

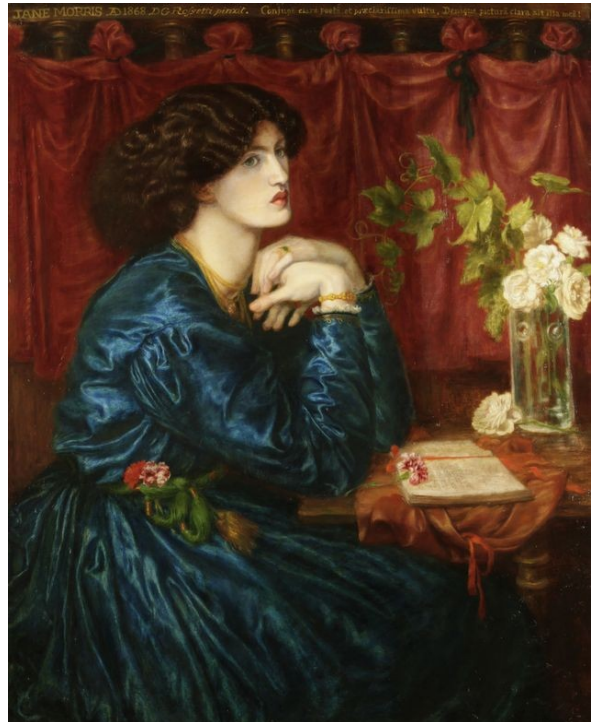
Press Release



Musée
d'Orsay

A Ballad of Love and Death: Pre-Raphaelite Photography in Great-Britain, 1848-1875

8 March – 29 May 2011
Median level, rooms 68 to 72



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Jane Morris, la robe de soie bleue* [*Jane Morris, The Blue Silk Dress*], 1868
Oil on canvas, 110.5 x 90.2 cm
London, The Society of Antiquaries
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This exhibition has been organised by the National Gallery of Art, Washington in association with the Musée d'Orsay.

The historian and art critic, John Ruskin, had a great influence in Great Britain not only on the Pre-Raphaelite movement created in 1848, but on the development of early photography in the 1850s. The leading Pre-Raphaelite painters, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Holman Hunt and Ford Madox Brown and their followers, wished to change the pictorial conventions laid down by the Royal Academy, and in order to demonstrate the transformations in modern life, invented a radically new idiom marked by bright colours and clarity of detail.

Pre-Raphaelite painters and photographers frequently made similar choices of subjects, and the photographers, particularly Julia Margaret Cameron, David Wilkie Wynfield and Lewis Carroll, were often had close links with the painters.

When painting landscapes, the Pre-Raphaelite artists answered Ruskin's call, meticulously observing nature in order to capture every nuance of detail. For their part, photographers, such as Roger Fenton, Henry White, William J. Stillman and Colonel Henry Stuart Wortley, experimented with the new process of wet plate collodion negatives that allowed much greater image detail, and achieved similar effects. Although highly impressed at first by the daguerreotype, which enabled the eye to see tiny, overlooked details, Ruskin was nonetheless still very critical of landscape photography, which could not reproduce the colours of nature and in particular of the sky. This failing also gave rise to a major debate amongst photography critics.

In portraiture, there were clear links between the painted portraits of Watts and Cameron's photographic portraits. By using special lenses and photographing her models in close-up, Cameron, achieved, with a glass negative, exactly the opposite effect to the clear image advocated by Ruskin, and her work was distinctive for the breadth of relief and contour, as well as the compositions evoking Raphael's paintings, also a source of inspiration for Watts.

The painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti repeatedly drew and painted Jane Morris, a model with whom he was infatuated, and he asked Robert Parsons to produce a series of photographs, under his personal direction, which captured the fascinating presence of the young woman as effectively as his own paintings.

Just like the Pre-Raphaelite painters, Victorian photographers would turn to religious or historical subjects, finding a shared inspiration in the poems of Dante, Shakespeare and possibly Byron, and above all in the Arthurian legend made popular once more by Lord Tennyson, the poet laureat. From a formal point of view, Millais' *Ophelia*, one of his most successful paintings, was a source for Henry Peach Robinson's photograph, *The Lady of Shalott*, even though it had a different theme.

Finally, Pre-Raphaelite painters and Victorian photographers both liked to present scenes from modern life with a moralising undertone: hence *She Never Told Her Love*, a photograph by Robinson that was very successful when exhibited at the Crystal Palace in 1858, William Holman Hunt's painting, *Awakening of Conscience*, and Rossetti's *Found*, a painting depicting a countryman who comes across his former sweetheart, now a prostitute in the city.

In the 1880s, Pre-Raphaelite painting would be transformed, with artists and writers like William Morris, Burne-Jones, Whistler and Oscar Wilde, into a very different movement concerned only with the cult of beauty and rejecting Ruskin's concept of art as something moral or useful. British photographers, however, inspired by the Pre-Raphaelites would inspire the Pictorialist movement that flourished in the 1890s, encouraged by the writings of Henry Peach Robinson and Peter Henry Emerson, extolling artistic photography.

Curators:

Diane Waggoner, curator, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Françoise Heilbrun, chief curator, Musée d'Orsay

Media Partner : Direct Matin

Around the exhibition

Lectures / John Ruskin and the The black cloud of the XIXth century

- 8 March 2011 at 7.30pm / *Ruskin or the eye of the reason* by Robert Hewison, professor, City University, London
- 22 March 2011 at 7.30pm / *Ruskin and the painting* by Philippe Saunier, curator, Musée d'Orsay
- 29 March 2011 at 7.30pm / *Ruskin and the architecture* by Jean-Claude Garcias, urban planner, TGT and partners

Music

- Special concert on Thursday 10 February at 8pm with baritone, Simon Keenlyside, and pianist, Malcolm Martineau
- Concert at 12.30pm on Tuesday 8 March with Cantabile and The London Quartet with the pianist Malcolm Martineau
- Light opera on 3, 5 and 7 May at 8pm and 8 May at 3pm with the students of the Royal College of Music in London directed by Michael Rosewell
- Special concert on 16 June at 8pm with Christopher Maltman, baritone, and The Nash Ensemble

Musical Show for the Family

- On 3 April at 3pm *Secret Passage*: two musicians, Christofer Bjurstörm and Christophe Roger enter the world of the storyteller Lewis Carroll and meet Alice performed by Élise Caron.

Practical information

Opening times: daily except Monday, 9.30am to 6pm (last tickets at 5pm), open on Thursdays until 9.45pm.
Admission: museum entrance ticket: full rate: €8; concessions: €5.50
Access: through the main entrance, 1, rue de la Légion d'Honneur, 75007 Paris

Communication Dept: Amélie Hardivillier: +33 (0)1 40 49 48 56 – amelie.hardivillier@musee-orsay.fr

Press contacts: Marie Dussaussoy: +33 (0)1 40 49 49 96 – marie.dussaussoy@musee-orsay.fr