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Making the most of Memphis life

TAKE NOTE

Memphis-born Oscar winner and White Station High School Class of 1966 alumnus Kathy Bates will play a mother "from the wrong side of the trailer park" in her next film, "Relative Strangers," scheduled for release late next year. Danny DeVito, who is producing the film, will play Bates's husband. According to Wednesday's Hollywood Reporter, the story concerns "an uptight professional (Ron Livingston) who sets out to meet his biological parents only to discover they are from the wrong side of the trailer park." Neve Campbell plays the young man's fiancée.



C. A. SPY



Loretta Scott sings at a reception she threw for flutists Sir James and Lady Jeanne Galway. Columnist Michael Donahue has the story.

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ALSO TODAY

ANNIE'S MAILBOX/M2

DR. GOTT/M4

BILLY GRAHAM/M4

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"A Distant Dome" by James McNeill Whistler (1901, oil on wood)

Whistler at the Dixon

By **FREDRIC KOEPEL**
koepel@commercialappeal.com

WHISTLER HAD A MOTHER, of course, but he also had a teapot.

You can see his mother at the Musee d'Orsay in Paris; you can see the teapot at Dixon Gallery and Gardens in Memphis.

And there's more to see, including 12 paintings, 57 etchings and lithographs, books, manuscripts and letters and pieces of the artist's porcelain and silver.

The exhibition, "James McNeill Whistler: Selected Works from the Hunterian Art Gallery," opening Sunday, brings 129 items to Dixon for display through Jan. 2.

The exhibition is being circulated to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Whistler's death in 1903. Dixon is the first of six venues in the United States.

The Hunterian Art Gallery of the University of Glasgow holds the world's most extensive collection of the American expatriate artist's work — 80 oil paintings, 100 pastels, 120 drawings and watercolors, 390 etchings, 150 lithographs and so on — and of Whistleriana, that is, Whistler's personal effects, including home furnishings and his studio materials.

The collection began in 1935, when Rosalind Birnie



"Little Juniper Bud — Lizzie Wills" (circa 1897) immortalizes the 8-year-old daughter of



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The collection began in 1935, when Rosalind Birnie Philip, Whistler's youngest sister-in-law, ward, caretaker and heir, gave the Hunterian 41 of the artist's paintings and a large group of pastels and graphic works, with the stipulation that "none should ever leave the university." Further gifts and bequests from Philip and other family members continued until 1955.

See **WHISTLER, M4**



"Little Juniper Bud — Lizzie Willis" (circa 1897) immortalizes the 8-year-old daughter of Whistler's housekeeper, a family fond of gin.



"Red and Black: The Fan" (circa 1891) was called The Red Bunnie by Whistler, reflecting his affectionate nickname, Bunnie, for sister-in-law Ethel Birnie Philip.

BASEBALL: Yankees best Red Sox, 10-7 | DI **NBA: Grizzlies win preseason opener at Orlando**



THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE | 165TH YEAR | WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2004

FOOD



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NERVOUS DRIVERS

Shooter taking aim at a

COMING THURSDAY

At the Dixon

Opening Sunday. The Dixon Gallery exhibits works of American expatriate artist James McNeill Whistler. **THURSDAY'S M**



Clearing possible
Mostly cloudy. High 69.
Low 52.

DETAILS, D8

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The Commercial Appeal
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to today's newspaper
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WHISTLER

The Hunterian adheres to the "no-travel" rule of Philip's initial gift, said Peter Black, the institution's curator of prints who was in Memphis last week to check the condition of the exhibition.

"But that stipulation does not apply to later bequests," he said, "so while some very fine pieces don't leave the gallery, we're happy that so many others are able to."

Black called Whistler "utterly defiant of the mainstream," but also characterized him as "a man of tremendous refinement."

James Abbott McNeill Whistler was born in 1834 in Lowell, Mass. He abandoned studies at West Point and by 1855 was ensconced in the bohemian life of artistic Paris, where he befriended the apostles of realistic French painting, Courbet and Fantin-Latour.

In the 1860s and with a move to London, Whistler layered his realism with Pre-Raphaelite poetic intensity and the spareness of Chinese and Japanese prints and watercolors, of which he was an early European connoisseur. Another influence was Spanish artist Velazquez, whose simple, monumental forms and subdued palette inform many of Whistler's portraits.

In the 1860s and 1870s, Whistler bestowed musical names on his paintings — nocturne, symphony — to denote the interrelationship of the arts, a major premise of the "art for art's sake" movement.

That movement was challenged in 1877, when



Silver, ceramics and nappy from the James McNeill Whistler collection will be displayed at Dixon Gallery.

TAKE NOTE

David Park Curry, curator of American Arts at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, will speak about the life and work of artist James McNeill Whistler at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Dixon Gallery and Gardens. Curry is author of the soon-to-be-published book, "James McNeill Whistler: Uneasy Pieces" (W.W. Norton & Co., \$50).

Whistler instituted a libel suit against John Ruskin, the most venerated writer on esthetics and artistic morality of the Victorian period. Of Whistler's painting "Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket," Ruskin wrote, with snobbery in full sail, "I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now, but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."

Whistler won the battle but lost the war: The jury awarded him damages of one farthing (the most insignificant coin of the realm), and faced with huge legal costs, he went bankrupt.

The artist spent the next few years in Venice, producing a series of innovative etchings

with the ancient, water-bound city as their subject.

"It's possible to say of Whistler's Venice etchings that they're the greatest etchings of Impressionism," Black said. "The Impressionist artists, by and large, were not talented etchers nor even very interested in etching. Whistler's genius was to create atmosphere not by means of lines but by gradations of ink."

Black emphasized, on the other hand, that though "Impressionism is the movement in relation to which Whistler needs to be defined, he was clearly not a member of that movement. There is some overlap, but there's a very different tonality, and the attitude to paint is utterly

different. Whistler paints thin. We mustn't forget that his first success came in 1858 with 'Twelve Etchings,' and that his technique in painting was very much influenced by works on paper."

Whistler's return to London in 1880 was triumphant. He received important portrait commissions and in 1888 married the artist Beatrice Philip Godwin. When she died in 1896, Whistler was disconsolate; he withdrew from society, and his artistic career gradually came to an end.

— Fredric Koeppl: 529-237