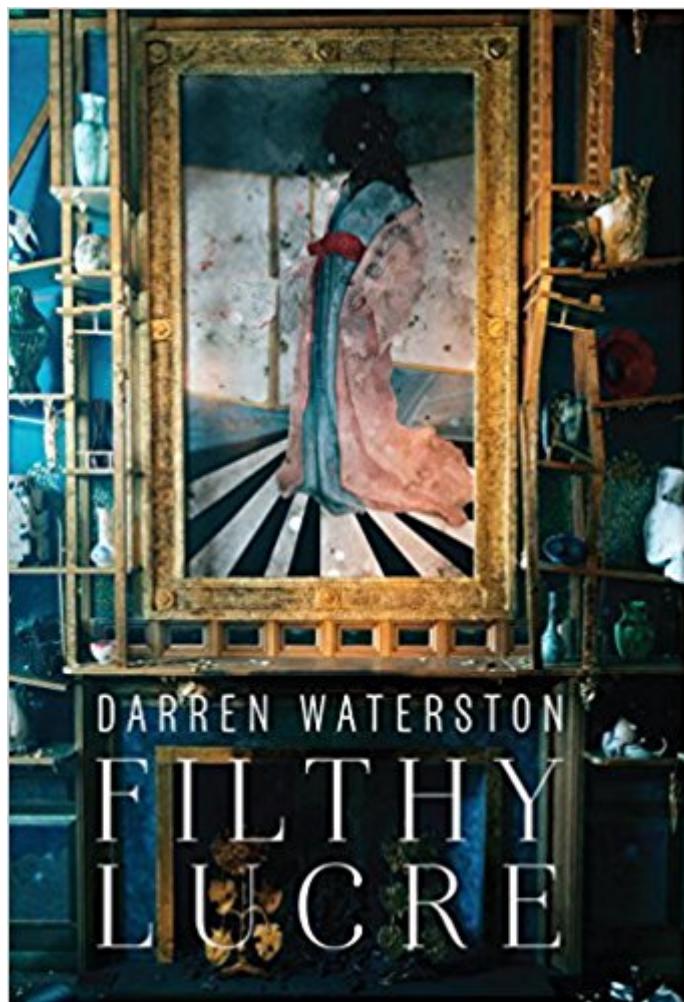


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# Darren Waterston: Filthy Lucre



## Synopsis

Inspired by James McNeill Whistler's famous Peacock Room, contemporary painter Darren Waterston creates his own decadent interpretation in a major installation at MASS MoCA. Darren Waterston's *Filthy Lucre* is a contemporary reimaging of James McNeill Whistler's decorative masterpiece *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room*—originally a dining room in the London mansion of shipping magnate Frederick Leyland. In 1876 and 1877, Whistler transformed the space with painted leather walls, gilded shutters, and a ceiling reflecting the coppery golds and brilliant blues of a peacock's plumage. Waterston reconstructs the historical room as a sumptuous ruin, replete with reinterpretations of Whistler's paintings and 250 hand-painted vessels. This title features all-new photography of Whistler's and Waterston's rooms, accompanied by essays by their curators and a scholar of patronage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Susan Cross is curator of visual arts at MASS MoCA, North Adams. Lee Glazer is associate curator of American art at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C. John Ott is associate professor of art history at James Madison University.

This book, which is a wonderful look at Waterston's interpretation of the Peacock Room in Washington, DC, was priced right, and packaged beautifully.

excellent

The Peacock Room was a decorative art project that a very wealthy patron named Leyland commissioned James McNeill Whistler to create while the owner was going to be away for a few months. Meant to serve as a place to house his collection of Chinese porcelain and paintings by Whistler himself, Leyland was surprised to learn that the modest assignment he had envisioned, a few days work at best, had suddenly become a massive reworking of the entire room. Expensive leather wall-coverings and mahogany shelves had been painted over in blue, with gilt illustrative flourishes everywhere. Whistler then proceeded to give Leyland a very large bill, far more than had been agreed upon, for unsolicited work. Leyland was not happy about the liberties the artist had taken, but agreed to pay half. What followed was a bitter campaign of slurs and insults, most of them originating from Whistler. He had been in financial trouble, and obviously saw 'The Peacock Room' as a way to alleviate those troubles. The room is still a popular exhibit today, and is every bit as beautiful, lavish and decadent as it was a century ago. If you didn't know the ugliness that surrounded its creation, the room itself certainly offers no clues. Darren Waterston decided to create the Peacock Room's dark, psychic twin -- an experiment in homage, fused with an interpretation of historical and psychological context. He reimagines it as a place where all the anger, jealousy and bitterness manifests as a corrosive radiation, eating away at the decadent beauty of the work. Leyland's porcelain lies in pieces, and the shelves are broken and twisted, wounds afflict the painted and gilded surfaces like leprosy. The title, 'Filthy Lucre', is taken from one of Whistler's vitriolic screeds. This exhibition catalog (also entitled 'Filthy Lucre'), published by frequent collaborators Skira and Rizzoli, is 9.75" x 11.75" and 130 pages long. Using a thick, glossy stock, sturdily bound, and attractively designed and laid out, this is a handsome hardcover, and one worthy of Waterston's vision. I've followed his career as a painter for the last few years, and his brilliantly executed abstract compositions are incredibly unique. Only Ali Banisadr produces a similar blend of abstraction and vague figuration that possesses his level of intelligence and technical skill. For a more comprehensive examination of Waterston's art, I recommend the hardcover monograph released by Charta a few years ago, 'Darren Waterston: Representing the Invisible'; it collects many of his most beautiful and moving works, large-scale oils that suggest the birth of the universe, hydrogen nebulas, the spaces between atoms, a sunset glimpsed through the waning storms of sulfuric acid on Venus. For fans of Waterston and Whistler, this is absolutely fascinating work. Art that ties itself contextually to the history, style, subject matter, and methods of the past is always

what draws me in, and this is a prime example.

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