Project

- AHRC funded 5-year major research project to produce an online catalogue raisonné of Whistler's etchings (1995-2010, extended to 2011), £345,000.
- Lunder Foundation (2005-11), £50,000.
- Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art (2011), £2500.
- Chancellor's Fund, Glasgow University (2011), £10,000.
- International Fine Print Dealer's Association (2010), \$5000.

4. Details of the impact

Professor Margaret MacDonald and her research team's major commitment to publishing the work and correspondence of James McNeill Whistler have transformed how curators, art dealers, critics and the public understand Whistler, his work and techniques.

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[James McNeill Whistler: The Etchings – A Catalogue Raisonné](#) has become a significant, definitive resource and reference point, encouraging further appreciation and knowledge of the art market, influences and collaborations involved in 19th century print-making. It brings together 490 etchings, covering the history of individual prints in a wider context. It is a comprehensive guide based on the works themselves, the copper plates, and documentary or published records. It includes exhibition reviews and publications, identifies sitters, collectors, sites and subjects, and is fully annotated and searchable. The website, launched in October 2011, receives over 900 visits a day (27,000 a month) from countries worldwide.



The catalogue has had consistently positive feedback from the art community. A prominent American Realist artist, based in Hawaii, stated:

I have often looked at his etchings in books with a magnifier, but what you and your colleagues have done on the website is simply phenomenal – you have made it possible to actually see the wizardry

of Whistler's lovely and living lines on the copper.... Take for instance, Black Lion Wharf, in fact the entire Thames set – I can't stop studying the zoomed-in lines, Whistler's way with the needle is now able to be seen clearly, learned from, and marvelled at. I dearly love Whistler, as all etchers do, and have studied his work all these years, without a true knowledge of it until now – with the website, I can actually see into Whistler's mind while he worked – zooming in on the lines that are still full of life today....

The project relied on collaboration between the University of Glasgow, Art Institute of Chicago and the Freer Gallery of Art, supported by major collections including the National Gallery of Art (USA), and British Museum. It involved extensive collaboration with dealers, curators, and collectors. The network of experts has continued to benefit from MacDonald's expertise. Examples include the St Louis Art Museum and Toledo Museum of Art which subsequently contacted Professor MacDonald for her expert opinion; the Baltimore Museum of Art and Art Institute of Chicago revised their catalogues to conform with the *catalogue raisonné*. The Curator, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, writes:

Thank you ... for your support in our catalogue of Monet exhibition. The information you gave us about our Whistler print was very helpful for editing the catalogue. And your Whistler project on web also very much helped us. That is generous and wonderful idea [sic], I believe it helps many researchers in the world.

Professor MacDonald is regularly consulted by art dealers and auction houses. For instance she has authenticated previously unknown works, including a drawing, *Three Figures*, bought (at her suggestion) from a Swiss dealer for the Colby College Museum of Art (Maine, USA); and a watercolour, *The Three Clouds* for Boisgirard-Antonini, Paris (sold 12 June 2013).

She advised on a pastel, *White and Pink (The Palace)*, sold at Doyle's, NY, 9 May 2012 (*reproduced at right*) and bought by the National Gallery of Art (USA).



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A Specialist in Prints for Sotheby's wrote (August 2013): 'We have been using the online catalogue raisonné since the beginning of the year. I refer collectors to it often as well and they always marvel at the wealth of information that is now more widely available.'

The Deputy Managing Director of the Fine Art Society, London, stressed the catalogue's importance:

The study of Whistler's etchings has been transformed by the work undertaken by Margaret MacDonald, Grischka Petri, Meg Hausberg, and Joanna Meacock at the University of Glasgow, now available online. [...] The catalogue entries record a wealth of information about the prints, their subjects, their history and collections: I have found it invaluable in preparing this catalogue.

MacDonald and her colleagues are involved in education outreach activities, providing guided tours of Whistler exhibitions in The Hunterian, public lectures to art clubs and museums, including the National Gallery of Scotland, and conference lectures. MacDonald launched the *Etchings catalogue raisonné* to a wide audience in October 2011 at a conference in her honour at the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC, followed by a seminar in the National Gallery of Art (USA), where the catalogue was received enthusiastically. Curators in, for instance, The Hunterian, Freer Gallery and Art Institute of Chicago now direct enquirers to the website, and MacDonald answers numerous enquiries on Whistler's work from all over the world.

An exhibition on [Whistler: The Gentle Art of Making Etchings](#) (2009) led by Professor MacDonald attracted over 15,000 visitors to The Hunterian (Glasgow) and was then, by special request, lent to the [Lady Lever Art Gallery](#) (Liverpool). It was widely praised by the press, including *The List*, *Liverpool Echo* and *Scotsman*. The Senior Exhibitions Officer, called it:

a very popular show with our visitors, who really appreciated the opportunity to discover another facet of Whistler's art and to see the etchings so close up. We had nearly 32,500 visitors over the period [...] with a daily average of 405 over 80 days. [...] This compares very well indeed with our previous exhibitions [...] and we were delighted with the response.

A vibrant research community fosters further projects, particularly online publication and exhibitions. The reputation of Whistler scholars, including MacDonald and colleagues such as Professor Pamela Robertson in the Hunterian has led to many interesting enquiries, related research projects and exhibitions. Examples include *An American in London: Whistler and the Thames*, co-curated by MacDonald with de Montfort for Dulwich Picture Gallery, Addison Gallery of American Art and the Freer Gallery of Art (2013-14). An extended version of the exhibition will travel to Japan (The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto and Yokohama Museum of Art, 2014-15), curated by a University of Glasgow graduate, and MacDonald and colleague have been asked for advice and invited to contribute to the catalogue.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Evidencing value of the catalogue raisonné to artists and art professionals

Artist's Statement (quoted in §4) [available from HEI]

Statement from Associate Curator, Baltimore Museum of Art [available from HEI]

Statement Sotheby's, New York [available from HEI]

The Fine Art Society, London, statement and exhibition catalogue, 2013) [available from HEI]

Statement from Curator, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo [available from HEI]

User statistics for the online catalogue from July 2012 to July 2013 [available from HEI]

Popular reception of Whistler: The Gentle Art of Making Etchings

Reviews:

- [The Scotsman](#)
- [Liverpool Echo](#)
- [The List](#)