



FS Colour Series: Powder Blue Inspired by James Abbot McNeill Whistler's Faraway Dreams

Description



Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Cremorne Lights, 1872

Bands of horizon where sky meets and merges with water were a recurring theme in the art of the Symbolist painter James Abbot McNeill Whistler,

flooding his canvases with the atmospheric light of a faraway dream. As much as Whistler is known as the painter of the night with his sombre, subtle 'Nocturnes' series, he also made countless paintings exploring the soft, hazy light of dwindling dusk or early morning with nuanced shades of pale, pastel blue like [Powder Blue](#), capturing silent moments when the sky is subdued and the world is wrapped up in a blanket of quiet and calm.

Whistler was born in 1834 in Lowell, Massachusetts. A tempestuous child with a free spirit, he found moments of stillness in art. The family spent time in St Petersburg, Russia during the 1840s, and it was here that Whistler's art training began at the Imperial College of Fine arts, aged just 11 years old. The family later returned to the United States, setting up home in Pomfret, Connecticut. In 1852, Whistler enrolled in the United States Military Academy at West Point, but he struggled with the rigours of academia, and soon found himself expelled. Instead, he found work as a topographical draughtsman for the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, where he was able to consolidate his drawing and etching skills.

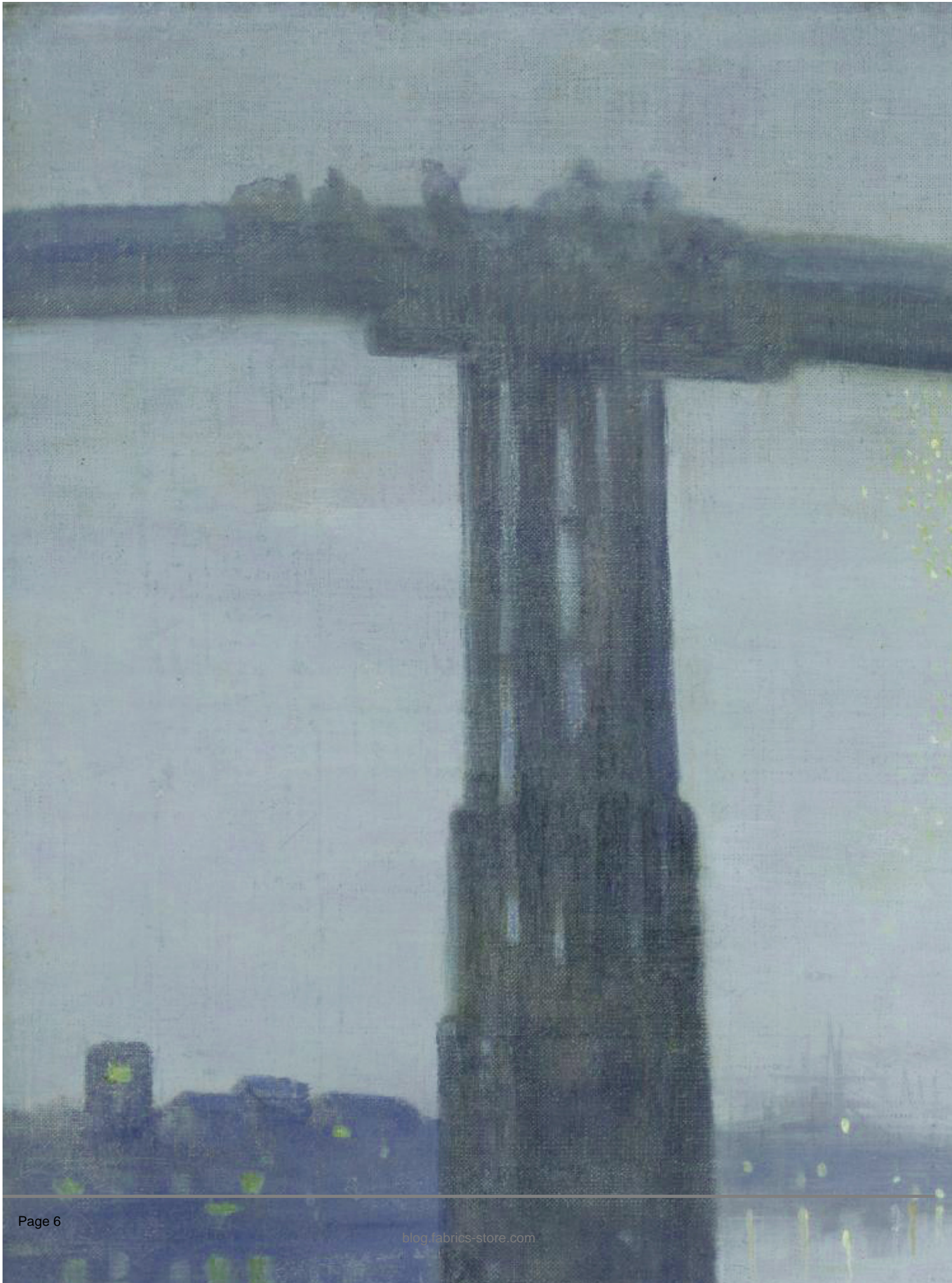


FS Powder Blue lightweight softened linen

In 1855, Whistler left the U.S. for Paris, hoping to become an artist. He trained at the Ecole Imperiale and the atelier of Swiss painter Charles Gabriel Gleyre, all the while integrating himself into the bohemian society of Paris. Friendships fostered with the artists Henri Fantin-Latour, Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet, along with the writer Charles Baudelaire, proved vital in giving Whistler the confidence to become a modernist artist with a singular vision. But his time in Paris was not to last – in 1859 he moved to London and established a permanent base here for the rest of his life.

Nonetheless, he continued to travel throughout Europe in search of new subject matter, and a wider audience for his art. In 1866, Whistler visited Valparaiso in Chile, where he made a series of seascapes capturing the sparkling effect of light on water. In *The Morning After the Revolution, Valparaiso*, 1866, he contrasts the wispy blue of sky and water with passages of burnished gold throughout the grass, near and far, and the horizontal strips formed by quietly shifting boats that overlap one another as they receded into the distance.

By the 1870s Whistler had adopted a style of painting influenced in part by French Impressionism, seeking to convey fleeting moments in time with pale, luminescent colour schemes. However, Whistler also aligned his practice with the dream-like qualities of the Symbolists, working with loose, layered washes of paint applied wet on wet with a broad brush, speckled with the tiniest sparks of light from ships or buildings in the far distance. *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Cremorne Lights*, 1872, depicts a view from Battersea Bridge out to Cremorne Pleasure Gardens in the soft light of evening. Sweeping stripes of pale blue and soft grey capture the dreamy, mystical nature of dusk, as the real world seems to melt into the indistinct haze of a dream, while strands and specks of light reflecting on the glass-like water pull us back to the real world of people still going about their lives.



Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge, 1872–5

Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge, 1872-5 transforms the bustling centre of London into a peaceful blue reverie, as the outline of Battersea Bridge seems to soften into a blurred and indistinct ghost of its former self. In the far distance, the lights of Albert Bridge, and the outlines of Chelsea Church can just about be seen. This was Whistler's preferred time to enjoy the city, once the hectic daytime had passed and the quiet lull of nighttime took over, transforming the vivid, waking world into the immaterial and indistinct.

CATEGORY

1. COLOUR SERIES
2. TEXTILES

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Date Created

May 31, 2024

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