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James Mcneill Whistler Beyond the Myth

Ronald Anderson

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The myth perpetuated throughout Whistler's life - of a witty, irascible dandy endlessly feuding with the establishment or anyone else who stood in his way clouds the real extent of his artistic achievement. Now, for the first time ever, and to mark a major exhibition of his work at the Tate Gallery in October, his art and life are brought together to recreate the extraordinary career of the man behind that myth. From a youth in Tsarist Russia and an American military training at West Point to a Bohemian lifestyle in 1850s Paris, Whistler went on to embody the image of the cosmopolitan artist. His friendships with Courbet, Fantin Latour, Rossetti, Millais, Manet, Monet, Degas, Baudelaire, Swinburne, Wilde and Mallarme mark him out as a crucial player in the larger art movements of the nineteenth century, and a pivotal figure between the British and French art scenes. The many strands that make up Whistler's personality form a complex and intriguing individual who sought to uphold a public persona often at variance with his private self. His life reflected the title of his only book, The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, most notably in his libel suit against Ruskin. Plagued by doubts about his work, his sensitivity made him temperamental. He was often at odds with his family, and was rarely seen without a beautiful woman on his arm, until in his fifties he found happiness in a tragically short-lived marriage to Beatrice Godwin. By examining Whistler's life and work, together with the impact his followers, collectors and friends made on his reputation after his death, Anderson and Koval show this most controversial and colourful artist to be one of the most remarkable men of his age.

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