



For Immediate Release

**DRAWN FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE
CITY OF BIRMINGHAM (UK), "VICTORIAN RADICALS"
BEGINS NATIONAL TOUR IN OCTOBER**



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Proserpine*, 1881–82, Oil on canvas, 39 9/16 x 24 3/16 in., Presented by the Trustees of the Public Picture Gallery Fund, 1927.

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(New York, March 29, 2018)—The American Federation of Arts is pleased to announce the upcoming exhibition *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement*, a project created in collaboration with Birmingham Museums Trust. The exhibition, drawn from the collection of the city of Birmingham, United Kingdom, focuses on three generations of young and rebellious artists and designers whose response to the increasingly industrial world around them revolutionized the arts in Britain. Beginning in October 2018, the show will be presented at seven venues across the United States, including the Oklahoma City Museum of Art (October 11, 2018–January 6, 2019), Vero Beach

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Museum of Art (February 10–May 5, 2019), Seattle Art Museum (June 13–September 8, 2019), San Antonio Museum of Art (October 10, 2019 – January 5, 2020), Yale Center for British Art (February 13–May 10, 2020), Nevada Museum of Art (June 18–September 13, 2020), and the Frick Pittsburgh (October 29, 2020–January 24, 2021).

“With Birmingham’s strong tradition of artisans and workshops as well as its history of early and rapid industrialization, we couldn’t have asked for a better partner in this project,” said Pauline Willis, Director & CEO of the American Federation of Arts. “Birmingham Museums Trust is unique as the city’s holdings include the largest Pre-Raphaelite collection in the world, and we are thrilled to be able to share these treasures with audiences across the United States.”

Toby Watley, Director of Collections at Birmingham Museums Trust, said: “This is Birmingham Museums Trust’s largest ever touring exhibition. It will bring the story of the city’s pioneering artistic figures to America, for the first time in this depth: from the progressive work of the Pre-Raphaelites to the inspiring designs of the Arts and Crafts movement,” and added, “This is an exciting opportunity for Birmingham, helping to raise the profile of both the city and its collection internationally.”

With approximately 145 works on display at each venue, by artists and designers such as Ford Madox Brown, Edward Burne-Jones, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Elizabeth Siddall, the exhibition’s paintings, drawings, watercolors, and decorative arts illuminate the ideas that preoccupied artists and critics at the time—the relationship between art and nature; questions of class and gender identity; the value of the handmade versus machine production; and the search for beauty in an age of industry—issues that remain relevant and actively debated today.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

Led by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, and William Holman Hunt, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded in 1848 with the intent to return modern art to the simplicity, clarity, and honesty of European painting before the time of Raphael (1483–1520). The Brotherhood and its circle drew inspiration from literature, the Bible, and modern life. Included in the exhibition is an important painting by Holman Hunt titled *Two Gentlemen of Verona (Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus)* (1851), which was attacked by reviewers when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy, but inspired an

impassioned, public defense of the Brotherhood by the critic and reformer John Ruskin that transformed the group's reception.

The exhibition includes one of the most famous Pre-Raphaelite paintings, *Pretty Baa-Lambs* (1851–59), which marks the artist Ford Madox Brown's pioneering attempt to paint a landscape from nature in direct sunlight. Other highlights from this period include commentaries on the harsh working conditions and social stratification of Britain at the time, such as Henry Wallis's *The Stonebreaker* (1857), Brown's *Work* (1859–63), and Rossetti's powerful studies (1853–59) for the unfinished painting *Found*. These preparatory drawings both illustrate Rossetti's exploration of female exploitation and destitution and reveal the Pre-Raphaelites' meticulous working processes. Two day dresses in vivid green and purple silk illustrate the impact of the invention of aniline dyes from 1856 on, and provide a fascinating parallel with the jewel-like, synthetic pigments employed in the contemporaneous paintings on view.

In the decorative arts, a return to medieval simplicity inspired designers to match form more closely to function and material. The exhibition includes stained glass panels, ceramics, and metalwork created as a critique to industrial mass production, by reform-minded designers and architects such as A.W. N. Pugin and William Butterfield, as well as a group of exceptional, handmade glass vessels designed by Philip Webb in 1859–60 and manufactured by the pioneering glassmakers James Powell & Sons, an early manifestation of modern design.

By the latter half of the 1850s, a younger generation of artists, including William Morris and the Birmingham-born Edward Burne-Jones, had launched a second wave of Pre-Raphaelitism inspired heavily by the rich colors, beauty, and romance of medieval art. This portion of the exhibition features paintings and works on paper by Burne-Jones, Frederick Sandys, and Simeon Solomon, but also foregrounds the role of women as artists and models. Elizabeth Siddall is represented in the exhibition both as a fiercely original artist of the Pre-Raphaelite circle and as Rossetti's model (and wife), and she is joined by multiple depictions of Fanny Cornforth, Rossetti's mistress and housekeeper after Siddall's death, and Jane Burden, who married William Morris in 1859 and became Rossetti's muse during the latter part of his life.

In 1861, William Morris gathered a group of "Fine Art Workmen" to form the most progressive and idiosyncratic company of the Victorian period, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. (later named Morris

& Co). Bolstered by Ruskin's critiques of contemporary art and design, the company's collaborative working methods and return to pre-industrial techniques enabled its artist-designers to create objects that stood out from the factory-produced commodities of the period. Some remarkable examples include stained glass by Morris, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones, tiles designed by Morris and Burne-Jones and painted by Kate and Lucy Faulkner, and a fine group of textiles and wallpaper designs by Morris. *Victorian Radicals* also includes an extraordinary gilded chest, *The Hesperides Cassone* (1888), designed by Burne-Jones with decoration executed by Kate Faulkner, unseen outside Birmingham since it was first displayed at the 1893 Arts & Crafts Exhibition in London. Works by Morris's associates include luster-glazed ceramics designed by William de Morgan and a remarkable, complete tea set designed and manufactured by W. A. S. Benson, a founding member of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society.

A particularly strong group of works by Burne-Jones charts his progress from Rossetti's young protégé to one of the most celebrated European painters of his generation. Burne-Jones's long and fruitful artistic partnership with William Morris is also represented comprehensively. A high point of the exhibition is the glorious *Kelmscott Chaucer* (1896), with Morris's typography and Burne-Jones's illustrations, one of the most influential printed books of the past two centuries.

Victorian Radicals presents many illustrious examples from the Arts & Crafts Movement, with a particular focus on the products of the city of Birmingham. Inspired by the notion that the act of making could heal a society dehumanized by industry and mechanization, new educational centers that emerged in Britain's leading industrial cities of the late nineteenth century, such as Birmingham's municipal School of Art, emphasized the practical teaching of crafts and the union of art and design. Among the pieces in the exhibition are outstanding works by key proponents of this movement, including objects created by architect-craftsmen Henry Wilson and John Paul Cooper, exceptional pottery by the Martin Brothers, and jewelry by Charles Robert Ashbee and the Guild of Handicraft. Alongside works by artists and makers who drew strength from Birmingham's wealth of small workshops and its jewelry-making and metalwork traditions, this exhibition also introduces American audiences to the city's painters, including Maxwell Armfield, Kate Bunce, and Joseph Southall, whose experiments in tempera led to a revival of the medieval medium in Britain at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Drawing upon one of Europe's great collections of fine and decorative art, *Victorian Radicals* is a comprehensive and unprecedented testament to three generations of the most influential artists in British history. Their vision inspired artists from Frank Lloyd Wright to Walter Gropius, and art movements from European Symbolism to the Bauhaus and International Modernism. They changed the practice, purpose, and perception of the visual arts by both embracing the past and laying the groundwork for the art and design revolutions of the new century.

CURATORS

Tim Barringer is Paul Mellon Professor and Chair of the History of Art at Yale University. He specializes in the art of Britain and the British Empire, notably the Pre-Raphaelites and American painting. He has curated exhibitions at Tate Britain, Yale, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Martin Ellis is a freelance curator, lecturer, and broadcaster. As Curator of Applied Art at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery for many years, he has particular expertise in the fields of metalwork, ceramics, and stained glass.

Victoria Osborne is Curator of Fine Art for Birmingham Museums Trust, specializing in British nineteenth-century works on paper. She has co-curated several major international loan exhibitions of British nineteenth-century art.

CREDIT

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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.

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. birminghammuseums.org.uk

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