



Adult Learning Within Reach

Member Lecture – 15 February 2024

Art on trial: the Whistler libel trial
Prasannajit De Silva, WEA tutor

Questions answered post-lecture

Q1 The painting of the Thames, is the 'panel' made of wood – if so, what type?

Yes, 'panel' in this context means a wooden panel. Most galleries are pretty non-committal as to which wood is used for any specific painting, but I believe Poplar was quite popular for this purpose in the 19th century.

Q2 Whistler's painting in Venice was not too dissimilar to Ruskin's. Was he trying to prove something?

There is certainly an irony to the fact that Whistler's first post-trial commission involved a trip to Venice, which had been such an important site for Ruskin, so I understand why this particular question has been asked. But, looking at their Venetian works more broadly, I would suggest that Whistler's are more atmospheric and Ruskin's more precisely architectural. However, 'trying to prove something' would certainly seem to have been in character for Whistler!

Q3 What is the Grosvenor Gallery up to these days?

The Grosvenor Gallery closed in the 1890s following disagreements among some of those involved, and the emergence of other even 'trendier' spaces. I believe there is currently a Grosvenor Gallery in the West End of London, but I don't think there is any connection to the original – other than the name.

Useful links and resources for further reading

Books

Original texts by Ruskin 'Stones of Venice' etc and Whistler 'The Gentle Art of Making Enemies' are readily available in modern and facsimile editions.

Whistler (1994), Richard Dorment & Margaret F MacDonald (ed.) – the catalogue of a major exhibition at the Tate.

Whistler: A Life for Art's Sake (2014), Daniel E Sutherland – a recent biography of the artist

John Ruskin: The Power of Seeing (2019), Louise Pullen – a brief introduction to Ruskin's ideas and work, published to accompany an exhibition marking the bicentenary of his birth.

Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting (2007), Elizabeth Prettejohn – a discussion of the Aesthetic Movement in England.

Links

[The Peacock Room – Smithsonian](#) – information and virtual tour.

Forthcoming WEA courses by Prasannajit De Silva

[British Architecture in India \(Q00012135\)](#) - 2 Mar, Orpington

[American Artists in Britain \(Q00009549\)](#) - 9 Mar, online

[The Art Historical Canon \(Q00009397\)](#) - 14 Mar, Caterham

[British Landscape Artists' Views of India \(Q00009392\)](#) - 24 May, Winchester