



# Pre-Raphaelites

Victorian Art and  
Design, 1848 – 1900

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# Pre-Raphaelites



## Introduction

Queen Victoria had been on the throne for little more than a decade when seven fervent young men formed a secret society in London in 1848 with the aim of rejuvenating the arts in industrial-age Britain. Bonding over their mutual passion for medieval art and disdain for contemporary painting practices, they called their group the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) in acknowledgment of their admiration of art prior to Raphael (1483–1520). The three most talented members were **JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS**, **DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI**, and **WILLIAM HOLMAN HUNT**—ages nineteen, twenty, and twenty-one, respectively. Along with other artists in their circle, most significantly their mentor **FORD MADOX BROWN**, they sowed the seeds of a self-consciously avant-garde movement, one whose ideals they published in a short-lived journal, *The Germ*. Pre-Raphaelite paintings often addressed subjects of moral seriousness, whether pertaining to history, literature, religion, or modern society. While the artists emulated the pure colors, spatial

flatness, and linear draftsmanship of late Gothic and early Renaissance art, their unconventional style — with its hyperrealism and brilliant palette — looked shocking to the public when their first paintings were exhibited in 1849.

As an official group, the Pre-Raphaelites stayed together for only five years. But a second generation of artists, centered on Rossetti and led by **EDWARD BURNE-JONES** and **WILLIAM MORRIS**, arose in the 1860s with the aim of cultivating beauty in everyday life. By the end of Victoria's reign in 1901, the Pre-Raphaelite legacy had permeated all areas of British art and design, from painting and sculpture to photography and the decorative arts.

## Origins

When they first met in the late 1840s, Millais, Rossetti, and Hunt were disillusioned by their training at the Royal Academy of Arts, where rigid rules of painting and composition prevailed. They started holding meetings to discuss their ideas and reviewed each other's drawings. Rather than study the great masters of the previous three centuries, whose work they felt was hackneyed, they aspired to the simplicity and sincerity of Gothic and early Renaissance art. Above all they sought to convey truth.

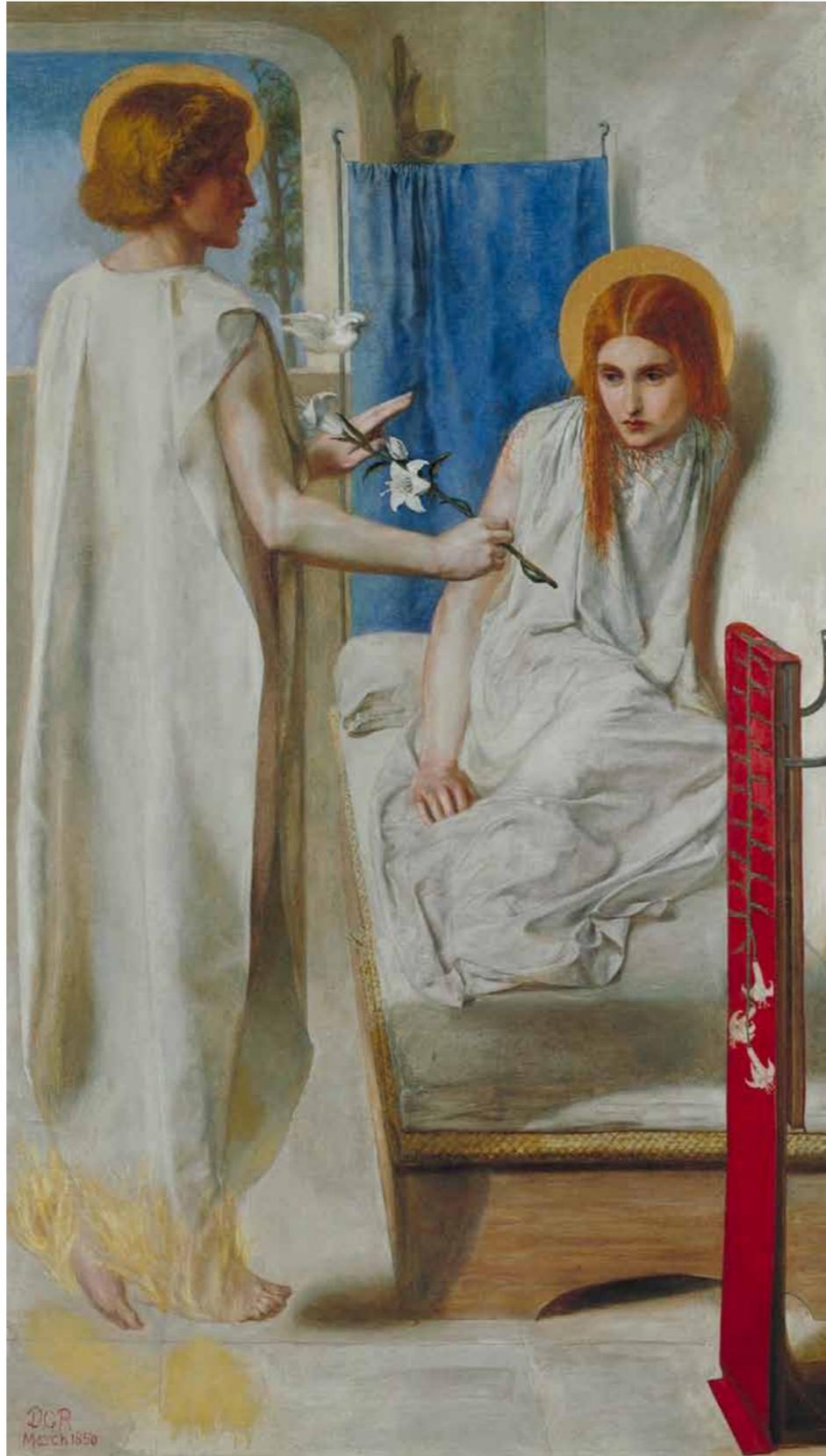
Initial reaction to their work was often brutal. The realistic treatment of the Holy Family — dirty feet, wrinkled brows, bulging blue veins — in one of Millais's earliest forays in the new style (fig. 1) proved too much for Charles Dickens. In a scathing review, he declared the figure of Jesus to be a “hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-headed boy,” condemned Mary for being “horrible in her ugliness,” and compared Joseph and his helper to “dirty drunkards.”

Rather than use professional models for their paintings, the enterprising young men asked family members and friends to pose. In one of his earliest endeavors, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (*The Annunciation*), Rossetti chose his devout sister, Christina, to model for the Virgin Mary, and his brother William for the angel Gabriel (fig. 2). The painting's title, which translates as “Behold the handmaid of

**FIG. 1** John Everett Millais, *Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Shop)*, 1849–1850, oil on canvas, Tate, purchased with assistance from the Art Fund and various subscribers, 1921



**FIG. 2** Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (*The Annunciation*), 1849–1850, oil on canvas, Tate, purchased 1886



the Lord,” comes from Mary’s acceptance of the news that she would bear the son of God (Luke 1:38). Whereas scenes of the Annunciation traditionally showed the Virgin quietly submitting to the will of God, Rossetti imagined the realistic reaction of a young girl, with Mary recoiling from the lily, symbol of her purity, proffered by Gabriel. The angel’s celestial status is represented not by wings but by flames shooting up beneath his hovering feet.

Artists traditionally prepared their canvases with a first layer of earthen or mid-toned paint. Starting with *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, however, Rossetti chose to paint this initial layer white, a practice also adopted by Millais and Hunt. The particularly luminous white ground used in their canvases made the pure colors brushed over it seem illuminated. A vibrant early example of this effect is seen in Hunt’s painting illustrating a scene from Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (fig. 3), in which the hero, Valentine, halts his friend Proteus’ unwanted advances toward Silvia, the woman they both desire. The brilliant colors and elaborate details of costume and vegetation still astonish today.

FIG. 3 William  
Holman Hunt,  
*Valentine Rescuing  
Sylvia from  
Proteus — Two  
Gentlemen of Verona  
(Act V, Scene iv)*,  
1850–1851, oil on  
canvas, Birmingham  
Museums and Art  
Gallery, Purchased  
1887



## Literature and History

Since the seventeenth century, academic theory had imposed a rigid hierarchy of subjects in art. Ranked above all others were dramatic events from literature or history that could impart lessons about personal and civic virtue. Pre-Raphaelite artists, though concerned primarily with historical and literary subjects, eschewed themes of classical mythology, military might, and aristocratic grandeur that had inspired earlier generations of artists. Instead they chose poignant episodes and intimate scenes, favoring tales set in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and delving especially into the works of Dante and Shakespeare. They also looked to contemporaries such as Alfred Tennyson, the future British poet laureate. His poem “Mariana,” which describes the wearisome isolation of a character from Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, inspired Millais’s painting of the long-suffering woman (fig. 4). Mariana waited for years for her feckless fiancé, Angelo, to return after he abandoned her when her dowry was lost. In Millais’s painting she rises from her tedious task of embroidery to stretch her aching back, embodying the sentiment of the poem: “She only said, ‘My life is dreary, / He cometh not,’ she said; / She said, ‘I am weary, weary, / I would that I were dead!’”

The Pre-Raphaelites embraced Tennyson as a kindred spirit. Arthur Hughes, a student from the Royal Academy who came under Pre-Raphaelite influence

**FIG. 4** John Everett Millais, *Mariana*, 1850–1851, oil on panel, Tate, accepted by HM Government in lieu of tax and allocated to the Tate Gallery, 1999



**FIG. 5** Arthur Hughes, *April Love*, 1855–1856, oil on canvas, Tate, purchased 1909



(though he was never an official member of the Brotherhood), took a verse from the poet's "The Miller's Daughter" of 1833/1842 ("Love is hurt with jar and fret. / Love is made a vague regret") as inspiration for *April Love* (fig. 5). Hughes did not illustrate the actual narrative of the poem, which addresses the theme of constancy from the viewpoint of a husband reminiscing on the spring when he fell in love with his wife. Instead the painter relied on the poem's lyrical atmosphere to imagine the tender pain of a lovers' quarrel.

When turning to literary or historical subjects, the Pre-Raphaelites sought to present particulars of dress and setting in a credible manner. To capture the believable sense of a floating body in his painting *Ophelia* (fig. 6), Millais placed his model, **ELIZABETH SIDDALL**, in a bathtub filled with water. (In a futile attempt to keep her warm, he put candles beneath it, but she reportedly became ill afterward and her father refused to allow her to work for him again.) The descent into madness of Shakespeare's gentle maiden after her beloved Hamlet murdered her father had fascinated British artists since the late eighteenth century. Rarely, however, had her demise been imagined as explicitly as in Millais's painting, which shows her floating down the stream before the moment when, in the words of the Bard,

**FIG. 6** John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851–1852, oil on canvas, Tate, presented by Sir Henry Tate, 1894



“her garments, heavy with their drink, / Pull’d the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death.”

Several years after *Ophelia* caused a sensation, another painting with a similarly bleak subject caught the attention of the public. Henry Wallis, who had briefly studied at the Royal Academy Schools with the Pre-Raphaelites and shared many of their concerns, imagined the death — possibly a suicide — of the seventeen-year-old poet Thomas Chatterton (fig. 7). An eighteenth-century prodigy who wrote pseudo-medieval works, Chatterton struggled for patronage while living in destitution. The writer John Ruskin, who was the Pre-Raphaelites’ chief advocate in the early years, was enamored of Wallis’ painting, praising its realism and advising viewers to “examine it well inch by inch.” Wallis used the horizontal canvas to great effect, conveying the tomblike confinement of the murky garret in which Chatterton died. The influence of the Pre-Raphaelite technique is evident in the attention Wallis paid to even the slightest details of the room’s furnishings and the poet’s clothing. This is history as pathos, not triumph, with anecdotal evidence (ripped-up pieces of paper, a single shoe lying on the floor, and the fatal dose of medicine fallen away from the poet’s hand) adding to the story of a troubled, misunderstood genius.

FIG. 7 Henry Wallis, *Chatterton*, 1855–1856, oil on canvas, Tate, bequeathed by Charles Gent Clement, 1899



## Nature

“Go to nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly... rejecting nothing, selecting nothing and scorning nothing.” This advice to landscape painters, offered by Ruskin in his book *Modern Painters* (1843), galvanized the Pre-Raphaelites. Embracing the idea that artists should refrain from changing what they observe in nature, they sought to capture its truth by laboriously transcribing every blade of grass, every crinkled leaf. Ruskin, whose own study of nature resulted in a trove of detailed drawings (fig. 8) and even daguerreotypes, recognized a mutual affinity with the Pre-Raphaelite artists when he first came upon their work. His spirited defense of their art countered its initially harsh reception, marking the beginning of critical rehabilitation.

*An English Autumn Afternoon, Hampstead — Scenery in 1853* (fig. 9) by Ford Madox Brown demonstrates how innovative Pre-Raphaelite scenes of nature could be. Despite the appealing motifs of the young couple and the hovering dove, the picture was radical in eschewing most of the picturesque conventions expected in landscape paintings. No path or winding stream leads the eye back to the distant vista; the view of a red-roofed house is cut off randomly by the foreground, and there is no central focal point. The composition epitomized Ruskin’s dictate to paint nature without judgment, to the degree that Ruskin himself questioned why the artist had selected such an “ugly” view (“Because it lay out of a back window,”

**FIG. 8** John Ruskin, *Mountain Rock and Alpine Rose*, 1844 or 1849, pencil, ink, chalk, watercolor, and bodycolor, Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University)



came the flippant reply). Describing it as a “literal transcript” of the scene, Brown reinforced that idea by indicating the specific season and time of day in the title, later narrowing the moment further to 3:00 pm.

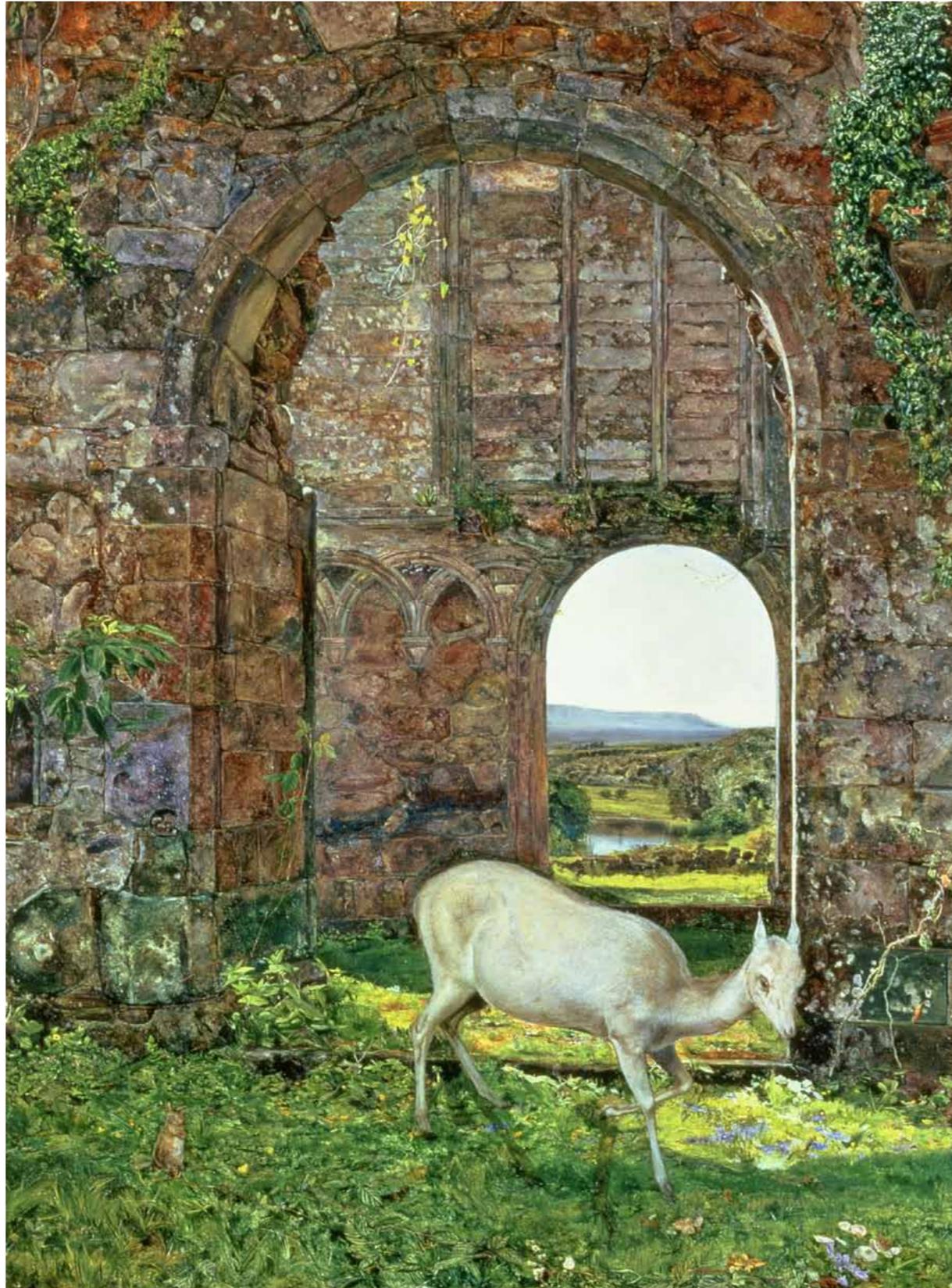
The Pre-Raphaelites’ style was quickly assimilated by artists outside their circle. John Inchbold, a student at the Royal Academy around the time Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti first met, attracted the attention of Ruskin with his meticulous representation of the natural world. The writer purchased Inchbold’s *At Bolton* (fig. 10), a brightly colored scene of medieval ruins inspired by William Wordsworth’s poem “The White Doe of Rylstone” (1807). The painting presents dilapidated stone arches with near-scientific exactitude, the view through them to distant hills no less in focus than the foreground vegetation.

Some critics accused Pre-Raphaelite artists of relying on photography to arrive at their extreme accuracy. In fact, the artists were adamant about painting outdoors, directly from nature, as Millais did with *Ophelia* (fig. 6) and Inchbold with *At Bolton*. Nevertheless, they must have been inspired by the technology’s ability to capture nature’s details, and especially by the clarity and precision of daguerreotypes; certain aesthetic choices, such as *At Bolton*’s planar composition, may even have been influenced by the new medium.

**FIG. 9** Ford Madox Brown, *An English Autumn Afternoon, Hampstead — Scenery in 1853*, 1852 – 1855, oil on canvas, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, presented by the Public Picture Gallery Fund, 1916



**FIG. 10** John William Inchbold, *At Bolton*, 1855, oil on panel, Leeds Museums and Galleries



## Salvation

Religious art had nearly disappeared in Britain after the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. However, in the early 1800s, as debates roiled over the types and role of ritual in the Church of England, interest grew in reviving the tradition. Demand for religious images increased further when civil rights were finally restored to Catholics in 1829, sparking curiosity about the once-suppressed denomination. Pre-Raphaelites responded to these currents by seeking innovative ways to represent biblical themes — albeit devoid of conventions associated with Catholicism, still regarded with suspicion. Works such as Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents* (fig. 1) or Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (fig. 2) were not created as devotional images for a church setting, but for secular spaces such as homes. These efforts were initially met with skepticism by those who accused the artists of secretly harboring Catholic sympathies.

Of all the Pre-Raphaelites, Hunt was the most deeply religious. He described the role of the artist as being “high priest and expounder of the excellence of the works of the Creator.” In search of authenticity in his biblical pictures, he went to the Holy Land on several occasions to study people, clothing, architecture, and rituals, putting his research to use in works such as *The Finding of the Savior in the Temple* (fig. 11). The scene is based on a passage from the Gospels, which relates that Mary

**FIG. 11** William Holman Hunt, *The Finding of the Savior in the Temple*, 1854–1860, oil on canvas, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, presented by Sir John T. Middlemore Bt, 1896

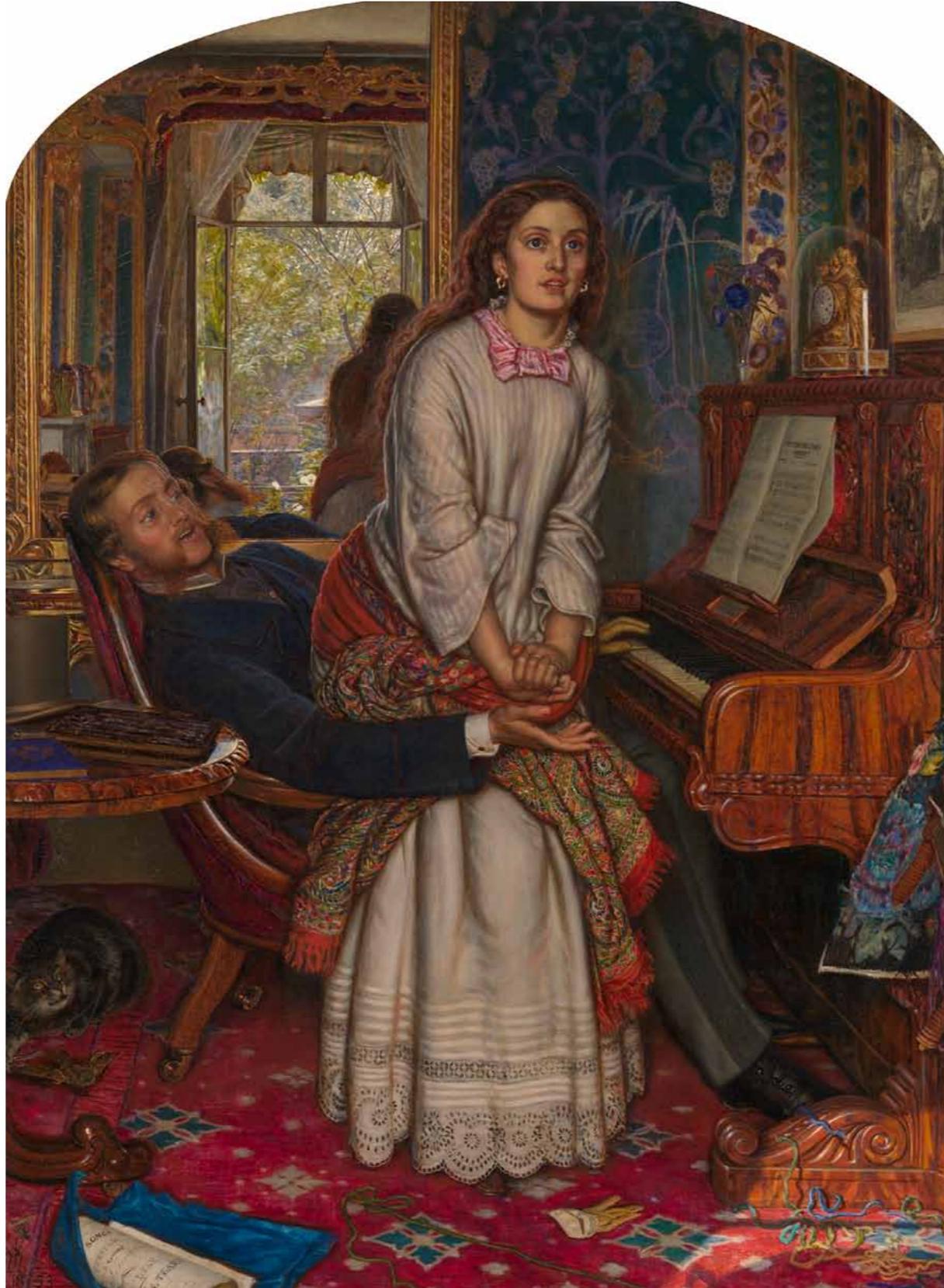


and Joseph had returned home after an annual visit to Jerusalem, only to realize Jesus was left behind. Returning to the city, they found him in the temple conversing with the elders, who were astonished at his wisdom. The painting's dazzling array of exacting details of dress and setting lend it an air of factual accuracy. (The artist, however, finished the work back in London using local models for many of the figures, including Jesus and Mary.) A critical and financial success, the painting sold for the highest sum of any English painting to that date, and Hunt's dealer made money touring it through England.

A moralizing undercurrent extended to just about every subject the Pre-Raphaelites addressed, not just to religious themes. Modern society was ripe for redemption. Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (fig. 12) depicts a moment of salvation, a spiritual message embedded in a composition dense with symbolism. A kept woman, on hearing the song her lover has been singing, realizes her mistaken ways and rises from his lap. The sentimental lyrics reminded her of lost innocence; she looks out from the dark, gaudily furnished apartment that has been set up for their trysts, toward the light of the garden, reflected in the large gilded mirror behind her. The fallen woman was a shocking subject, but it fascinated many painters, including Rossetti, who addressed the controversial theme in a poem and

"Oft in the Stilly  
Night" by Thomas  
Moore, arrange-  
ment by Sir  
John Stevenson.  
Recording by Rosa  
Lamoreaux, soprano,  
accompanied by  
Maribeth Gowen,  
pianist. Copyright  
© 2012 National  
Gallery of Art,  
Washington

Fig. 12 William  
Holman Hunt,  
*The Awakening  
Conscience*, 1853 –  
1854, oil on canvas,  
Tate, presented by  
Sir Colin and Lady  
Anderson through  
the Friends of the  
Tate Gallery, 1976



a number of drawings. He spent years working on an unfinished painting, *Found* (fig. 13), in which a rural youth, in the city to sell his calf, discovers his former fiancée, now a prostitute. Unlike Hunt's painting, Rossetti's seems to offer little hope for redemption, as the woman turns away in shame. A sonnet he wrote in 1881 to accompany the work ends despairingly: "Leave me — I do not know you — go away."

The Pre-Raphaelites invested even the subject of labor with moral gravity. One of Brown's earliest critical successes was an allegory of work, which he made a second version of to please a patron (fig. 14). The Protestant idea linking diligence and hard work to salvation was voiced by social critic Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) when he wrote "there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in work." Brown's painting (which portrays Carlyle at right, bearded and wearing a hat) places the physical laborers front and center, while the aristocratic equestrians, who have no need to work, remain in shadow in the background.

**FIG. 15** Dante  
Gabriel Rossetti,  
*Found*, begun  
1859, oil on canvas,  
Delaware Art  
Museum, Wilming-  
ton, Samuel and  
Mary R. Bancroft  
Memorial, 1935



FIG. 14 Ford Madox Brown, *Work*, 1863, oil on canvas, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, bequeathed by James Richardson Holliday, 1927

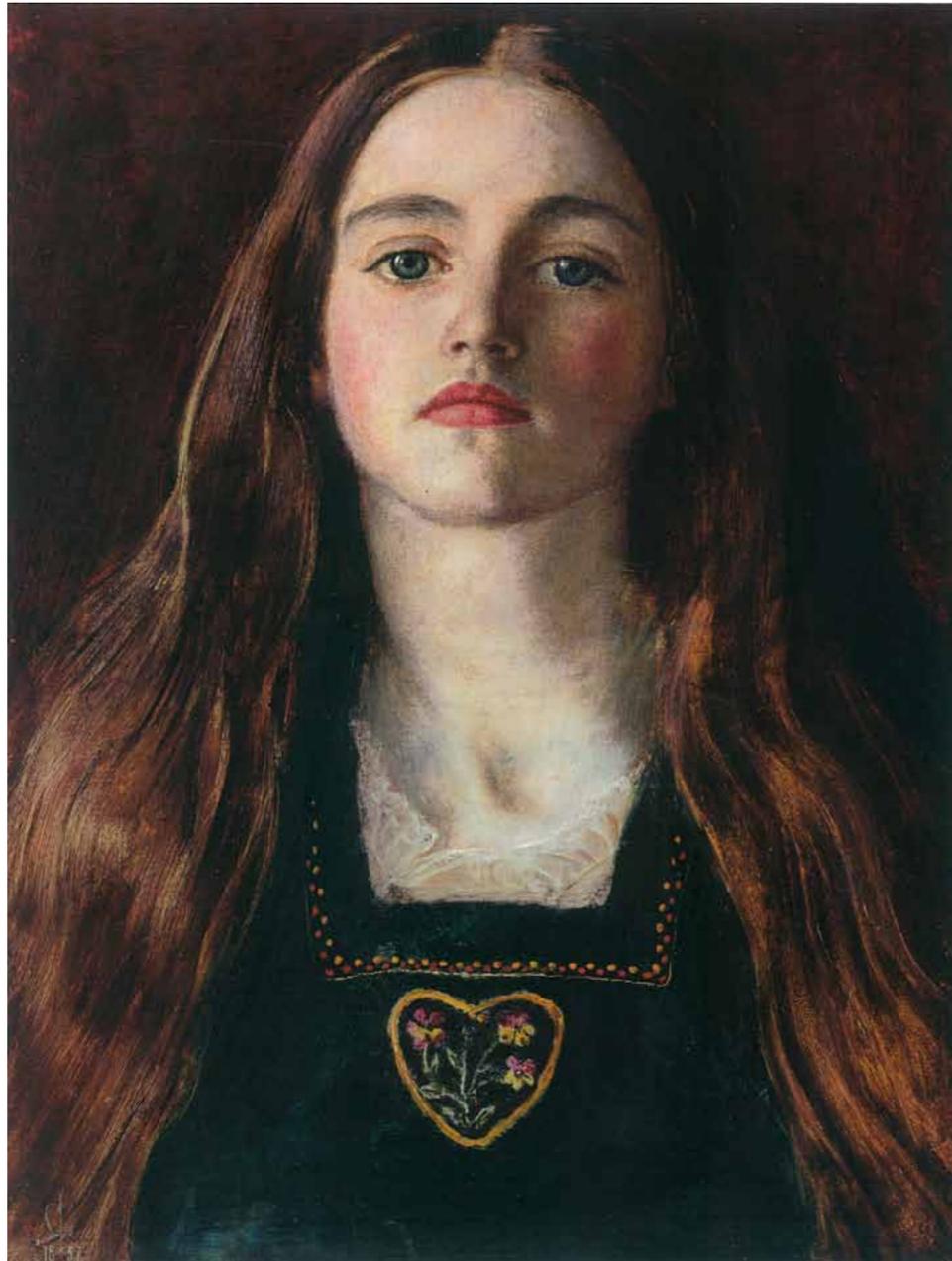


## Beauty

In the 1860s, the Pre-Raphaelites gradually relinquished their labor-intensive handling of paint in favor of looser brushstrokes and a softer surface effect. Delight in the purely visual eclipsed the earnest search for truth as they made explorations of beauty their primary quest. This stylistic evolution was at the forefront of a larger development in the arts known as the Aesthetic movement. *Sophie Gray* (fig. 15), Millais's poetic portrait of his wife's sister, was a significant precursor of this shift. Rossetti followed suit with his 1859 painting of a voluptuous copper-haired beauty, *Bocca Baciata* (fig. 16). The title, "kissed mouth," refers to a line from the *Decameron*, by the fourteenth-century Italian poet Boccaccio, but was a later addition. The work, more ideal and opulent than realist, otherwise has no connection to the text: it is a transparent celebration of sexualized femininity that makes no claim to moral relevance.

Sensuous, half-length female figures with luxurious, wavy tresses became the central motif of Rossetti's later career. Whereas the Pre-Raphaelite artists initially drew from pre-sixteenth-century sources, the format, rich coloring, and luscious paint handling of these works recall Venetian Renaissance paintings by artists such as Titian, whom Rossetti had come to admire. Since the late 1840s the Pre-Raphaelites had sought out striking young women, whom they called "stunners,"

**FIG. 15** John Everett Millais, *Sophie Gray*, 1857, oil on paper laid on panel, Private collection c/o Christie's



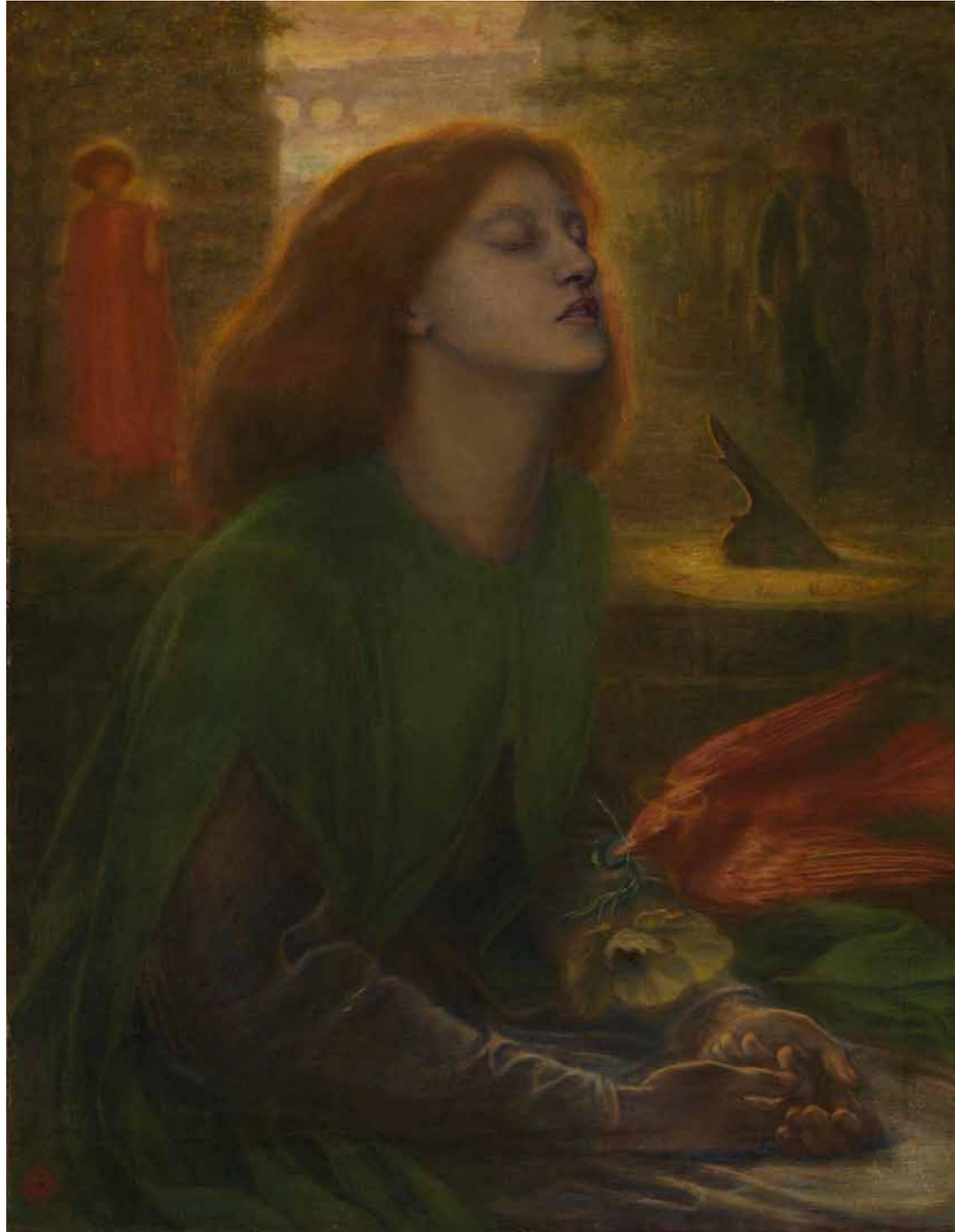
**FIG. 16** Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Bocca Baciata*, 1859, oil on panel, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, gift of James Lawrence



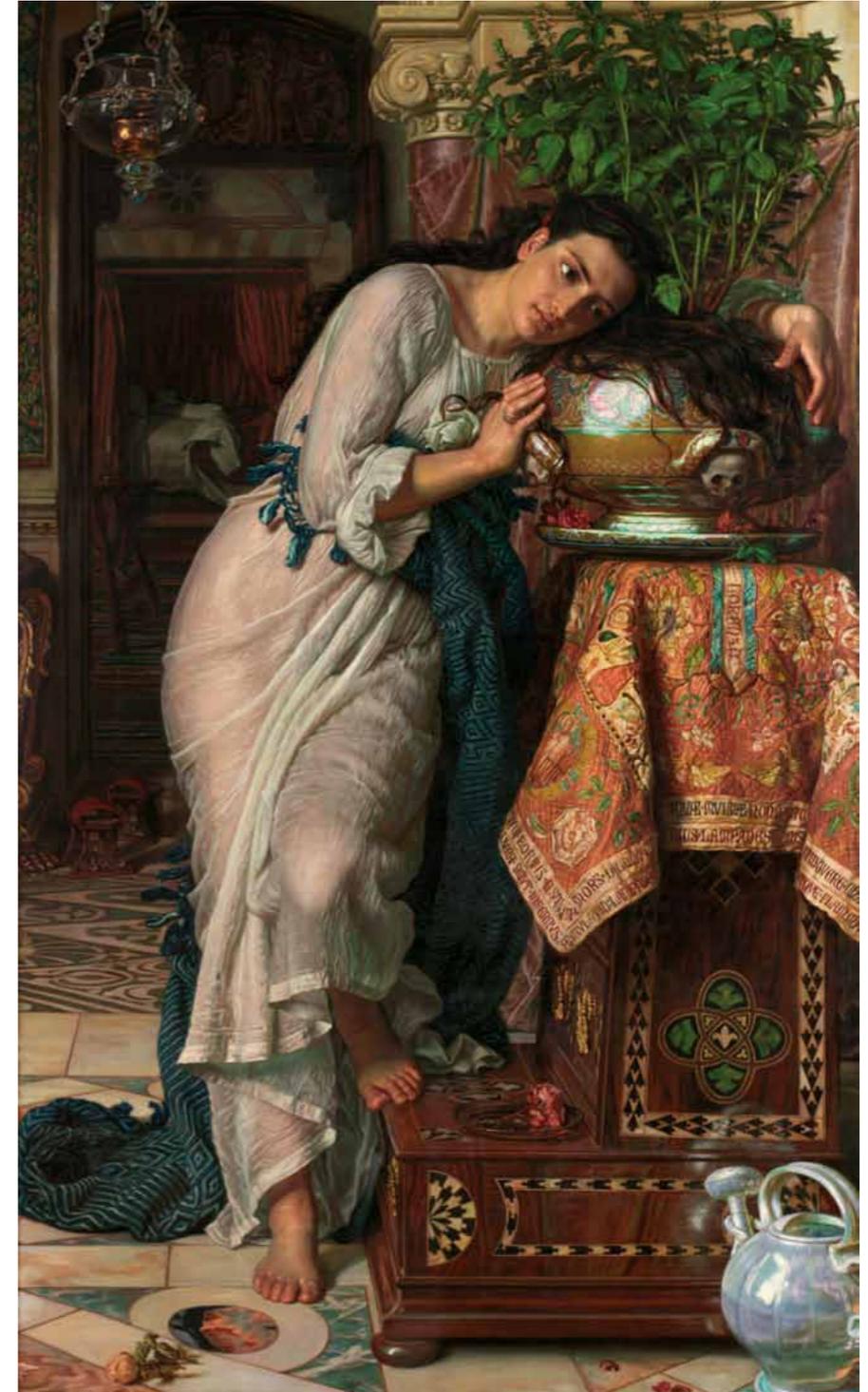
to hire as models. Rossetti favored several different models, a few of whom formed an intimate relationship with him. Fanny Cornforth, who sat for *Bocca Baciata*, was his housekeeper and most likely one lover; another was Elizabeth Siddall, eventually his wife. Siddall, who studied to be an artist in her own right, was Rossetti's most significant muse in the 1850s. She inspired him even after her death in 1862. *Beata Beatrix* (c. 1863–1870, fig. 17) is a portrait of both the poet Dante Alighieri's beloved Beatrice and of Siddall, each of whom had died tragically young. The painting makes clear references to both women, using dreamlike symbolism. In the background, the figure of Dante (at right) looks toward the personification of Love, who carries Beatrice's glowing heart. The dove, colored red as a symbol of love, refers to Rossetti's nickname for his wife; the poppy it drops into her lap acts as a reminder of how she died, of an opiate overdose. With a halolike light around her hair and her eyes closed, Beatrice sits as if in an ecstatic trance — in Rossetti's words, “rapt visibly into Heaven.”

The frank eroticism of Rossetti's depictions of women was received with some consternation, even by his former PRB colleague Hunt, who accused him of serving “mere gratification of the eye.” Yet Hunt, who remained the most stalwart Pre-Raphaelite in technique and tone, also introduced a certain sensuality in his

**FIG. 17** Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix*, c. 1864–1870, oil on canvas, Tate, presented by Georgiana, Baroness Mount-Temple in memory of her husband, Francis, Baron Mount-Temple, 1889



**FIG. 18** William Holman Hunt, *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*, 1866–1868, retouched 1886, oil on canvas, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne



paintings from the 1860s on, for example in *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (fig. 18). Illustrating a poem by John Keats (itself inspired by an episode from the *Decameron*), the work depicts a young Florentine maiden who has buried her murdered lover's head in a pot in which she grows basil watered by her tears. She stands in a richly appointed interior, but it is her sultry figure — flowing hair and shapely body revealed beneath a clinging, transparent dress — that most elicits attention.

Among those who admired Rossetti's sensuous women was the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron. Her soft-focus, tightly cropped, bust-length portraits of beautiful women echoed Rossetti's paintings, as in *The Mountain Nymph, Sweet Liberty* (fig. 19), which follows the example of Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* in taking its title from a literary work (lines from Milton's *L'Allegro*) without providing an obvious literary context. Early photography had been valued for its ability to accurately represent the world, but Cameron demonstrated how the relatively new medium could be put to use in the pursuit of beauty and poetry.

**FIG. 19** Julia  
Margaret Cameron,  
*The Mountain  
Nymph, Sweet  
Liberty*, 1866, albu-  
men print, National  
Gallery of Art,  
Washington, New  
Century Fund



## Paradise

William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones were young students when they befriended Rossetti in the mid-1850s. The three shared a passion for medieval culture and began collaborating on projects such as a chair for the rooms Morris and Burne-Jones rented in London (fig. 20). Morris commissioned the chair from a local craftsman to look like those he had seen in Gothic cathedrals; he and Rossetti then decorated it with abstract designs and figures of a knight and ladies. Several years later, after furnishing the home he moved into with his new bride, **JANE BURDEN**, Morris established a decorative arts firm with Burne-Jones, Rossetti, and Brown as partners.

Morris lamented the division of labor introduced by the industrial revolution. Mass production, in his view, separated workers from their creations, and machine manufacturing resulted in shoddy quality. Morris' enterprise, by contrast, would be a close collaborative effort among artists and artisans to craft high-caliber goods, such as furniture, tapestries, stained glass, and tile, to elevate public taste. Burne-Jones designed the enchanting *Cinderella* tile panel (fig. 21), one of three panels illustrating fairy tales commissioned to be installed over a fireplace. In general, Burne-Jones and Rossetti provided the figural designs, often based on medieval tales, for the firm's productions, including large tapestries (fig. 22), stained glass,

**FIG. 20** Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris, *The Arming of a Knight* chair, 1856–1857, painted pine, leather, and nails, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, acquired through the Bequest of Doris Wright Anderson and through the F. V. du Pont Acquisition Fund, 1997



FIG. 21 Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. (maker), Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris (designers), and Lucy Faulkner (painter), *Cinderella* tile panel, 1862–1865, overglaze polychrome decoration on tin-glazed earthenware Dutch blanks in ebonized oak frame, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California



FIG. 22 Morris & Co.,  
Edward Burne-Jones,  
William Morris,  
and John Henry  
Dearle (designers),  
*The Arming and  
Departure of the  
Knights of the Round  
Table on the Quest  
for the Holy Grail*,  
1890–1894, cotton  
warp, wool, and  
silk weft tapestry,  
Collection of Jimmy  
Page, Courtesy of  
Paul Reeves, London



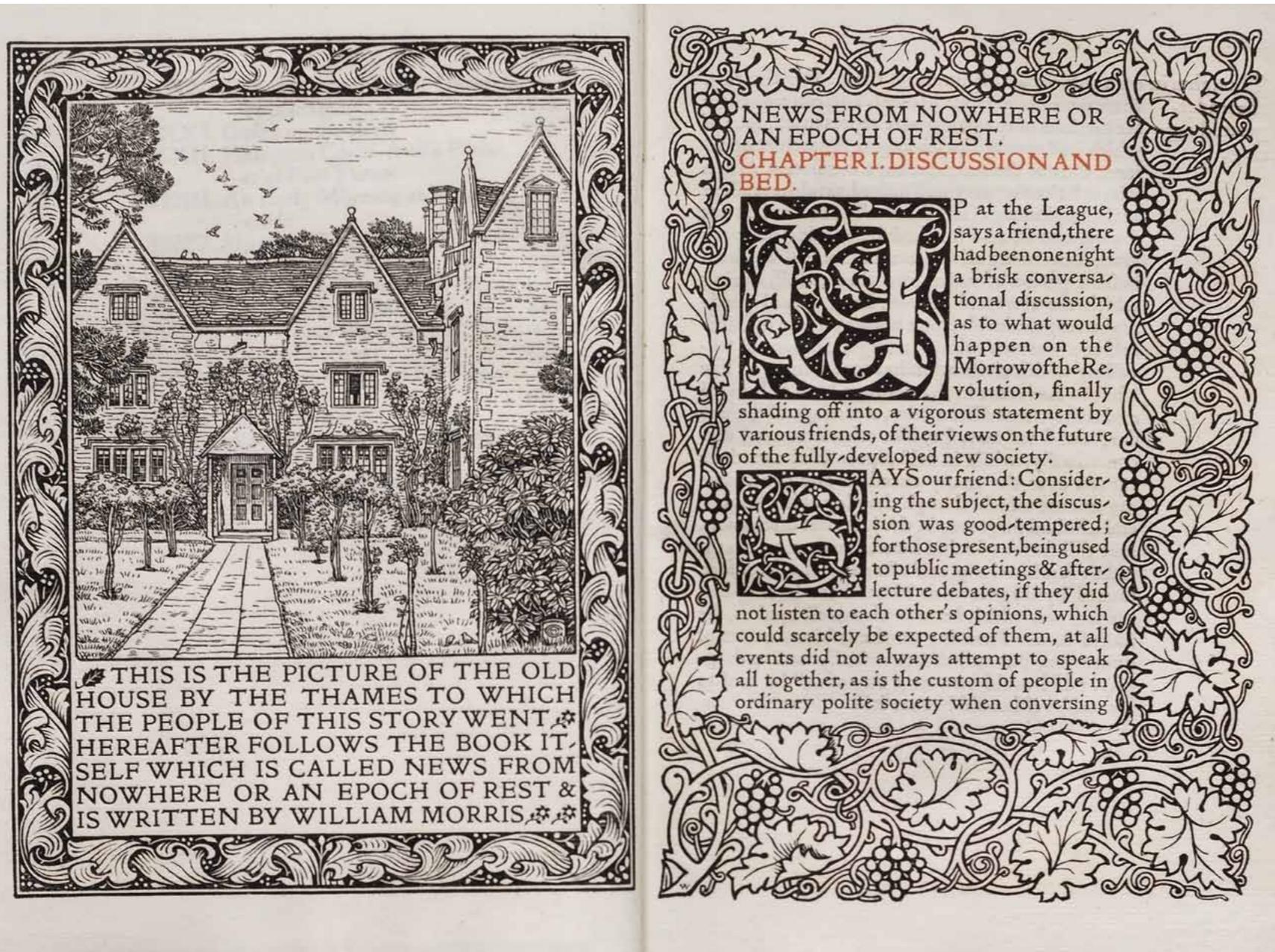
and furniture. Jane Morris and her younger daughter, May, worked on embroidery, creating wall hangings and bedspreads. Morris had a hand in every aspect of production, reviving old techniques for weaving, dyeing, and block-printing.

Among Morris' most famous creations were the patterns he designed for wallpapers and textiles, which he based on British flora and antique fabrics. Instead of using engraved rollers to print patterns with synthetic dyes, he experimented with natural colors and mastered the old-fashioned art of printing by hand with carved wood blocks. Thirty-four blocks, an unprecedented number, were used in the making of the *Cray* textile, named after a tributary of the river Thames (fig. 23). Morris also founded the Kelmscott Press in 1891 with the aim of hand-printing books that were "visible works of art." The frontispiece by C. M. Gere to his *News from Nowhere* (fig. 24), a utopian fantasy about an ideal future society, features Kelmscott Manor, the author's beloved sixteenth-century country home; the typeface, designed by Morris, was inspired by Renaissance Venetian fonts.

**FIG. 23** Morris & Co., William Morris (designer), *Cray* printed textile, 1884, block-printed cotton, printed between 1884 and 1917, The Baltimore Museum of Art, The Jane and Worth B. Daniels, Jr. Fund



FIG. 24 William Morris (designer) with frontispiece by C. M. Gere, *News from Nowhere*, Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1892, Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, on loan to the University of Delaware Library

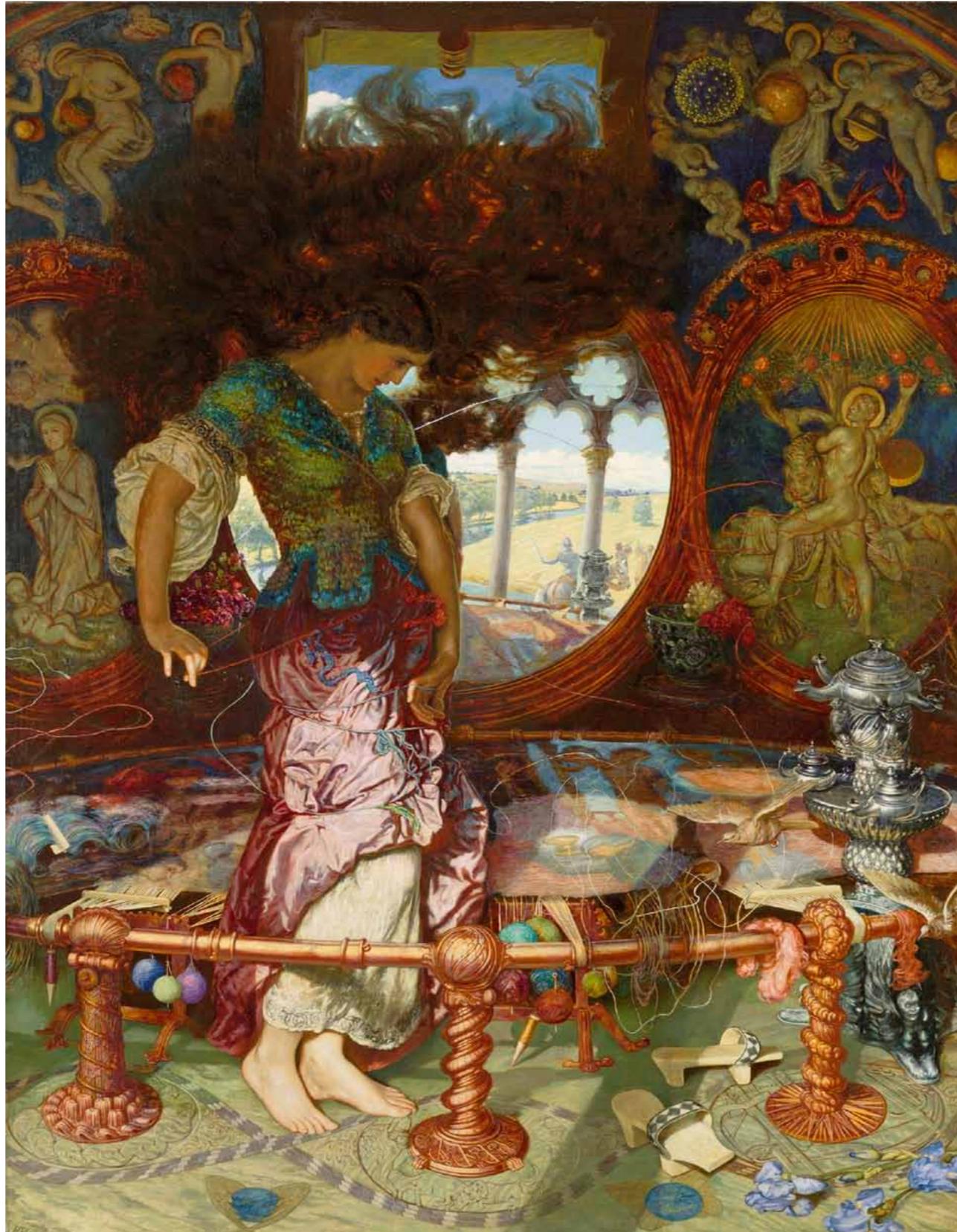


## Mythologies

Whether the Pre-Raphaelite artists remained grounded in a precise, naturalistic style, as Hunt did, or embarked on a more poetic direction with loose brushwork like Rossetti and Burne-Jones, their late paintings are often imbued with a concern for psychological states. The chaotic energy unleashed in Hunt's depiction of the Lady of Shalott (fig. 25) is suggestive of the figure's own unrestraint. As described in a poem by Tennyson that drew loosely on Arthurian legends, the lady defied a curse that condemned her to live in isolation while weaving images of the outside world she was allowed to glimpse only through a mirror. The painting represents the moment after her fateful decision to look directly out the window at the gallant Sir Lancelot, ultimately precipitating her death. The mirror behind her shoulder cracks and a gust of wind blasts through the room, whirling her hair and unraveling the tapestry. The room's elaborate decoration includes figures of the Virgin Mary and Hercules, who embody virtue and the acceptance of duty — unlike the Lady of Shalott, who has failed to remain steadfast against temptation.

The lady's impassive face betrays no emotion, but the tornado-like force churning around her surely reflects her inner turmoil. A certain introspection also characterizes Rossetti's *La Pia* (fig. 26), a portrait of a tragic figure who appears in the

FIG. 25 William Holman Hunt and Edward Robert Hughes, *The Lady of Shalott*, c. 1888–1905, oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund



fifth canto of Dante's *Purgatory*. La Pia's neglectful husband banished her to a castle, where the pious woman eventually lost her will to live and died without receiving the last rites. Seen here in doleful confinement, she embodies melancholy through her bowed head and fingers that twist her wedding ring.

Rossetti's work wielded enormous influence on Burne-Jones, who took the dreamlike aesthetic further than any other Pre-Raphaelite. Unlike most of his colleagues, Burne-Jones never addressed contemporary subjects. He was drawn to the medieval past, but added classical antiquity to his pictorial repertoire of myth, legend, and fairy tale. *Laus Veneris* ("Worship of Venus") (fig. 27) derives from the Germanic story of the knight Tannhäuser, who upon discovering the home of Venus stays to indulge in sensual pleasures. In this picture Venus lounges at right, waiting for her musicians to play. The somnolent atmosphere, soft focus, and flowing, silky robes charge the painting with diffuse eroticism.

The densely packed scene is typical of Burne-Jones' refined, ornamental style. A tapestrylike effect here and elsewhere is indicative of the artist's involvement with the decorative arts. One of his largest projects, never finished, was to outfit the music room of a wealthy member of Parliament: in addition to colored glass in

FIG. 26 Dante  
Gabriel Rossetti, *La  
Pia*, 1868–1880, oil  
on canvas, Spencer  
Museum of Art, The  
University of Kansas,  
1956.0031



FIG. 27 Edward Burne-Jones, *Laus Veneris*, 1873–1878, oil on canvas, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne



the windows and oak paneling, he planned a series of ten large canvases to act as a frieze along the upper walls. The subject of the series was the Greek hero Perseus, slayer of the Medusa, a snake-haired Gorgon so terrifying she turned those who looked at her into stone. The second of four pictures that were completed, *The Doom Fulfilled* (fig. 28) shows Perseus' rescue of Andromeda, tied to a rock as an offering to the sea monster coiled in sinewy loops around the hero. Enigmatic and wistful, Burne-Jones' visions are the culmination of the Pre-Raphaelite drive to infuse the modern industrial world once again with beauty and meaning.

**FIG. 28** Edward Burne-Jones, *The Doom Fulfilled*, 1885–1888, oil on canvas, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart



# Biographies





### John Everett Millais (1829–1896)

Millais entered the Royal Academy Schools at the age of eleven, the youngest student ever accepted by the prestigious institution. After the heated reaction to his Pre-Raphaelite paintings, he gained an ally in Ruskin, whose favorable writings turned his fortune around. Ruskin was also responsible, inadvertently, for Millais's future family. While spending time with Ruskin to paint his portrait, Millais fell in love with the writer's wife, Effie Gray. She eventually left her disastrous marriage — unconsummated after six years — and married Millais in 1855. Despite the scandal that ensued, Millais enjoyed tremendous critical and financial success, especially through his commissioned portraits and sweeping Scottish landscapes. Admitted to the Royal Academy as an associate in 1853 and a full member in 1863, he was elected its president in the year of his death.

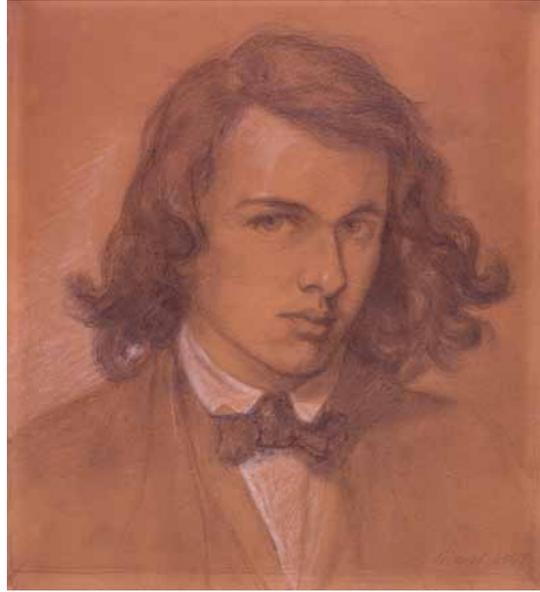
TOP: William Holman Hunt, *John Everett Millais*, 1853, pastel and chalk, National Portrait Gallery, London



### William Holman Hunt (1827–1910)

Hunt's family expected him to follow his father, a manager of a warehouse, into the business world. After he insisted on pursuing a career in art, his father helped him gain access to lectures at the Royal Academy. Unlike Millais, however, Hunt was never admitted as a professional member of the academy. He was forced to look outside its system of exhibiting to find other avenues to promote his work. Of key importance was the Grosvenor Gallery, which opened in London in 1877 to showcase contemporary art that had no place at the academy. Like other PRB artists, his personal life was plagued by controversy. Involved with Annie Miller, a barmaid turned model who posed for *The Awakening Conscience* (fig. 13), he tried to shape her into a potential wife through education. He married instead the more respectable Fanny Waugh, who died shortly after giving birth to their son in Florence. Hunt later married her sister Edith in Switzerland. Although this hurt him socially (in England it was illegal for a man to marry his wife's sister), he continued to find professional success, especially in his religious paintings. Hunt's two-volume autobiography (1905) is a major source of Pre-Raphaelite lore.

BOTTOM: John Everett Millais, *William Holman Hunt*, 1853, pencil with some wash, National Portrait Gallery, London



## Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882)

Son of an Italian political émigré, Rossetti was obsessed with his namesake, the poet Dante Alighieri, though he never once visited Italy. He grew up in a literary family: his father was a Dante specialist, his brother William a writer, and his sister Christina a poet. Rossetti also wrote poetry, including sonnets to accompany his paintings. His artistic education was uneven: he studied two years at the Royal Academy, then became a pupil of Ford Madox Brown for a few months, and finally moved in with Hunt as an apprentice. After *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (fig. 2) was pilloried by critics, he rarely again exhibited his works in public. Rossetti's private life was turbulent. He had affairs with several models, and in the 1850s was obsessed with Elizabeth Siddall, whom he eventually married. Her untimely death, which may have been a suicide, haunted him for the rest of his life. In the 1860s Jane Morris became his constant muse, and probably his lover, though she broke off the relationship after discovering his addiction to the sedative chloral hydrate, a dependency that led to his physical and mental decline. Rossetti was not yet fifty-four when he died, nearly blind, of kidney failure.

TOP: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Self-Portrait*, 1847, pencil and chalk, National Portrait Gallery, London

## Elizabeth Siddall (1829–1862)

The daughter of a hardware store owner, who grew up in the industrial north, Siddall was working at a milliner shop in London when the artist and Pre-Raphaelite associate Walter Deverell spotted her. Awed by her thick red hair, pale skin, and striking features, he asked her to model for him. Shortly afterward she began sitting for artists in the Pre-Raphaelite circle including Millais and, fatefully, Rossetti. They began an affair, and she moved in with him. He encouraged her work in watercolor and poetry, as did Ruskin, but Rossetti's eventual neglect, despite marrying her in 1861, may have contributed to her death. Half a year after giving birth to their stillborn child, Siddall took an overdose of laudanum, a narcotic commonly used in Victorian England. Rossetti buried her with all his poems, but several years later exhumed her body to retrieve them.

BOTTOM: British 19th Century, *Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall*, c. 1850s, albumen print with hand coloring possibly by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, Gift of the A. Jay Fink Foundation, Inc., in memory of Abraham Jay Fink, 1963

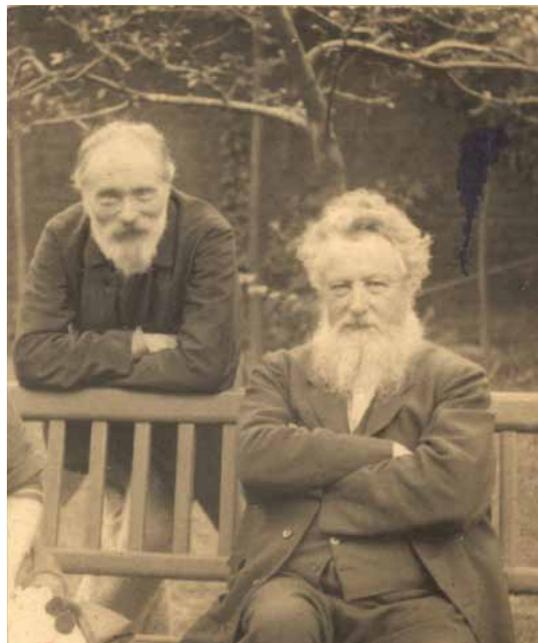




### Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893)

Several years older than the PRB artists, Brown never officially joined the group. His painting style was instrumental to their early work and he contributed to their journal, *The Germ*. Brown had grown up in France, studied art in Belgium, and worked in Paris and Rome for several years before moving to England. In Rome he met the Nazarenes, German artists who formed a brotherhood that was a precursor to the PRB. Brown introduced their medievalist works to the Pre-Raphaelites. They in turn influenced him with their technique of painting on a white ground. Brown's first wife died five years after their marriage; he later married one of his models. His early days of financial struggle — owing in part to the hostility he faced from Ruskin, whom he offended and who thereafter refused to champion his work — were gradually replaced by the security of steady patronage in the 1860s and early 1870s. He spent his last years working on murals for the town hall in Manchester.

TOP: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ford Madox Brown*, 1852, pencil, National Portrait Gallery, London



### Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898)

Growing up in Birmingham, Burne-Jones immersed himself in the world of his imagination. His was a lonely childhood — his mother died shortly after his birth and his father, a frame-maker who never remarried, left most of the child-rearing to nurses and relatives. He went to Oxford, intended for the ministry. Moving to London in 1856, he started producing watercolors and drawings under the informal tutelage of Rossetti. Their friendship led to a joint commission in Oxford to paint murals, together with a larger group that included Morris. In 1860 Burne-Jones married Georgiana McDonald, daughter of a Methodist minister, who had studied at a school of design. In the late 1860s, as he became involved with his model and pupil Maria Zambaco in a tempestuous affair that turned into public scandal, Georgiana deepened her friendship with Morris, with whom she shared strong socialist convictions. By the early 1870s Burne-Jones had transitioned to oil painting, creating large-scale works that earned him international fame. He was admitted to the Royal Academy as an associate in the 1880s, although he continued to exhibit his work primarily with the Grosvenor Gallery. His high reputation led Queen Victoria to make him a baronet in 1894.

BOTTOM: Frederick Hollyer, *Morris and Burne-Jones at the Grange*, 1890, platinum print, William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest



### William Morris (1834–1896)

Morris led a privileged childhood, growing up in a London suburb as the son of an affluent businessman. For a number of years the family lived on the border of Epping Forest, known since medieval times as a favored royal hunting spot, which the young Morris frequently explored. He entered Oxford with the intention of becoming a clergyman, and there he struck up a lifelong friendship with Burne-Jones. After the two read *The Germ* in 1855, they were inspired to found their own literary journal, *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (1856). They toured northern France together in the summer of 1855, visiting Gothic cathedrals and resolving to dedicate themselves to art. Leaving Oxford without finishing their degrees, they moved to London and became involved in the Pre-Raphaelite circle. The collaborative effort to furnish Red House, the home Morris commissioned from the architect Philip Webb upon his marriage to Jane Burden, acted as impetus for the decorative arts firm Morris established with Burne-Jones, Rossetti, and Brown in 1861. The partnership was dissolved and the firm was reorganized in 1875 as Morris & Co. Morris became a committed socialist who closely connected his artistic endeavors with his political beliefs.

TOP: William Morris, *Self-Portrait*, 1856, pencil, Victoria and Albert Museum, given by Dr. R. Campbell Thompson



### Jane Burden Morris (1839–1914)

The daughter of a stableman, seventeen-year-old Jane Burden caught the eye of Pre-Raphaelite artists while they were in Oxford painting murals in a university building. She became model to several of them, married William Morris in 1859, and acted as Rossetti's last and most inspired muse. Her transformation from an uneducated working-class girl to a widely read, cultivated woman counted among the more successful of the attempts by Pre-Raphaelite artists to elevate their beautiful but often lower-class models into respectable society. Morris was tall and thin with a graceful, long neck, fleshy lips, a thick mass of crimped black hair, and strong dark eyebrows. Part of her appeal was how exotic she seemed—in her looks, her tousled coiffure, her flowing dress that defied the constraints of Victorian fashion. Morris was a skilled needlewoman and collaborated with her husband in his artistic endeavors, but as their marriage faltered, her close relationship with Rossetti seems to have turned into an affair that lasted several years.

BOTTOM: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Jane Morris*, 1870, pen and ink with wash, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection

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### PHOTO CREDITS

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Fig. 16: © 2010 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

### DETAILS

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