

PRESS RELEASE

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VICTORIAN RADICALS: FROM THE PRE-RAPHAELITES TO THE ARTS & CRAFTS MOVEMENT OPENS AT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM JUNE 13, 2019

Wide-ranging exhibition reveals how three generations of artists revolutionized the visual and decorative arts in Britain



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SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Art Museum presents *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement* (June 13–September 8, 2019), exploring how three generations of rebellious British artists, designers, and makers responded to a time of great social upheaval and an increasingly industrial world. Organized by the American Federation of Arts and the Birmingham Museums Trust, the exhibition features 150 works from the collection of the city of Birmingham—many of which have never been shown outside of the United Kingdom—including paintings, drawings, books, sculptures, textiles, stained glass, and other decorative arts. They reveal a passionate artistic and social vision that revolutionized the visual arts in Britain.

Victorian Radicals features work by notable Pre-Raphaelite and Arts & Crafts artists including Ford Madox Brown, Edward Burne-Jones, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, William Morris, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Playing out against the backdrop of late 19th-century England, these influential movements were concerned with the relationship between art and nature, questions of class and gender, the value of the handmade versus machine production, and the search for beauty in an age of industry—all relevant issues in our current era of anxiety amid rapidly evolving technologies.

“This exhibition is perfect for Seattle right now,” says Chiyo Ishikawa, SAM’s Susan Brotman Deputy Director for Art and Curator of European Painting and Sculpture. “These artists wanted art to infuse every aspect of life, believing it could be a force for social good. Somewhat paradoxically, they looked back to England’s medieval past for inspiration, revering nature, authenticity, and the handmade—and in doing so, they brought up questions about the purpose of art in society that future generations would continue to grapple with.”

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Victorian Radicals is presented chronologically, tracing a 60-year period across the turn of the 19th century.

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The First Industrial Nation



In the late 1840s, London's Royal Academy of Arts dominated artistic practice with a focus on the classical European tradition of painting and sculpture. Artists such as Sir Edwin Landseer, Charles Eastlake, and William Etty were admired by Queen Victoria for their large, dramatic paintings inspired by Renaissance artists. The exhibition opens with an introduction to this tradition that the Pre-Raphaelites

would come to reject: a hierarchal reliance on the grand style of history painting. Also at this time, new technologies—including electroplating and the introduction of steam power—were rapidly increasing the speed and output of manufacturing, and the mass-produced objects made, particularly from the hub of Birmingham, were highly ornate.

The Pre-Raphaelite Avant-Garde

Led by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, and William Holman Hunt, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded in 1848 with the intent of returning modern art to the simplicity, clarity, and honesty of European painting before the time of Raphael (1483-1520). Drawing inspiration from literature, the Bible, and modern life, these artists insisted on depicting only “what they could see,” with an ethos that revered nature and the immediacy of vivid colors and human emotion. There was also a social interest in the value of labor and the inequities furthered by rapid industrialization.



A highlight of this section is Hunt's *Two Gentlemen of Verona, Valentine Rescuing Sylvia From Proteus* (1851), which goes directly to nature to depict a scene from Shakespeare. The artist engaged friends as models and took advantage of new chemical pigments to produce strikingly vivid jewel tones that at the time were seen as garishly bright. Also, John Everett Millais' *The Blind Girl* (1854-56) reveals the Pre-Raphaelites' interest in the primacy of the senses,

depicting vision, sound, smell, and touch in a tender scene of modern life. Decorative objects such as handmade silver and gilded vessels crafted in refined, Gothic Revival styles reflect a similar interest in honesty and simplicity.

Secular Ministry

A second wave of Pre-Raphaelites emerged after 1857, brought together around the charismatic figure of poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. This group was even more inspired by the culture and religion of the Middle Ages, especially the rich colors, importance of narrative, and idealistic approach to beauty. This section also features the *Kelmscott Chaucer*, elaborately illustrated by Edward Burne-Jones and produced by William Morris, as well as several examples of Morris's textiles, which remain a major influence in the design world.



Artists such as Frederick Sandys and Edward Burne-Jones explored feminine archetypes—both positive and negative—in their work. Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (begun 1877) imagines the death of Beatrice, the beloved of the medieval Italian poet Dante Alighieri, as a visionary trance; it was also a tribute to artist and muse Elizabeth Siddall, who died of a laudanum overdose in 1862. Also in this section are Burne-Jones' four *Pygmalion* paintings depicting Ovid's myth about a sculptor's love for his creation.

Utopias for a New Century

As the new century approached, new art schools throughout England's industrial cities emphasized the practical teaching of crafts, alongside organizations inspired by medieval craft guilds. Birmingham became the center of the burgeoning Arts & Crafts Movement, which held that art could directly improve people's lives and was influenced by socialist utopian ideals. In this arena, women played a key role, becoming leading makers and teachers in these new art centers.



On view in this section are notable examples of Arts & Crafts decorative objects, including George James Frampton's "Christabel necklace" (1893-94), featuring the sculptor's pioneering work in enamel; numerous examples of Martin Brothers Pottery, which embraced a free and humorous style of decoration; and an embroidered textile by Birmingham Municipal School of Art teacher Mary Jane Newill, which will be presented as intended on a bed.

The paintings on view in this section echo the Pre-Raphaelite interest in precise lines and brilliant color, revealed in works by Maxwell Armfield, Joseph Edward Southall, and Arthur Joseph Gaskin. Kate Elizabeth Bunce's *Musica* (ca. 1895-97) depicts a female figure playing a lute against a detailed background of flowers and decorative objects, reminiscent of those produced by the Birmingham School.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A 280-page exhibition catalogue (including 320 color illustrations) published by the American Federation of Arts and Prestel will be available for purchase in SAM Shop (\$65.00). Also titled *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement* (ISBN: 978-3-7913-5763-8), it features essays by Tim Barringer, Paul Mellon Professor of the History of Art at Yale University; Martin Ellis, a curator, lecturer, broadcaster, and former Curator of Applied Art

at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; and Victoria Osborne, Curator of Fine Art for Birmingham Museums Trust in England.

RELATED PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

In conjunction with the exhibition, SAM will present a dynamic lineup of programming, including Art Beyond Sight and docent tours and a series of public programs. The programs will explore timely connections between themes of craft, labor, and nature that preoccupied these artists and Seattle today, with highlights including a free community opening celebration on June 13, free drop-in art workshops, and an in-gallery response space.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

For each major exhibition, SAM convenes a group of advisors from the community to take part in its planning. The *Victorian Radicals* advisory committee is Kelly Björk, Rachel Gallaher, Jerry Garcia, Dana Garvey, Misha Graham, Elisheba Johnson, Malia Peoples, and Jayme Yen.

TICKETING INFO

Museum Hours

- Closed Tuesday
- Wednesday 10 am–5 pm
- Thursdays 10 am–9 pm
- Friday–Monday 10 am–5 pm

Daily Prices

- \$29.99 Adult
- \$27.99 Senior (62+), Military (with ID)
- \$19.99 Student (with ID), Teen (15–18)
- FREE for children (14 and under)
- FREE for SAM Members

First Thursday Reduced Ticket Prices

- \$9.99 Adult
- \$7.99 Senior (62+), Military (with ID)
- \$4.99 Student (with ID), Teen (15–18)
- FREE for children (14 and under)
- FREE for SAM Members

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and Birmingham Museums Trust. The exhibition is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding provided by Clare McKeon and the Dr. Lee MacCormick Edwards Charitable Foundation.



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Image credits: All works lent by Birmingham Museums Trust on behalf of Birmingham City Council. All images © Birmingham Museums Trust, Courtesy American Federation of Arts. *La Donna della Finestra*, 1881, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, British, 1828-1882, oil on canvas with underdrawing in chalk and graphite, 37 3/4 × 34 1/4 in., Purchased, 1883, 1885P2465. *The Christabel Necklace*, 1893-94, George James Frampton, British, 1860-1928, silver gilt, champlevé enamel, pearls, and opals, 23 7/8 × 3 in., Presented by Mrs. Anne Hull Grundy, 1983M3. *Wall tile*, ca. 1880-90, William Frend De Morgan, British, 1839-1917, dust-pressed earthenware painted in underglaze colors on a white slip, 8 1/8 × 8 in., Purchased from the Alan Green Collection and presented by the Friends of Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery with assistance of the MGC/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, 1981M118. *Pandora Crowned by the Seasons*, ca. 1824-30, William Etty, British, 1787-1849, oil on canvas, 68 × 95 3/4 in., Presented by the Birmingham Society of Artists, 1867, 1885P2547. *Two Gentlemen of Verona (Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus)*, 1851, William Holman Hunt, British, 1827-1910, oil on canvas, 38 3/4 × 52 1/2 in., Purchased, 1887P953. *Beata Beatrix*, begun 1877 (left unfinished in 1882 and completed by Ford Madox Brown), Dante Gabriel Rossetti, British, 1828-1882, oil on canvas, 34 1/8 × 26 7/8 in., Purchased, 1891P25. *Musica*, ca. 1895-97, Kate Elizabeth Bunce, British, 1856-1927, oil on canvas, 30 × 20 in., Presented by Sir John Holder, 1897P17.

ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and reopened as the Asian Art Museum in 1994. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017. From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.

ABOUT THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

The American Federation of Arts is the leader in traveling exhibitions internationally. A nonprofit organization founded in 1909, the AFA is dedicated to enriching the public's experience and understanding of the visual arts through organizing and touring art exhibitions for presentation in museums around the world, publishing exhibition catalogues featuring important scholarly research, and developing educational programs. For more information about the AFA, visit www.amfedarts.org.

ABOUT BIRMINGHAM MUSEUMS TRUST

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery is operated by Birmingham Museums Trust, an independent charity that manages the city's museum collection and venues on behalf of Birmingham City Council. It uses the collection of around 1,000,000 objects to provide a wide range of arts, cultural and historical experiences, events and activities that deliver accessible learning, creativity and enjoyment for citizens and visitors to the city. The collection is one of the three great civic collections of the UK, reflecting the city's historic and continuing position as a major international centre for manufacturing, commerce, education and culture. Most areas of the collection are designated as being of national importance, including the finest public collection of Pre-Raphaelite art in the world. Attracting over one million visits a year, the Trust's venues include Aston Hall, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Blakesley Hall, Museum Collections Centre, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, Sarehole Mill, Soho House, Thinktank and Weoley Castle. More at birminghammuseums.org.uk.