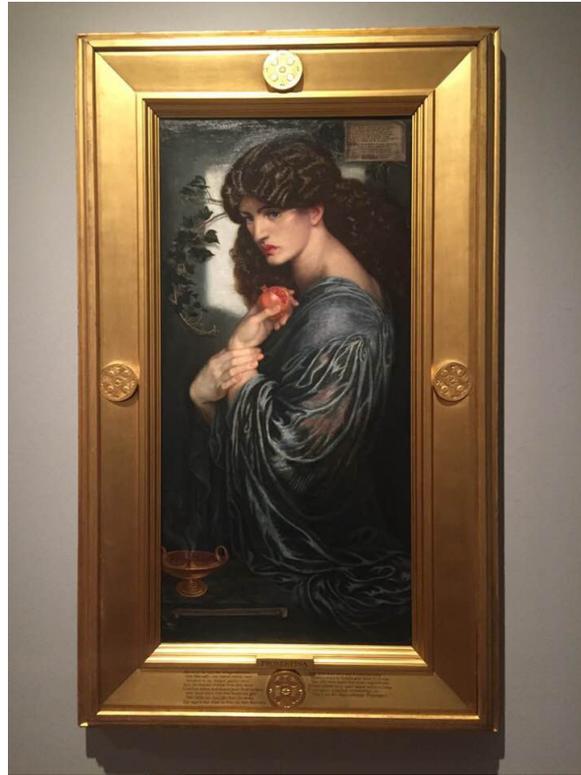


## **The Pre Raphaelites at Tate Britain** **Talk / Tour**

*Because their spirits were free and their works were bold, the art of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood will forever have an enduring allure...*



### **Talk and Tour led by Selin.**

Selin has completed a Masters Degree in Painting at Wimbledon College of Art and has also studied a Fine Art degree at The University of the Arts London. She has extensive and wide knowledge on Art history, specifically focusing on paintings of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. She has especially a passion for the Pre Raphaelites Movement. Her future ambition is to study her PHD in Art History at The Courtauld Institute of Art. Selin is also a practising artist and painter.

***Ophelia***. John Everett Millias 1851-1852.

Ophelia is considered to be one of the great masterpieces of the Pre-Raphaelite style. Combining his interest in Shakespearean subjects with intense attention to natural detail, Millias created a powerful and memorable image. His selection of the moment in the play Hamlet when Ophelia, driven mad by Hamlet's murder of her father, drowns herself was very unusual at the time.

The figure of Ophelia floats in the water, her mid section slowly beginning to sink. Clothed in an antique dress that the artist purchased specially for the painting, the viewer can clearly see the weight of the fabric as it floats, but also helps to pull her down. Her hands are in the pose of submission, accepting her fate. She is surrounded by a variety of summer flowers and other botanicals, some of which are explicitly described in Shakespeare's text, while others are included for their symbolic meaning. For example, the ring of violets around Ophelia's neck is a symbol of faithfulness, but can also refer to chastity and death.

The model depicted in the painting as Ophelia is the wife and muse of Dante Gabriel Rossetti Elizabeth Siddal, who was a poet and artist in her own right. Millias had Siddal floating in a bath of warm water kept hot with candles under the tub. However one day the candles went out, without being noticed by the engrossed Millias. Siddal caught phenomena. Siddal's father threatened legal action for damages until Millias agreed to pay for the doctor's bills.



***The Death of Chatterton.*** Henry Wallis 1856.

The death of Chatterton by Henry Wallis illustrates the suicide of poet Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) despairing over his lack of literary success, the young poet tore up his manuscripts and took a lethal dose of arsenic. Wallis shows the pale, still body of Chatterton lying on the bed, his left and right arm loosely dangling over the edge, his tattered papers and the poison vial beside him. His white shirt and white stockings help to silhouette the figure against the darker background, while the vivid purple of Chatterton's knee breeches and his reddish hair grab the viewer's attention.

Chatterton created a sensation when it was first exhibited in 1856 and again when it appeared at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857. John Ruskin called the painting 'faultless and wonderful', but for others it was a cautionary tale. The Victorian public could not fail to understand the moral message of a talented life tragically cut short. Wallis's painting is a brilliant combination of history, romanticism, and the truth to nature.



***Sancta Lilies.*** Dante Gabriel Rossetti. 1874.

This is an early-unfinished version of Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel* (1857-8). The picture was begun in September 1873, but after working on the head, the artist soon abandoned it and had it cut down to its current size. The subject derives from one of Rossetti's own poems published in 1850.

The blessed damozel leaned out  
From the gold bar of Heaven;  
Of waters stilled at even;  
She had three lilies in her hand,  
And the stars in her hair were seven.

The poem expresses the longing felt by a dead woman for her lover, who is still alive. In the finished picture she looks down towards her beloved. Behind her, pairs of lovers, united once again in heaven, embrace joyfully. The inspiration for Rossetti was clearly the premature death of his own wife, Lizzie Siddal, who died from an overdose of laudanum.



***The Lady of Shalott.*** John William Waterhouse. 1888

The Lady of Shalott is an 1888 painting by John William Waterhouse. The painting was inspired by Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem of the same name, about the Arthurian maiden who was in love with Sir Lancelot.

The girl who is loosely based on Elaine of Astolat has an unrequited love for Sir Lancelot. She is isolated due to a curse and is locked in a tower near King Arthur's Camelot. Waterhouse painted three versions of this in 1888, 1984, and 1915. A basic reading of the painting, suggest that The Lady of Shalott is on a boat, having just left her island. She is dressed in virginal white clothes with a crucifix and rosary, which suggests spirituality. The intricacy of the work on the tapestry shows Waterhouse's attention to every minute detail. The background is distinct and takes on a brushy quality. The fallen leaves denote that autumn is nearing. However, the fallen leaf on the women's lap denotes the loss of her innocence, the Lady as the single fallen leaf and her impending death.

The painting is a representation of the Pre Raphaelites with the bright colours associated with the era. In the poem, the curse is put on her to stay in the tower and to not look outside. However in the poem, she defies the curse and the rules of confinement to get a glimpse of the outer world, and this moment is captured in the painting by Waterhouse. Waterhouse's close attention to detail and colour, accentuation of the beauty in nature, realist quality, and his interpretation of a vulnerable, yearning women are further representation of his artistic skill.



***The Beloved.*** Dante Gabriel Rossetti. 1865-1866.

To the Pre Raphaelites, women were not mere objects of the viewer's gaze revealing virtue and beauty. They were, rather, active subjects possessing their own desires and passions- not just seductive, but seducing. In *The Beloved* (*The Bride*), 1865-1866, Dante Gabriel Rossetti mixed eroticism with exoticism, imagining the bride of *The Song Of Solomen* unveiling her face to her beloved, saying:

*'My beloved is mine and I am his. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.'*

Rossetti clothes her betrothed in oriental fabrics, adorns her with golden jewels, crowns her with rich-red hair ornaments, and has her surrounded by her companions as described in the Psalms:

*'She shall be bought unto the King in raiment of needlework: virgins her companions that follow her shall be bought unto thee'*

-The Song of Solomon, 45:14.



***Lady Macbeth.*** John Singer Sargent. 1881.

The famous actress Dame Ellen Terry (1847-1928) is shown here in the role of Lady Macbeth. At the first performance in 1888, Sargent was struck by Terry's appearance and persuaded her to sit for a portrait. He invented her dramatic pose, which did not occur in the production.

Oscar Wilde, who saw the actress Terry's arrival at Sargent's Chelsea studio, remarked, 'The street that on a wet and dreary morning has vouchsafed the vision of Lady Macbeth in full regalia magnificently seated in a four-wheeler can never again be as other streets: it must always be full of wonderful possibilities.'

Terry's intense and powerful gaze enhances this climatic moment. Alice Comyns Carr, a close friend of the artist designed the model's spectacular costume, using green silk and blue tinsel adorned with thousands of beetle wings to make the actor look like a serpent. Sargent captured the iridescent effect with impressionistic dabs of pigment.

