

J.W. WATERHOUSE: THE MODERN PRE-RAPHAELITE
The Sackler Wing of Galleries

27 June – 13 September 2009

Supported



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In June, the Royal Academy of Arts will present a major retrospective exhibition of the Pre-Raphaelite artist, John William Waterhouse RA (1849-1917). The exhibition, which will feature over 40 paintings from both public and private collections, will include such highlights as *The Lady of Shalott*, 1888 (Tate), *Hylas and the Nymphs*, 1896 (Manchester Art Gallery), *Circe Invidiosa: Circe Poisoning the Sea*, 1892 (The Art Gallery of South Australia), and from the Royal Academy Collection, *A Mermaid*, 1900. These works will be accompanied by studies in oil, chalk and pencil; period photographs; sketchbooks; and the volumes of Tennyson and Shelley in which Waterhouse drew sketches.

The retrospective will consider how Waterhouse's paintings reflect his engagement with contemporary issues ranging from antiquarianism and the classical heritage to occultism and the 'New Woman'. It will include almost all the paintings which made him one of the most successful and critically acclaimed artists of the day. This will be the first major Waterhouse show to have been presented in the United Kingdom since the late 1970s.

Waterhouse was born to British parents in Rome in 1849. That same year, the founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti) delivered their manifesto for a new, 'reformed', art which challenged the 'official' art promoted through the Academy's teaching and Annual Exhibitions. Waterhouse inherited the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's taste for Tennyson, Keats and Shakespeare, but also drew inspiration from classical mythology interpreted by Homer and Ovid. Although his images are perceived as serene, they belie a Romantic fascination with intense human passions.

During the 1890s, Waterhouse gravitated toward images of metamorphosis which made subtle references to contemporary Symbolist preoccupations: lily-like nymphs seducing Hylas into their pool; naiads discovering the severed head of Orpheus singing as it floats in the river; and Echo and Narcissus pining away. Such explicit subjects gave way after 1900 to more ambiguously titled, mythically inspired scenes of maidens picking flowers. These were succeeded by a decisive return to the emotionally more highly charged "Pre-Raphaelite" narratives as *Miranda - The Tempest*, *Tristram and Isolde*, and *The Decameron*.

Waterhouse's richly coloured canvases, often large in scale, deliver a visual impact that is both compelling and unprecedented. Even seen individually, his canvases astonish viewers with their lively brushwork, dramatic compositions, and deft draftsmanship. His painterly manner and adherence to three-dimensional space distinguish him from his Pre-Raphaelite forerunners. This exhibition will examine the notion of Waterhouse as a "belated" Pre-Raphaelite who discovered Millais's *Ophelia* (Tate, 1851-52) in 1886, at exactly the same moment that he was absorbing the spontaneity of newer French art

through William Logsdail, Frank Bramley, and the Newlyn and Primrose Hill Schools. The twentieth-century scholars who reclaimed the Pre-Raphaelites often marginalised Waterhouse for such seemingly contradictory tendencies, yet it is these which have endeared him to viewers today.

Waterhouse enjoyed a long-standing relationship with the Royal Academy of Arts. He entered the Royal Academy Schools in 1870 as a probationary student of sculpture before turning to painting and his work was accepted at the prestigious annual Summer Exhibition in 1874, when he was aged 25. Eleven years later, the exhibition of his painting of the young Christian martyr, St Eulalia, won him election as an Associate Member of the institution, a distinction which was followed by his election as a full Royal Academician in 1895. He marked his entry to the artistic elite by depositing *A Mermaid* with the institution as his Diploma Work, and his commitment to the Academy as a whole by teaching regularly in the RA Schools.

ORGANISATION

The exhibition has been curated by Peter Trippi, art historian and Waterhouse biographer, together with Elizabeth Prettejohn, Professor of Art History at the University of Bristol, Robert Upstone, Curator of Modern British Art at Tate and MaryAnne Stevens, Director of Academic Affairs, Royal Academy of Arts. This exhibition is organized by the Groninger Museum, the Netherlands with the collaboration of the Royal Academy of Arts, London and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

CATALOGUE

The accompanying catalogue captures the visual impact of Waterhouse's richly coloured and compelling canvases. The exhibition's curators' explore the artist's distinctive role in

the history of British art, his engagement with the pictorial innovations that were taking place in France during the later nineteenth century, and the artist's particular vision of femininity.

EXHIBITION TOUR

Groninger Museum, Groningen, The Netherlands 13 December 2008 – 3 May
2009

Royal Academy of Arts, London 27 June – 13 September 2009

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada 1 October 2009 – 7 February
2010

DATES AND OPENING HOURS

Press View: Tuesday 23 June, 10am – 2pm

Open to public: Saturday 27 June – Sunday 13 September 2009
10am – 6pm daily (last admission 5.30pm)

Late night openings: Fridays until 10pm (last admission 9.30pm)

ADMISSION

£9 full price; £8 Registered Disabled and 60 + years; £7 NUS / ISIC cardholders; £4 12–18 years and Income Support; £3 8–11 years; 7 and under free.

TICKETS

Tickets are available daily at the RA. To book tickets in advance please tel: 0844 209 1919 or visit www.royalacademy.org.uk. Groups of 10 or more are asked to book in advance; please tel: 020 7300 8027, fax: 020 7300 8084 or email: groupbookings@royalacademy.org.uk

IMAGES

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