

= Symphony in White , No. 3 =

Symphony in White , No. 3 , is a painting by James Abbott McNeill Whistler . The work shows two women dressed in white , one sitting on a sofa and the other resting on the floor . The model on the sofa is Joanna Heffernan , the artist 's mistress . By calling the painting Symphony in White , No. 3 , Whistler intended to emphasise his artistic philosophy of corresponding arts , inspired by the poet Charles Baudelaire . The presence of a fan on the floor shows the influence of Japonisme , which was a popular artistic trend in European art at the time . Whistler was also greatly influenced by his colleague and friend Albert Joseph Moore , and their works show considerable similarities .

Though Whistler started on the painting in 1865 , he was not ready to exhibit it publicly until 1867 , when it went on display at the Royal Academy . His colleagues were impressed by the painting , but not all critics fully understood the connection between the painting and its title . One review in particular questioned the presence of other colours in addition to white , a criticism which prompted Whistler to respond with a scathing and sarcastic letter . Years later , Whistler 's former student Walter Sickert criticized the painting as " the low @-@ water mark of the old manner , before the birth of the new . "

= = Background = =

James Abbott McNeill Whistler was born in the United States in 1834 , the son of George Washington Whistler , a railway engineer . In 1843 , his father relocated the family to Saint Petersburg , Russia , where James received training in painting . After a stay in England , he returned to America to attend the US Military Academy at West Point in 1851 . In 1855 , he made his way back to Europe , determined to dedicate himself to painting . Here he settled in Paris at first , but in 1859 moved to London , where he would spend most of the remainder of his life . There he met Dante Gabriel Rossetti and other members of the Pre @-@ Raphaelite Brotherhood , who would have a profound influence on Whistler .

It was also in London that Whistler met Joanna Heffernan , the model who would become his lover . By 1865 , Whistler had already used her as a model for other paintings , among these Symphony in White , No. 1 and Symphony in White , No. 2 . Heffernan supposedly had a strong influence over Whistler ; his brother @-@ in @-@ law Francis Seymour Haden refused a dinner invitation in the winter of 1863 ? 64 due to her dominant presence in the household . In January 1864 , Whistler 's mother Anna ? later depicted in the painting Arrangement in Grey and Black ? arrived to stay with her son in London . As a result , Heffernan had to move out of the apartment , and only visited as a model . Still , Heffernan 's presence displeased Whistler 's mother , and his relationship with both women became strained .

= = Creation and reception = =

Whistler started on Symphony in White , No. 3 perhaps as early as July 1865 . It was the last of his paintings for which Heffernan was a model . He used Milly Jones , the wife of an actor friend , as the second model for the painting . By the middle of August , he had a complete sketch ready , and he continued work on the painting into September . Whistler kept reworking it , however , and it was not until 1867 that he considered it finished . He painted over the final " 5 " in the date , and replaced it with a " 7 " , to mark the changes it had undergone . In March 1867 , William Michael Rossetti wrote of seeing the painting in Whistler 's studio , and mentioned that it was previously called The Two Little White Girls . It then went on display at the Royal Academy .

The work was greatly admired by Whistler 's colleagues , including Henri Fantin @-@ Latour , Alfred Stevens , James Tissot and Edgar Degas . For Degas , the painting served as an inspiration for his own portrait of Eugénie Fiocre in the ballet La Source . Some critics , however , were confused by the title . Philip Hamerton , writing for the Saturday Review on 1 June 1867 , remarked :

In the " Symphony in White No . III . " by Mr. Whistler there are many dainty varieties of tint , but it is

not precisely a symphony in white . One lady has a yellowish dress and brown hair and a bit of blue ribbon , the other has a red fan , and there are flowers and green leaves . There is a girl in white on a white sofa , but even this girl has reddish hair ; and of course there is the flesh colour of the complexions .

Whistler was always belligerent in his response to critics . He wrote a letter to the editor that the newspaper would not print , but was later reprinted by Whistler himself in his book *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* :

How pleasing that such profound prattle should inevitably find its place in print ! ... Bon Dieu ! did this wise person expect white hair and chalked faces ? And does he then , in his astounding consequence , believe that a symphony in F contains no other note , but shall be a continued repetition of F , F , F ? . . . Fool !

The painting was originally bought by the wealthy art collector Louis Huth , who later also commissioned Whistler to paint a portrait of his wife . It is currently in the ownership of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts , in Birmingham , England .

= = Composition and interpretation = =

Symphony in White , No. 3 shows Heffernan reclining on a sofa with her head rested on her hand , while Jones is seated on the floor , leaning against the sofa . There is a fan on the floor , and a plant bearing white flowers on the right . The fan is an oriental element , and an expression of the artistic trend known as Japonisme which was then prevalent in European art . At the time , Whistler was greatly influenced by his friend and colleague Albert Joseph Moore . The painting bears close resemblances to Moore 's roughly contemporary painting *A Musician* , though at the time the two were working so closely together that it is hard to ascertain exactly who influenced whom .

The painter Walter Sickert ? a student of Whistler ? later described the painting in unflattering terms . In December 1908 , five years after Whistler 's death , he wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* :

In ' *Symphony in White* , No. 3 , ' we get the culbute . A bad picture , lâchons le mot , badly composed , badly drawn , badly painted , the low @-@ water mark of the old manner , before the birth of the new . Folds of drapery are expressed by ribbons of paint in the direction of the folds themselves , with hard edges to them . Only painters can quite understand the depth of technical infamy confessed in this last description . It means that the drapery is no longer painted , but intended .

To Whistler himself , however , the painting was not old @-@ fashioned , but rather an expression of something new and innovative . By naming it *Symphony in White* , No. 3 , Whistler highlighted his emphasis on composition , rather than subject matter . The use of a musical title was also an expression of the theory of corresponding arts , which was an idea developed by the French poet Charles Baudelaire . These tendencies became more and more dominant in Whistler 's art over time . His two earlier paintings *Symphony in White* , No. 1 and *Symphony in White* , No. 2 had originally been titled *The White Girl* and *The Little White Girl* respectively , and later been renamed by the artist . Whistler had originally intended to call this work *Two Little White Girls* , but the development of his artistic philosophy made him change his mind , and from the time of its first exhibition it has been called by its musical title .