



The Street of Wonderful Possibilities: Whistler, Wilde & Sargent in Tite Street

Devon Cox

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A beautifully illustrated art history and cultural biography, *The Street of Wonderful Possibilities* focuses on one of the most influential artistic quarters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - London's Tite Street, where a staggering amount of talent thrived between the 1870s and 1930s, including James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Oscar Wilde and John Singer Sargent. It provides a new, fresh perspective on legendary figures in British art and literature and explores the relationship between these artists and their living environment.

Today Tite Street is a narrow, quiet thoroughfare tucked away in a cosy corner of London. With the exception of a few blue plaques upon its walls, there is little indication of the rich and vibrant history of a street that once stood at the heart of the London art world. In this thriving artistic quarter, artists and writers created a bohemian enclave that would challenge Victorian values in art and literature.

For Oscar Wilde, Tite Street was full of 'wonderful possibilities', while for Whistler it was 'the birthplace of art' where the nascent Aesthetic Movement was nurtured in his highly controversial White House. From the studios and houses of Tite Street issued modern masterpieces in art such as Whistler's *Harmony in Pink and Grey* and Sargent's *Lady Agnew*, and in literature with Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. But Tite Street had a dark side as well. Here Whistler was bankrupted, Frank Miles was sent to an asylum, Wilde was imprisoned, and Peter Warlock was gassed to death.

Throughout its turbulent existence, Tite Street mirrored the world around it. From the Aesthetic Movement to the Edwardian suffragettes, through the bombs of the Blitz in the 1940s to the bombs of the IRA in the 1970s, Tite Street remained a home to innumerable artists and writers, socialites and suffragettes, musicians and madmen. Countless biographies have explored the major figures in Tite Street individually, but never in the context of their living and working environment. *The Street of Wonderful Possibilities* unfolds this complex history, tying together the private and professional lives of Tite Street's artists, writers and bohemians to form a colourful tapestry of art and intrigue, illuminating their relationships to each other, to Tite Street and to a rapidly modernising London at the *fin de siècle*.

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