

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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## "WHISTLER'S MOTHER" AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. May 10, 1964: John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today that Whistler's Portrait of the Artist's Mother: Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1 will be on exhibition at the National Gallery of Art from June 10 through June 30, 1964, on loan from the Louvre Museum, Paris. The painting will be hung on the main floor just off the Rotunda.

Also to be exhibited with the picture is a letter lent by the Philip H. and A.S.W. Rosenbach Foundation, Philadelphia, which was written by Whistler to G. W. Smalley, an art correspondent in Europe for American periodicals. The letter exults at the purchase of the painting, directly from Whistler, by the French Government. "This is simply the greatest honour that can possibly be conferred upon an Artist - and it occurs to me in my lifetime" Whistler wrote to Smalley.

The painting of his mother was accepted for exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1872, the year after it was painted, but only grudgingly, and Whistler never exhibited at the Royal Academy again. The judges would have rejected the picture for exhibition had not a member of the Academy threatened to resign and stir up a scandal as a protest.

Controversy was the hallmark of Whistler's career. His famous White Girl, now hanging in the National Gallery of Art, was rejected by the Salon in 1863, and was exhibited in a "Salon of the Refused" (Salon des Refusés) in defiance of official taste. Also exhibiting in the protest exhibition were such artists as Manet, Cézanne, and Pissarro.

Later, in 1877, Whistler's exhibition of The Falling Rocket at the Grosvenor Gallery in London led to the charge by England's leading critic, John Ruskin, that Whistler was "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." Whistler sued, and in a notorious court trial was awarded damages of one farthing (less than a cent). The expenses of the trial led to Whistler's bankruptcy.

(more)

Whistler's title for the portrait of his mother, "Arrangement in Gray and Black" is evidence of his desire to lead the public away from considering pictures on the basis of their subject-matter alone. His theory was that "art should be independent of clap-trap - should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like."

"It is ironic that a picture that Whistler intended to be looked at for values other than its subject should have become America's most famous painting precisely because of its subject" John Walker, Director of the National Gallery said. "Actually, as in all successful works of art, the artistic means used reinforce the total impact; the tones of the gray and black are symbolic of age, and with the tremendous subtlety of the composition reinforce the mood of dignity, resignation, and tranquility that this painting conveys to us."

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (he added the McNeill, his mother's maiden name, to his own in 1851) was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1834. His father, Major George Washington Whistler, was a Civil Engineer, and took the family to St. Petersburg, Russia, where he helped build the railroad from St. Petersburg to Moscow. The young Whistler later returned to America, studying at the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, where he was top of his class in drawing, but from which he was discharged in 1854, having failed chemistry. He then moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked for the Coast and Geodetic Survey for \$1.50 a day, and painted portraits. In 1855 he moved to Paris, and from 1859 on lived mostly in London, until his death in 1903.

Whistler's Mother will subsequently tour other American museums. A tentative itinerary is attached.

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Further information available through J. Carter Brown, National Gallery of Art, Washington 25, D.C. REpublic 7-4215, ext. 248

Tentative list of museums exhibiting Whistler's  
Portrait of the Artist's Mother: An Arrangement in  
Gray and Black after the National Gallery of Art,  
Washington, D.C.

Philadelphia Museum of Art	July 1964
Metropolitan Museum of Art	August-September 1964
Toledo Museum of Art	October 1964
Art Institute of Chicago	November-December 1964
Cincinnati Art Museum	January 1965
Cleveland Museum of Art	February 1965
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York	March 1965
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts	April 1965