Whistler's Mother Encyclopedia Article

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James Abbott McNeill Whistler's 1871 portrait of his mother, Anna Matilda McNeill, has crossed over from the realm of fine art to that of popular culture. Whistler (1834-1903), an expatriate American painter active in London and Paris, was one of a number of late nineteenth-century artists who downplayed subject matter and emphasized abstract values. People often refer to the painting as "Whistler's mother," but Whistler himself preferred to call it *Arrangement in Gray and Black*. Ironically, the painting is famous largely because of its subject. Recognized as a universal symbol of motherhood, Whistler's mother was featured, in 1934, on a United States postage stamp honoring Mother's Day. However, she has not always been treated so reverently. The somber, seated figure, a familiar reference point in many countries, has been widely lampooned in the popular performing, as well as visual, arts.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler's *8*

Further Reading:

Anderson, Ronald. *James McNeill Whistler: Beyond the Myth.* London, J. Murray, 1994.

Spencer, Robin. *Whistler.* Rev. ed. London, Studio Editions, 1993.