

Gallery documents a Whistler

By HELEN ZUCKER
Considering the icy weather, a small army of avid art fans turned up at the Bloomfield Township Library for the opening of the Whistleriana show. They came to hear Arnold Klein talk on his favorite subject—the life, art, and times of James Abbott MacNeill Whistler.

Klein is a highly knowledgeable man who has moved from years of teaching to a curatorship of graphic arts at the Detroit Institute of Art in his own specialized gallery in Royal Oak.

The 19th century is his favorite period and Whistler his passion. Klein, who has bookdealers from London to Los Angeles on the lookout for materials, owns what is probably the largest collection of Whistleriana in the United States.

Klein loaned some of his diverse, wonderful collection to the Bloomfield Library for the current exhibit. "Some," in this case, amounts to 65 pieces—books, paintings, pamphlets, catalogs, cards, and memorabilia that take up two large glass display shelves in the front hall.

The show is a must for anyone interested in Whistler, undoubtedly one of the most colorful and gifted artists of the 19th century.

As Leslie Ward said in "Vanity Fair," "Whistler was a man people breakfasted with although the menu usually consisted of a sardine and a cup of coffee."

Whistler talked as well as he painted. Klein's program, "Whistler, His Friends, Enemies, Publications, and Lawsuits," dealt with some of the famous law suits the artist was forever engaged in.

KLEIN GAVE HIS AUDIENCE a picture of a man with boundless energy and enormous wit; a giant of an artist who thrived on controversy, who designed and published his own catalogs in London and Glasgow, who wrote books entitled "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies," and "The Gentle Art of Resenting Injuries."

None of Whistler's truly crazy law suits seemed to stop his prolific career for long. The dragging libel suits seemed rather to exhaust the people he sued, or who sued him.

The audience peppered Klein with questions about "The Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket," the painting that was at the heart of Whistler's famous suit against the English critic, John Ruskin. The painting is owned by the Detroit Institute. Whistler didn't like Ruskin's criticism of the painting and the court actions dragged on from 1878 to 1882.

Poor Ruskin. I came away with the feeling that Whistler positively needed the stimulus of courtrooms. The "right" and "wrong" of the matter had seemed hardly to have mattered.

Whistler came from a family of engineers. His grandfather, brother, and father were engineers. Born in Lowell, Mass., in 1834, Whistler spent part of his boyhood in Russia while his father was in charge of building railroads for

the czar. He flunked out of West Point, and after a brief stint in Washington as a map engraver, he went to Paris to study painting. He didn't study much. He took to the profession like a duck to water. He soaked up what he needed and remained a self-taught artist.

THIS TURBULENT, VOLATILE man meant to stress the formal qualities of portraiture, not the emotions. To a large measure, he succeeded. But art is an odd occupation. Whistler's favorite work, the painting he called simply "Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1," a portrait of his mother, whom he adored, has become synonymous with age, dignity, motherhood.

Esther Mason Frank, who was at the talk, said, "Every home in London had a picture of Whistler's mum on the living room wall when I was growing up."

It's not too different here, "Whistler's Mother" has long since taken up residence in the national consciousness. But I have always liked the dash and the turbulence of Whistler's life. He has passed into dim history, it is these marvelously wrought portraits that will stay with us—as alive as the day he painted them.

I especially like the tall, regal portrait of Mrs. Frederick R. Leyland. The portrait is in the Frick Collection in New York. Leyland was Whistler's "dream patron," a Liverpool millionaire who hired him to decorate part of his house.

Whistler, who thought of himself as a decorator as well as an author and a painter, eventually painted his way into the dining room and up the stairwell. Leyland simply stepped around the paint and let Whistler do as he liked, unlike the artist's other patrons. Leyland was amply repaid with the stunning portrait of his wife.

THE LIBRARY EXHIBIT CONTAINS an etching by Red Grooms done in 1976 that captures Whistler's feeling for butterflies, oriental sores, lush, careful Bohemian dress, and Whistler's liking for women. The richness and careful structure of faces, forms, and dress is really what Whistler is all about, despite his famous "Nocturnes" and smaller works. The exhibit also includes copies of Whistler's famous lectures at Cambridge and Oxford.

Klein seems to have an inexhaustible fund of information, and an unflagging interest in Whistler. His wife, Karen Anne Klein, a painter, his two sons, and his daughter, Kory, who sculpted a small, neat figure of Whistler out of kneaded erasers during the talk, were all on hand. So was Arnold Carlson, president of the Friends of Bloomfield Township Library.

Elaine Morse, vice president of the board of trustees of the Birmingham library, said at the reception following the talk, "It's too bad Whistler died in 1903. I'd have hired him to decorate my

house, and then sued him to kingdom come."

Now there's a lady who Whistler would undoubtedly have taken to his bosom—and to court.

The Arnold Klein exhibit of Whistleriana can be seen at the Bloomfield library through March 5.

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Blizzard warnings affect the skin too

It's blizzard time again. Severe storms have already caused discomfort in most of the country. Since this condition will remain for another 10 weeks, it's time to remember how to survive during snowy, icy attacks.

Along with all the other advice on how to survive the remainder of the winter, here are some tips for skin care in blizzards.

In strong, icy winds, wrap your muffler around your cheeks. Besides chapping skin, severe cold can injure the capillaries (the tiny blood vessels nearest the skin surface), causing them to swell up and break, and possibly show up later as small red thread-marks on the skin.

When you come in from the cold, don't immediately lean over a stove or fireplace, or wash your face in hot water. Sudden changes in exposure from cold to hot are also bad for skin because the capillaries need time to adjust to the difference in temperature.

Use extra lubricants on your skin in blizzards. Lubricants add a layer of protection, help skin retain its natural oils and warmth, and make it less vulnerable to wintry weather.

Protect your lips. Use an extra-creamy lip balm or a stick of colorless lip balm which can also be dabbed around the nostrils. Wherever there is moisture, skin chaps more easily.

Moustaches are a definite blizzard hazard. While facial hair offers

some warmth to the skin, it also collects moisture from snow which could freeze to ice. Again, wrap a muffler around your face for added protection. It also helps to dab a little light oil on your moustache before going out, to make it shed water and therefore be less apt to irritate the skin beneath it. The same holds true for beards.

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