

The Pre-Raphaelites

Information for educators

The following booklet has been formulated to provide you with ways of working with groups in the Gallery. The information is based on the Pre-Raphaelites and supplies practical and theoretical approaches to using artworks. You could use the artworks and suggested activities as a starting point to further study or for a new class project, developing the ideas to suit your yearly or termly planning. Ideas can be photocopied directly from the pack or adapted into worksheets for your students to explore independently, in pairs or as part of a group discussion.

The theme has been chosen to give educators and their pupils or students an introduction to the Gallery and the Pre Raphaelite collection, which includes paintings and decorative arts.

Three painters have been selected, as they were the main instigators of this movement, John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Additionally to give a different insight into the movement, a designer, William Burgess, has been selected. The artworks will target specific areas within the Gallery, whilst also allowing time to explore the building generally and grasp the various destination Galleries and breadth of study that can be conducted using the collection.

Manchester Art Gallery is a fantastic resource for engaging with many subjects across the curriculum. Art and Design, History, English and Citizenship, can be easily addressed within one visit and provide a framework for further visits. The education team use many artworks in a cross-curricular approach, which can be adapted to suit individual student, teacher and school/college needs. Some of these techniques will be explored through the information that follows to create a focal point to your visit and to provide inspiration for related classroom or studio activities and future practise.



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Gallery 5

Artwork: *The Light of the World*

Artist: William Holman Hunt

Date Made: 1851-6

Oil on canvas

Hunt paints Christ in an unconventional manner within the darkness of the night, holding a lantern with his left hand. The lantern has been interpreted as the act of bringing light into the world. The door on his right has rusty hinges and is covered with weeds; it represents the entrance to the human soul. This painting was inspired by a passage from the Bible.

The artist worked outdoors at night, in order to capture the real light conditions. Despite being a naturalistic image, there is a dreamlike atmosphere.

The original lantern used in this painting is also displayed in a cabinet, within Gallery 5.



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Gallery 5

Artwork: *Cabinet Stand*

Artist: William Burges

Date Made: 1873

A dresser in two parts, made at different times from wood that has been carved, painted and gilded.

Burges designed this piece of furniture based on a dresser with the chest of drawers at the bottom and a shelving rack above.

The top decorative structure was designed after the chest of drawers, which helps to explain why the two separate pieces do not quite fit together.

Burges was an avid collector of artefacts from the middle-east and Indian sub-continent. This piece illustrates his influences and would have been displayed within his bedroom.



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Gallery 5

Artwork: *Only a Lock of Hair*

Artist: John Everett Millais

Date Made: 1857-58

Oil paint on panel

Millais was a child prodigy and became a student at the Royal Academy at the age of 11, exhibiting there from the age of 17. He made extensive preparatory sketches for all his paintings, and was known as a notable illustrator during the 1860s.

The woman depicted in the painting is about to cut off a strand of hair. She looks outside the picture, distant, lost in thoughts.

This painting could be seen to be not quite a portrait, it more the reflection of an evocative and melancholic moment.

Beauty is essential to the painter who uses fine detail; the colour schemes become almost poetic rather than naturalistic to reflect the mood of the woman.



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Gallery 8

Artwork: *Astarte Syriaca*

Artist: Gabriel Rossetti

Date Made: 1877

Oil on canvas

Rossetti was one of the founders of the Pre Raphaelite brotherhood. Their aim was to restore in art the spirit of the middle ages and early Renaissance and make it relevant to the 19th century.

The painting depicts Astarte, an earlier version of Venus. The striking features of the model, dark eyes, full lips, prominent chin and long neck became recurrent in many of Rossetti's late paintings. It is known that the model was Jane Morris, wife of William Morris. We can recognise her from photographs that the artist took. This piece and other late works often depict mysterious dreamlike women. The artist uses symbolism to express his ideas about female beauty, virtue, love, death and destiny.

Ways in

- Pre-Raphaelites painters concerns were beyond formalism, they tried to express something through their paintings, e.g. a passage from the Bible or inspiration from literature. Students could look at the different examples of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in Galleries 5 and 8, trying to identify the artworks source. Can they identify what sources are the most often used by Hunt, Millais or Rossetti?
- Pre Raphaelites paintings are full of symbolism, this is not however intrinsic to this movement. As a task, students could compare the different symbols found in the 17th century Dutch paintings within Gallery 12.
- Millais left an important legacy of portraits that included the Marquis of Salisbury, conservative Prime Minister and the artist Kate Perugini who was Charles Dickens' daughter and married to the artist Charles Perugini. One of Perugini's paintings is in the Clore Interactive Gallery, which could be used as an extension to the visit.
- Students would be given a copy of the poem Rossetti wrote to accompany the painting 'Astarte Syriaca', see below, to demonstrate how he mythologized his personal relationships within his art. The woman depicted is said to be Jane Morris, the wife of William Morris with whom Rossetti was in love with. Students could explore further ideas to interpret the piece.

Mystery: lo! betwixt the sun and moon
Astarte of the Syrians: Venus Queen
Ere Aphrodite was. In silver sheen
Her twofold girdle clasps the infinite boon
Of bliss whereof the heaven and earth commune:
And from her neck's inclining flower-stem lean
Love-freighted lips and absolute eyes that wean
The pulse of hearts to the spheres' dominant tune.
Torch-bearing, her sweet ministers compel
All thrones of light beyond the sky and sea
The witnesses of Beauty's face to be:
That face, of Love's all-penetrative spell
Amulet, talisman, and oracle, —
Betwixt the sun and moon a mystery

- Students could also compare photographs, (check websites in further research section), of Jane Morris with the actual painting whilst in the Gallery.
Do they think the sitter resembles Jane Morris?
Was Rossetti painting a naturalistic image of Jane Morris or a personal interpretation of how he perceived her to look?

Follow Up

Students could create a piece of work inspired by literature, music, film or a painting. They could research a text that is personal to them and create a response using an appropriate outlet. E.g. the lyrics from a rap could be composed into a poem or a verse.

Ford Madox Brown is said to have greatly influenced the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which students could explore in detail. Madox Brown shared an interest in early Italian art, bright colours and painting out-of-doors. However being older than the rest and more independent, he refused to join the Brotherhood.

Pre-Raphaelites artists often depicted women in their painting, however little has been said about the Pre-Raphaelite women artists. In fact, the Brotherhood was comparatively welcoming to women. Look at the work by Anna Mary Howitt, Jane Benham or Barbara Leigh Smith to explore the female influence.

Rossetti's painting depicts a femme fatale, a half-threatening, half-alluring woman. It is very difficult to define what femme fatale is, however this figure has been a popular persona in paintings, literature and cinema.

Older and more able students could research the importance of this obscure figure by looking at different examples, such as the Victorian vamp and the diva in Italian cinema. How does this figure relate to feminist theories?

Further Research

For images of Jane Morris, the woman depicted within Rossetti's, 'Astarte Syriaca',
<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/exhibitions/rossetti/works/morris.asp>
<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/archive/>

The Pre-Raphaelites Ed. by Julian Treuherz
The Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists Ed. by Jan Marsh & Pamela Gerrish Nunn

Tom Hunter's photographic exhibition inspired by Pre-Raphaelites paintings, Thoughts of Life and Death, shown Nov.02-Jan.03 at Manchester Art Gallery. For more information check www.manchestergalleries.org
Hunter is a British artist that exhibits internationally.

Explore the catalogue to the 1999 Millais Portrait exhibition debuting at the National Gallery in London and travelling around the United States.