



Press Release
12 November 2019

Filthy Lucre: Whistler's Peacock Room re-imagined
25 January – 3 May 2020
Porter Gallery

www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/filthy-lucre | #FilthyLucre

Filthy Lucre is an immersive installation by contemporary American artist Darren Waterston, presenting a detailed reimagining of James Abbott McNeill Whistler's famed *Peacock Room* – the sumptuous 19th-century dining room once housed just a stone's throw away from the V&A and now installed at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Waterston has faithfully recreated each of the room's individual elements with a twist, with the installation revealing a magnificent ruin crumbling under the weight of material decadence and the egos of those involved in its creation.

On display for the first time in UK, the installation is inspired by the tension between art and money, ego and patronage. The design of the original interior famously saw Whistler create the space without the knowledge of his commissioner. Initially invited by his friend and patron, Frederick Leyland, to consult on the room's colour scheme, Whistler proceeded to redesign the entire room whilst Leyland was away from London. Fuelled by their clashing personalities, the argument was splashed across London's society tabloids, turning the once great friends into enemies.

Replicating almost every detail of Whistler's masterpiece, Waterston transforms the room into an uneasy experience of destruction and twisted excess, drawing parallels between the economic inequality of the Victorian era and today. Created through extensive collaboration, *Filthy Lucre* demonstrates master craftsmanship to reimagine the luxurious wood panelling, ornate lighting pendants and stunning ceramics collection, as well as decorative wall art and a captivating central portrait that draws viewers into the room. A soundscape by New York-based rockers BETTY also enhances the installation experience, filling the space with muffled gossiping voices and a mournful cello.

Darren Waterston said: *"I set out to recreate Whistler's fabled Peacock Room in a state of decadent demolition—a space collapsing in on itself, heavy with its own excess and tumultuous history. I imagined it as an unsettling cacophony of excess, with every interior surface and object within sumptuously painted. A vision of both discord and beauty, the once-extravagant interior is warped, ruptured and in the process of being overtaken by natural phenomena: stalactites hang from the mantelpiece, light fixtures morph into crystal-like formations and moss and barnacles cover the walls. Painted vessels sit broken and scattered, or drip fluorescent glazes down the latticed shelves. The shimmering central mural melts down the wall onto the floor in a puddle of gold. From her perch above the fireplace, the painting of the reigning 'Porcelain Princess'—depicted in fantastical deformity—oversees the unsettling scene."*

James Robinson, Keeper of Sculpture, Metalwork, Ceramics and Glass said: *"Waterston's magisterial work evokes not only the gilded age of interior design but the biting wit and*

fragmented relationships of the protagonists; Whistler, Leyland and the original architect of the room, Thomas Jeckyll whose contribution was effectively obliterated by Whistler's extravagant reworking. The Peacock Room has returned to South Kensington with a vengeance!"

The title *Filthy Lucre* takes inspiration from a vengeful caricature Whistler painted called *The Gold Scab: Eruption in Frilthy Lucre*, 1879, depicting Leyland as a hideous, grasping peacock, mocked for his miserliness and his unfashionable frilly shirts.

The craftsmanship in the *Peacock Room* and Waterston's reimagining draws parallels with the V&A's vast collections, encompassing interior design, decorative arts, painting and ceramics. On display in the museum's Porter Gallery, the installation will feature supporting material and video content to further explore the fascinating history of this iconic room and reveal a behind-the-scenes look at Waterston's process.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

- 'Filthy Lucre: Whistler's Peacock Room re-imagined' runs from 25 January to 3 May 2020. Entrance is FREE.
- *Darren Waterston: Filthy Lucre* was created by the artist in collaboration with MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts. Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York.

Social Media

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About Darren Waterston

Darren Waterston has been exhibiting his paintings, works on paper, and installations in the U.S. and abroad since the early 1990s. Recent exhibition highlights include: 'Peacock Room REMIX: Darren Waterston's Filthy Lucre' at The Smithsonian Institution's Freer/Sackler Galleries (2016); *Uncertain Beauty* at Massachusetts Museum of Modern Art (2014); 'Forest Eater' at The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu (2011); and 'Splendid Grief: The Afterlife of Leland Stanford Jr.' (2009), an installation at The Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, CA.

In 2007 CHARTA published a monograph on the artist, "Darren Waterston: Representing the Invisible", and in 2013 Prestel published a collaboration between the artist and poet Mark Doty, "A Swarm, A Flock, a Host: A Compendium of Creatures." "Darren Waterston: Filthy Lucre," was published by Skira Rizzoli in association with MASS MoCA and the Freer/Sackler in 2014.

Waterston's artwork is included in numerous permanent collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York Public Library, New York City; The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle; and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

He graduated with a BFA from the Otis Art Institute in 1988, having previously studied at the Akademie der Künste and the Hochschule für Bildende Künste, both in Germany. Waterston currently lives and works in Kinderhook, New York.

www.darrenwaterston.com

About the V&A

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) is the world's leading museum of art and design with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A's collections, which span over 5000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform.

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