



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

This presentation uses AI tools including Anthropic's Claude, ElevenLabs, and HeyGen. The art-historical content and editorial judgement remain my own.

- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art but I had some lectures that I gave many years ago and I thought I could use AI systems to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice to give them.

GENERAL REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as Claude, Perplexity, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot.
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.



Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830)
Portrait of Elizabeth Farren
before 1791

23-12 VICTORIAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



Victorian portrait painting spans a century of extraordinary ambition, social change, and technical transformation. We begin with Thomas Lawrence commanding the Regency court and end with John Singer Sargent scandalising Paris at the Salon of 1884. Between them stand miniaturists, photographers, Pre-Raphaelite rebels, and royal image-makers — each renegotiating what a portrait owes its subject. This talk traces how the painted and photographed face became Victorian Britain's most contested cultural battleground.



Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830)
Portrait of Elizabeth Farren
before 1791
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York

Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), Portrait of Elizabeth Farren, before 1791, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

This session opens with the figure who dominated British portraiture at the century's turn: **Sir Thomas Lawrence**. A child prodigy supporting his family through pastel portraits by the age of ten, Lawrence arrived in London at eighteen and rapidly became the most fashionable portrait painter of the **Regency era**. His first royal commission came at twenty-one, and by his death in **1830** he held the presidency of the **Royal Academy** and was regarded across Europe as the foremost living portraitist. His **1790 portrait of Elizabeth Farren** marks a pivotal shift in what portraiture was expected to do. One critic wrote that Lawrence had placed her "mind and character on canvas — arch, spirited, elegant and engaging." Previously, artists were paid for likeness alone; Lawrence demonstrated that a portrait could convey mood and personality. Farren herself was a celebrated actress who later married the twelfth Earl of Derby, and the painting helped secure Lawrence's position as successor to **Sir Joshua Reynolds**. Lawrence worked in the tradition Reynolds called the **Grand Manner** — an idealised, often full-

length style derived from classical and Renaissance precedent, designed to convey the nobility of the sitter. These works are sometimes called **swagger portraits**, and Elizabeth Farren remains among their finest examples.

Notes

We start with a late eighteenth-century portrait from one of the great portrait painters, Thomas Lawrence. It is a known and named person, Elizabeth Farren, and we know from reports at the time that it was an excellent representation. In a moment we will explore what is meant by a portrait as many pictures of people are not portraits in the conventional sense. First, it is interesting to consider the artist Thomas Lawrence and the sitter Elizabeth Farren.

Thomas Lawrence was a child prodigy who was supporting his family by the time he was 11. He became a fashionable portrait artist by the age of 18.

One critic wrote that this portrait, showed Elizabeth Farren's 'mind and character on canvas ... arch, spirited, elegant and engaging'. This was a major change, previously artists were paid to create a likeness but increasingly they represented a mood or a personality.

We will end with the other great nineteenth century portrait painter – John Singer Sargent.

Reynolds said that the artist must present their subject in a poetic manner. Although the Scriptures say that St Paul's bodily appearance was mean (or 'weak' or 'unimpressive', see 2 Corinthians 10:10) and Alexander was of low stature – Reynolds said that 'None of these defects ought to appear in a piece of which he is the hero'. In this case Reynolds said, 'In you sire, the world will expect to see accomplished what I have failed to achieve.' The established artist Zoffany had also painted a portrait of Miss Farren and he unselfishly held back exhibiting it 'for a young man must be encouraged.'

Lawrence's portrait was itemised in the Royal Academy catalogue not of a lady but of an actress, a word virtually synonymous with prostitute. Miss Farren was displeased and it can be assumed that the Earl of Derby, who commissioned the painting, was also displeased. Miss Farren wrote to complain that Lawrence had made her look too thin.

Notes

The Grand Manner referred to an idealised style derived from classical art as

interpreted by the Old Masters of the High Renaissance. As we know the highest genre was history painting but the term Grand Manner was increasingly applied to portraits. They were ostentatious, typically full-length and were also referred to as swagger portraits.

'Swagger portraits' were popular and painted in the 'Grand Manner' (Reynolds referred to it as the 'great style' or 'grand style'). It is the portrait version of history painting. The sitters must be presented in surroundings that convey nobility and elite status and they are often full length.

Sir Thomas Lawrence

Lawrence was a child prodigy who was supporting his family with his pastel portraits by the age of ten. At 18 he went to London and soon became established as a fashionable portrait artist and he received his first royal commission, to paint Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, when he was 21. He was self-taught, could capture a likeness and was a virtuoso at handling paint (Click). Consider how he captures the sheen of the silk with a few dabs of white paint alongside the soft fur and the glowing skin of her cheek and the softness of her lips. Her face is animated and she seems about to speak. His un-English virtuosity meant that he was not widely appreciated after his death and some of his greatest paintings, such as this one, ended up in the US.

Lawrence was described recently as 'one of the great painters of the last 250 years and one of the great stars of portraiture on a European stage.' He was the foremost Regency portrait painter and on his return from Italy in 1820 he was voted as president of the Royal Academy that evening to replace Benjamin West who had just died. He never married and when he died in 1830 at the age of 61 he was the most fashionable portrait painter in Europe. His death is a mystery as his doctor described it as due to the ossification of his aorta but his first biographer suggested it was caused by over zealous bleeding and leeching. The other mystery was where all his money went. He worked extremely hard, was paid well and did not gamble or drink. He kept poor or no accounts and was very generous so it is wondered if he gave it away to his family and friends. He almost went bankrupt and on his death his estate was worth nothing. His reputation declined after his death but has

recently been partially restored.

Elizabeth Farren

Farren was the actress daughter of an Irish surgeon and apothecary (pharmacist). She started acting when she was young and first appeared in London when she was 18. She played many parts including Portia (Merchant of Venice), Olivia (Twelfth Night), Juliet (Romeo and Juliet) and Hermione (The Winter's Tale) in Shakespeare's plays. She later married Edward Smith-Stanley, the 12th Earl of Derby and although she was the subject of satire no imputation was ever cast on her morals. Horace Walpole described her as the most perfect actress he had ever seen. One critic wrote,

'We have seen a great variety of pictures of Mrs. Farren, but we never saw her mind and character on canvas. It is completely Elizabeth Farren: arch, spirited, elegant and engaging'.

She was at the height of her career when this canvas was shown at the Royal Academy in 1790. Seven years later, she married the twelfth earl of Derby. This beautiful portrait helped to secure for Lawrence the role of successor to the elderly Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792).



H. Meadows
Dolorida
1838
Steel plate etching
Book of Beauty

H. Meadows, *Dolorida*, 1838, Book of Beauty

The annual gift book craze ran from **1823 to 1857**, producing up to seventeen volumes a year — a Victorian equivalent of the fashion magazine. Mass-produced through **steel plate etching**, these publications circulated idealised portraits of women and were used by female readers as literal role models for beauty and comportment. The most celebrated example was **Heath's Book of Beauty**, and **The Keepsake** became so culturally embedded that its title entered the language as shorthand for a Victorian feminine ideal. Yet the form attracted sharp criticism from its own era. **William Makepeace Thackeray**, writing in **Fraser's Magazine** in **1837**, dismissed the plates as figures that looked as though they had never been painted from a human figure — merely slovenly, rickety wooden imitations, tricked out in tawdry frippery, no more like real women than the accompanying verses were like real poetry. He singled out **Meadows's Dolorida** as one of the three worst plates in the volume, objecting to what he called another of his fatties in a chemise, adding that the image might be tolerable if it depicted a good honest fat woman instead. The

annuals declined as **photogravure** — a process combining gelatin with a mezzotint or aquatint screen — displaced the etcher's craft entirely by the later nineteenth century.

Notes

Books of Beauty and the Keepsake

The annual (also called books of beauty) was a fad from 1823 to 1857 and became so popular they were published up to 17 times a year. They were like today's fashion magazines and contained etchings of beautiful women. Mass produced using steel plate etchings (actually etching was mostly used). Used as colouring books. New photo techniques such as photogravure (uses gelatin and a mezzotint screen or aquatint rosin covering) ended the job of the etcher.

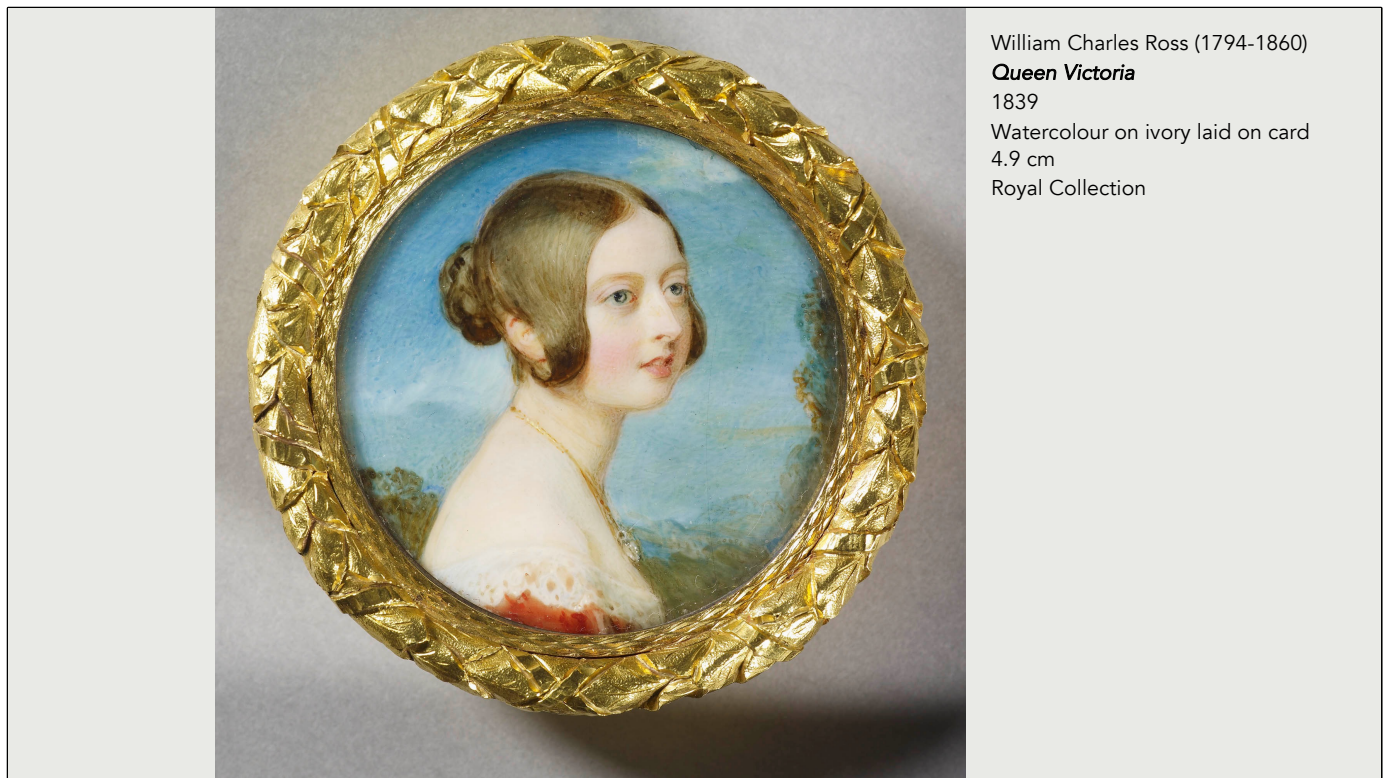
Early in the Victorian period there were annuals produced containing poetry and engravings of what were intended to be ideal forms of feminine beauty. These were called Books of Beauty and were purchased by woman as role models. The most famous was Heath's Book of Beauty. The Keepsake was another book of beauty and the term keepsake is sometimes used to refer to a Victorian ideal of beauty.

However, they were regarded with cynicism even in Victorian times. William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) wrote in Fraser's Magazine (1837):

'There is not one of these beauties, with her great eyes, and slim waist, that looks as if it had been painted from a human figure. It is but a slovenly, rickety, wooden imitation of it, tricked out in some tawdry feathers and frippery, and no more like a real woman than the verses which, accompany the plate are like real poetry.'

The same might be said about today's airbrushed, size 0 (30-22-32) models.

He added that Meadows's Dolorida was one of the three worst plates in the book as it depicted another of his 'fatties in a chemise', which the reviewer thought would be acceptable if it were a 'good honest fat woman'.



William Charles Ross (1794-1860), Queen Victoria, 1839, 4.9 cm, Royal Collection

Having established the sheer scale of Victorian portraiture, we turn now to one of its most intimate forms: the portrait miniature. **Queen Victoria** reigned for sixty-three years from 1837, and no figure was portrayed more frequently throughout that period. Born in 1819, she was the daughter of Prince Edward, fourth son of George III, and came to the throne at eighteen after her father's three brothers all died without legitimate heirs. The leading miniaturist of the age was **William Charles Ross**, who completed an astonishing twenty-two thousand miniatures before suffering a stroke. Ross excelled at cheerful, animated likenesses, and after just two sittings — the first lasting under two hours — he produced a miniature Victoria herself described as "exceedingly like." He was subsequently appointed **Miniature Painter to the Queen**. Ross's large-format miniatures were expensive, placing them beyond most budgets. **Photography**, introduced in **1839**, rapidly democratised portraiture, and many cheaper miniaturists simply switched medium. Ross proved to be the

last of his kind. Yet at the century's close, interest revived with the founding of the **Royal Society of Miniature Painters** in **1896**. Victoria and Prince Albert, enthusiastic patrons, commissioned portraits throughout their family life together, raising nine children between 1840 and 1857.

Notes

The most frequently portrayed Victorian was Queen Victoria. I would like to examine five styles of portrait by different artists.

The intimate personal portrait.

Portrait miniatures were popular but expensive. The master was William Charles Ross.

This was a wedding present and so a love token.

They became less popular after photography but there was a revival at the end of the 19thC.

Queen Victoria was the most portrayed person.

Key point: although little known today, Victorian portrait miniatures were very popular until photography became widespread

Alexandrina Victoria (1819-1837-1901), 63 years 7 months reign

Daughter Prince Edward, fourth son George III. His three brothers all died leaving no legitimate surviving children so she became queen at 18.

Her daughter, also named Victoria, was born on 21 November 1840. The Queen hated being pregnant, viewed breast-feeding with disgust, and thought newborn babies were ugly. Nevertheless, over the following seventeen years, she and Albert had a further eight children: Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (b. 1841), Alice (b. 1843), Alfred (b. 1844), Helena (b. 1846), Louise (b. 1848), Arthur (b. 1850), Leopold (b. 1853) and Beatrice (b. 1857).

Portrait Miniatures

At the beginning of the century there was a demand for portrait miniatures and William Charles Ross (1794-1860) painted an extraordinary 22,000 in his

lifetime before succumbing to a stroke. Ross excelled at capturing happy, cheerful likenesses. After only two sittings, the first of only 1 hour 40 minutes he completed this miniature which Victoria described as 'exceedingly like'. Ross was successful right from the start of his career and won several medals. He was appointed Miniature Painter to the Queen.

Ross was the last great miniature painter but his fashionable large miniatures were expensive and so few could afford them. Photography, introduced in 1839, provided a wider public with affordable, accurate likenesses. Many miniaturists at the cheaper end of the market took up photography, while younger artists rarely pursued careers as miniaturists. At the end of the century, there was a brief revival of interest in miniature painting with the establishment in 1896 of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters.

Victoria had more portraits painted than any other Victorian personality and a study of all the artists that portrayed her is a lecture in its own right. She and Prince Albert were interested in art and commissioned many works of them and their family of nine children.

Victoria bought a miniature of her mother Victoria, Duchess of Kent (1786-1861), which, after some discussion of a fair price, was sold by Ross for £22 1s (21 guineas).



George Hayter (1792-1871)
Coronation Portrait of Queen Victoria
c. 1838-40
Royal Collection

George Hayter (1792-1871), *Coronation Portrait of Queen Victoria*, c. 1838-40, Royal Collection

This portrait arrives at a pivotal moment in **Victorian royal image-making**. **George Hayter** had already impressed the young Princess Victoria with his portraiture and helped her with her early attempts at oil painting before receiving the appointment of **Principal Painter in Ordinary** in 1841. His life was turbulent: he secretly married his father's lodger as a teenager, lived openly with his mistress, studied in Italy where he met **Canova**, and spent a decade painting the four hundred MPs who passed the **Reform Bill**. Knighted in 1842, he was nonetheless considered old-fashioned by the time the honour arrived. The 1838 **State Portrait** shows the nineteen-year-old Queen as she appeared at her **Coronation in Westminster Abbey** on 28 June that year. Seated in her Homage Chair, wearing Coronation Robes and the Imperial State Crown, she carries the Sceptre with the Cross. The upturned face, struck by a shaft of light, deliberately echoes the devotional drama of **Baroque painting**, positioning the monarchy as divinely ordained. Victoria described the day itself as the proudest of her life, though the

ceremony was marked by confusion and a Coronation Ring forced painfully onto the wrong finger. Hayter received no further royal commissions after 1842, as Victoria turned decisively towards **Winterhalter**.

Notes

The grand state portrait. Shaft of light on her upturned face like a religious Baroque painting.

Commissioned by Queen Victoria in 1838.

The queen thought Hayter 'out and out the best portrait painter in my opinion'. The figure is regal but cold and aloof.

He received no royal commissions after 1842 as the Queen came to prefer Landseer and Winterhalter.

What do you think?

The queen loved watercolour painting and the queen and prince Albert both loved painting.

George Hayter (1792-1871), English portrait painter appointed Principal Painter to the Queen, his father was an artist, he ran away to sea, secretly married his father's lodger when he was 15/16 and she was 28, had three children, his wife then left him, he had an open affair and lived with the daughter of Sir William Cauty, had two children (so never became an RA), was sent to Italy where he met Canova, but he annoyed other artists because he was so pompous, he was one of the few artists to undertake history painting, he moved to Italy, his mistress poisoned herself with arsenic, he moved to Paris, then London, took 10 years to paint the 400 MPs who passed the Reform Bill, was knighted in 1842 but by the 1840s he was considered old-fashioned.

Royal Collection Description

Before his appointment as Queen Victoria's 'Painter of History and Portrait' in 1837, George Hayter had impressed the young Princess with his skill as a portraitist and helped her with her first attempts at oil painting. Hayter was to succeed Sir David Wilkie as Principal Painter in Ordinary to the Queen in 1841. However, he received no royal commissions after 1842 as the Queen came to prefer the work, and personality, of other artists - particularly Sir

Edwin Landseer and Franz Xaver Winterhalter.

Queen Victoria commissioned this, her State Portrait, from Hayter in 1838. The 19 year-old Queen is depicted as she was at her Coronation in Westminster Abbey on 28 June of that year. Shown seated in her Homage Chair, she wears Coronation Robes and the Imperial State Crown and carries the Sceptre with the Cross. Hayter's first background for the painting showed the Queen in Westminster Abbey, but he was to alter this later, placing her in a more generic regal setting.

Queen Victoria's pose, with her upturned face illuminated by a shaft of light, endows the composition with a religious spirit reminiscent of Baroque painting. In fact the day did not proceed smoothly, as the Queen was to relate in her journal. For instance, the Coronation Ring, which had been made to fit her little finger, was forced on to her fourth finger by the Archbishop and the unfortunate Queen had to bathe her hand in iced water after the ceremony before she could remove the ring. There was, according to Lord St John, the Sub-Dean, 'a continual difficulty and embarrassment, and the Queen never knew what she was to do'. Nevertheless, she described the day as 'the proudest of my life'.



Edwin Landseer (1802-1873)
Windsor Castle in Modern Times: Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and Victoria, Princess Royal
1841-1845
Royal Collection

Edwin Landseer (1802-1873), *Windsor Castle in Modern Times: Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and Victoria, Princess Royal*, 1841-1845, Royal Collection

Windsor Castle in Modern Times, completed by **Edwin Landseer** in **1845** after four years of sittings, belongs to a tradition called the conversation piece — a group portrait showing figures in relaxed, domestic exchange. Landseer was an infant prodigy who exhibited at the Royal Academy aged thirteen, was elected a full Academician in **1831**, and was knighted in **1850**. His social world included Dickens and Thackeray, and Victoria herself found him very good looking, if rather short. The painting shows Victoria and **Prince Albert** in a Windsor drawing room after a day's hunting. Albert's trophies are spread across the floor, Victoria offers him a nosegay, and their eldest daughter plays with a dead kingfisher. The scene is invented, not observed. Albert reads as a vigorous, masculine figure, yet Victoria is placed higher in the composition, asserting her rank as monarch even within a scene of domestic warmth. The **highly finished Germanic technique** reflects Albert's own taste. Four beloved family dogs anchor the foreground

— among them Victoria's favourite **Skye terriers** and Albert's greyhound **Eos**
— reflecting a broader cultural shift in which dogs were moving from working animals into the centre of family life.

Notes

Queen Victoria wrote, 'Landseer's game picture ... is a very beautiful picture, and altogether very cheerful and pleasing.'

The highly finished Germanic finish to the picture was probably done to satisfy prince Albert's taste.

The painting was probably posed and arranged by Landseer, it took 4 years and Victoria was not pleased by the time it took. When completed she was happy with the result, she described it as a "very beautiful picture, & altogether very cheerful & pleasing." It was hung in her sitting room at Windsor castle.

The dogs are (left to right) Cairnach (Skye terrier, the queen's favourite breed), Islay (Skye terrier, begging), Dandy Dinmont (terrier, named after a jolly farmer in Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* who owned terriers, the name was established by the mid-1800s) and Albert's favourite and personal dog Eos (Greyhound).

At this time dogs were shifting from working dogs to family pets and there was a boom in dog ownership and dog portraiture.

By the mid 1860s Landseer's animal paintings were selling for £6,000 to £7,000 each. *Monarch of the Glen* was declined by Parliament as it was too expensive.

Landseer collapsed in 1862-3, his eyesight was failing, he suffered from depression and took to alcohol. He spent the last three years of his life "half out of his mind". When he died he left the enormous sum of £200,000 much of it accumulated from engravings of his work.

A Conversation Piece

Windsor Castle in Modern Times is a group portrait and was called a 'Conversation piece'—a group of people engaged in light conversation or, later, a painting that gives rise to speculative conversation on the part of the viewers. It required multiple sittings and took so long it annoyed Queen Victoria.

Victoria and Albert are shown meeting in a drawing room at Windsor Castle just after Albert has come back from a day hunting. The hunting trophies are spread across the room and Victoria offers Albert a nosegay (a small bouquet of flowers). Her eldest child, Victoria, is playing with a dead kingfisher. The scene is entirely imaginary. Prince Albert appears masculine figure although Victoria is positioned in front and higher signifying her higher position as monarch. She is, however, shown as loving and caring wife by giving Albert the bouquet on his return. The royal family are shown as regal but engaged in homely activities similar to the middle-class. There are four dogs in the painting which were loved family pets Victoria and Albert knew well and which added to the homely feel.

Edwin Landseer (1802-1873), known as an animal painter and for the lions in Trafalgar Square, infant prodigy, exhibited at RA aged 13, performed dissections, RA (1831), knighted (1850), declined presidency (1866), nervous breakdown in his 30s, depression, alcohol, drugs, declared insane 1872.

From the BBC website: 'His career was a story of remarkable social as well as professional success: he was the favourite painter of Queen Victoria (who considered him 'very good looking although rather short') and his friends included Dickens and Thackeray. The qualities in his work that delighted the Victorian public, however, subsequently caused his reputation to plummet, for although he had great skill in depicting animal anatomy, he tended to humanize his subjects to tell a sentimental story or point a moral. '



Franz Xavier Winterhalter (1805-1873)
The Family of Queen Victoria
1846
Royal Collection

Franz Xavier Winterhalter (1805-1873), *The Family of Queen Victoria*, 1846, Royal Collection

Franz Xavier Winterhalter painted this family portrait in **1846**, when Victoria and Albert were both twenty-seven. Born to a farming family in the Black Forest, Winterhalter trained at the Academy of Arts in Munich under **Peter von Cornelius**, entered German court circles in 1828, and eventually settled in Paris as the portrait painter of choice for European royalty. He arrived in England in 1842 and went on to complete 120 works for the British royal family. The painting shows six of Victoria and Albert's nine children. Their youngest, **Princess Beatrice**, born in 1857, would not arrive for another eleven years. Winterhalter's skill at flattering likeness made him enormously wealthy, though it damaged his standing among fellow artists. His contemporary **Edwin Landseer** died within months of him in 1873, and together they had constructed a sustained visual argument for domestic virtue and moral propriety that defined the public image of the Victorian monarchy. Victoria mourned Winterhalter deeply, writing that no other portrait painter like him existed in the world, and predicted his work would one day rank

alongside **Van Dyck**. He died of typhus, aged sixty-eight, and was buried at Baden-Baden.

Notes

Prince Albert greatly admired the German painter Winterhalter. Winterhalter's ambition was to paint all the crowned heads and royal families of Europe. He painted more than 100 portraits of the British royal family. When he died in 1873 Queen Victoria thought that in time his work would rank with Van Dyck, and wrote 'there was not another portrait painter like him in the world.'

Winterhalter died within months of Landseer and together they promoted a public image of unsullied domestic bliss, moral propriety and idealised the young couple and endorsed a strict morality that underpinned the Victorian period.

Another conversation piece, a group portrait showing from left to right:

Alfred (1844-1900, aged 2), Duke of Edinburgh later Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha

Albert Edward (1841-1910, aged 5), The future Edward VII

Queen Victoria (24 May 1819-1901, aged 27) and Albert, Prince Consort (26 August 1819-1861, aged 27)

Princess Alice (1843-1878, aged 3), married Louis IV, Grand Duke of Hesse and by Rhine, daughter Alexandra, last Empress of Russia (Rasputin)

Princess Helena (1846-1923, aged 1), married Christian of Sonderburg-Augustenburg, lived in England

Victoria (1840-1901, aged 6, the eldest), Princess Royal later German Empress and Queen of Prussia

Her other children were:

Princess Louise (1848-1939), later Duchess of Argyll

Prince Arthur (1850-1942), later Duke of Connaught and Strathearn

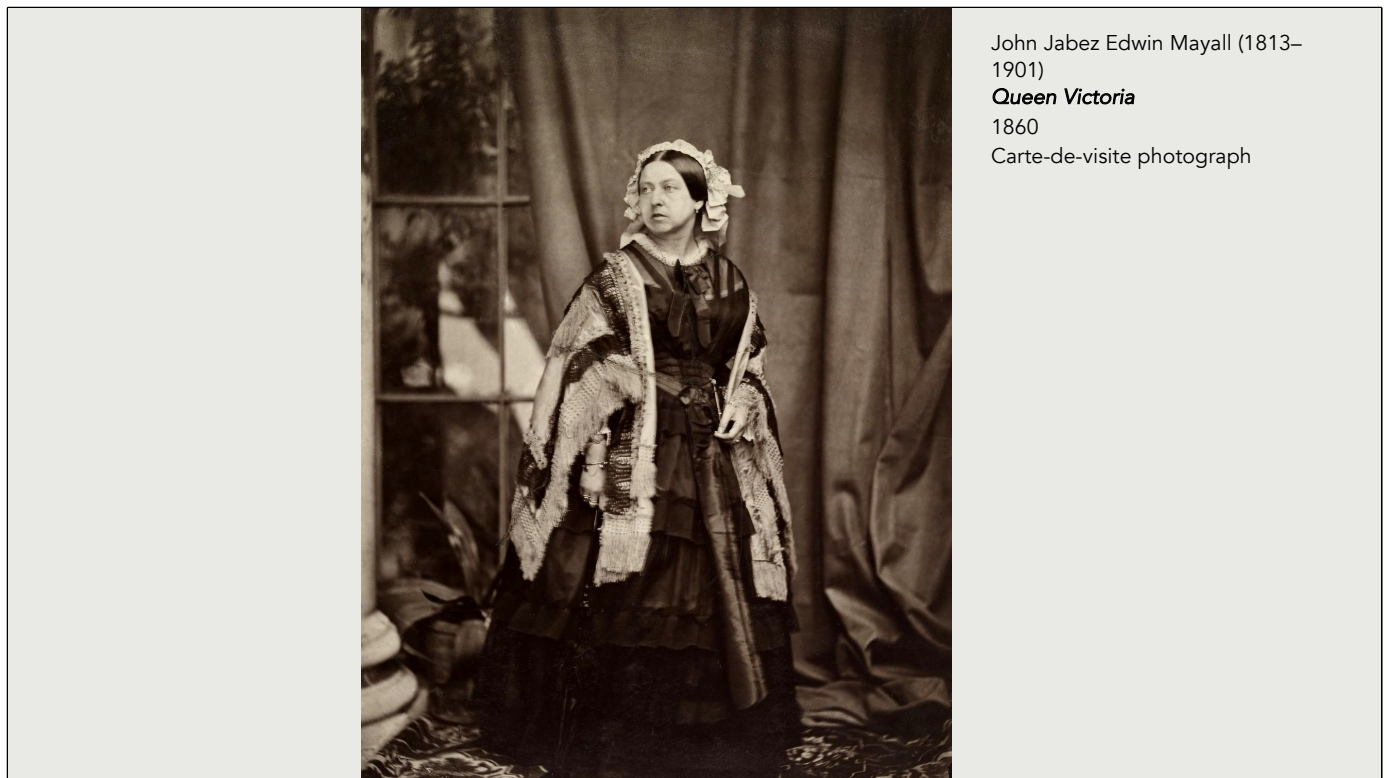
Prince Leopold (1853-1884), later Duke of Albany

Princess Beatrice (1857-1944), married Prince Henry of Battenburg, daughter Victoria Eugenie became Queen of Spain

Franz Xavier Winterhalter (1805-1873), fashionable German painter of royalty across Europe, father a farmer, brother painter, remained close to his family, Academy of Arts, Munich under Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867), entered court circles in Germany (1828), travelled to Italy then went to Paris where he became a successful portrait painter of royalty, skilled at flattering portraits his reputation suffered among other artists. He intended portrait painting to be temporary but he was a victim of his success and he worked exclusively as a portrait painter and became very rich. Went to England in 1842 to paint Queen Victoria and in total painted 120 works. Marriage proposal rejected and he remained a bachelor. Napoleon III and Second Empire (1852-1870) led to an international reputation and so much work he employed a studio of assistants. No other artist has been so successful at royal portraits, only Rubens and Van Dyck. He lived simply and abstemiously and bought a villa in Baden-Baden. He died of typhus aged 68.

Typhus

Is not typhoid, it is a different bacteria. Typhus killed more soldiers on Napoleons return from Russia than did the Russians. Typhus (gaol fever) killed more prisoners in the eighteenth century than public executioners (even though there were 241 capital offences). There was a major epidemic in Ireland 1816-19 the 'Year without a Summer' which killed 100,000, and also during the Great Irish Famine 1846-49. It spread to England as 'Irish Fever'. It was spread by lice and was endemic and inescapable, it often killed court officials. It peaked in 1922, with 25-30 million cases in Russia and 4 million Poland. It was a major cause of death in prisons and concentration camps (it killed Anne Frank at 15).



John Jabez Edwin Mayall (1813–1901), Queen Victoria, 1860

Shown here is one of the earliest **carte-de-visite** photographs produced by the English photographer **John Jabez Edwin Mayall**, who was born in 1813 and died in 1901. Mayall consistently identified himself as an artist, recording that very word on his census return, and his ambitions bore that out. **J. M. W. Turner** visited his studio repeatedly between 1847 and 1849, and the two men held extended conversations on the behaviour of light — an exchange that shaped Mayall's understanding of photographic tone. His **daguerreotypes of the Great Exhibition of 1851** circulated widely through engraved reproductions. The decisive turning point came in **May 1860**, when Mayall photographed the Royal Family and secured permission to publish the results as a set of cartes-de-visite. Released that August as a **Royal Album** of fourteen portraits, the set sold hundreds of thousands of copies almost immediately. When **Prince Albert** died in 1861, demand surged further: within one week, seventy thousand copies of his portrait were ordered from Marion and Co. alone. By the decade's end, that firm had paid Mayall **£35,000** in royalties. Producing

over half a million cartes annually, Mayall earned around **£12,000** a year, demonstrating just how commercially dominant the carte-de-visite format had become.

Notes

This is one of the first carte-de-visite photographs by the English photographer Mayall (1813-1901).

Mayall always considered himself an artist and he wrote 'Artist' on his census return.

J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851) visited his studio often between 1847 and 1849 and they had many conversations on the effect of light.

Mayall produced many daguerreotypes of the Great Exhibition of 1851 which were copied and engraved.

In May 1860, he made a number of portraits of the Royal Family and was given permission to publish them as a set of cartes-de-visite. In August, the cartes were released in the form of a Royal Album, consisting of 14 small portraits of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and their children. It was an immediate success, and hundreds of thousands were sold.

Britain began collecting carte de visite portraits of famous people. Another series of royal portraits by Mayall was published in 1861 that included Prince Albert who died later that year. His death created an enormous demand for his portrait and within one week of his death "no less than 70,000 of his carte de visite were ordered from Marion & Co." By the end of the decade, Marion & Co, had paid Mayall £35,000 in royalties for his portraits of the Royal Family.

The carte de visite (cdv) was the most popular of the portrait formats. The cdv also generated the most income. Mayall produced over half a million cartes a year, which helped him secure an annual income of £12,000.



Francis Grant (1803-1878)
Queen Victoria Riding Out
1838-1840
Royal Collection

Francis Grant (1803-1878), *Queen Victoria Riding Out*, 1838-1840, Royal Collection

Francis Grant's equestrian portrait of **Queen Victoria**, painted in **1834**, launched his reputation as Britain's foremost portrait painter of the age — a career that culminated in his presidency of the Royal Academy from **1866**. Grant, a self-taught Scotsman who spent an inherited fortune and turned to painting through passion rather than formal training, clearly studied his precedents carefully here. The composition echoes **Van Dyck's** equestrian portrait of Charles I, and layers onto that a deliberate allusion to Hans Eworth's allegory of Queen Elizabeth I passing triumphantly through a Windsor arch. The colour range — yellowy-buff through grey-blue — and the thick, textured brushwork recall Rubens and **David Wilkie**. Victoria rides her horse **Comus** through an imaginary gate in Windsor Great Park, accompanied by **Viscount Melbourne**, the Marquess of Conyngham, Sir George Quintin, the Earl of Uxbridge, and the Hon. George Byng. The Queen's own journal records Melbourne perched on a wooden horse in the studio, umbrella in hand — suggesting the sitting was as affectionate as the

finished work feels. Read as a genre scene, it becomes a chaperone painting: a young heiress courted by four top-hatted suitors. The joke was deliberate, and entirely shared.

Notes

Could be seen as a 'genre painting' of a chaperoned eligible young lady riding with her suitors.

Francis Grant (1803-1878), Scottish portrait painter who became President of the Royal Academy in 1866 when Landseer turned it down. Wealthy, inherited a fortune he soon spent. Passion for fox hunting. Self-taught painter, specialized in sporting subjects and graceful and refined portraits. RA (1851). 1834-79 painted 253 mostly full-length portraits.

This painting established Grant's career as the leading portrait painter

This painting was painted for Queen Victoria. The recently crowned Queen is riding her horse Comus, with her dogs, Dash and Islay ('eye-lay' or 'eye-la') in front.

The Queen was not a great lover of Grant's work.

She is accompanied by her court (right to left):

Viscount Melbourne (1779-1848), the Prime Minister, a favourite of Victoria at the time and he had a formative influence

Marquess of Conyngham (1797-1879, the Lord Chamberlain),

Sir George Quintin (Crown Equerry),

Earl of Uxbridge (1797-1869, Lord in Waiting), and

Hon. George Byng, later Earl of Strafford (1806-86, Comptroller of the Household).

The procession passes through an imaginary gate in Windsor Great Park, with a view of the castle in the far distance against a dawn sky. The Queen clearly enjoyed the creation of this very personal painting, just as she enjoyed riding out with these companions: on 31 July 1839 her journal describes Lord Melbourne sitting on a wooden horse within the artist's studio:

looking so funny, his white hat on, an umbrella, in lieu of a stick in one hand, & holding the reins, which were fastened to the steps, in the other . . . it is

such a happiness for me to have that dear kind friend's face, which I do like & admire so, so like . . . and Uxbridge, George Byng, & old Quintin ludicrously like.

The tone of this passage suggests that this painting was intended almost to be light-hearted and affectionate, even perhaps a private joke amongst the sitters. To read it this way one must imagine how the same image would be understood if the sitters were not recognised, in fact if this were a genre painting: it might then be entitled 'The Heiress' and would be interpreted as depicting a pretty and eligible young lady, in mourning for her recently deceased father, chaperoned by a guardian, and courted by four top-hatted rivals, one of whom has briefly won the favour of a raised veil and sweet smile. The joke depends upon this being a substantially correct reading, except that this heiress has inherited a crown from her recently-deceased uncle and her courtiers are seeking royal attention rather than her hand in marriage. The fact that, after her marriage, prints were produced of the image, with Prince Albert as the principle 'suitor', draws attention to the deliberate play on the two meanings of this word.

Francis Grant

Sir Francis Grant was a gentleman artist; according to Queen Victoria, he had the talent of an amateur and boasted 'of never having been to Italy or studied the Old Masters.' It looks here as if he has studied an appropriate Old Master - Van Dyck's equestrian portrait of Charles I, perhaps through the reduced version in the Royal Collection, which has a horse of identical dimensions. This clever resonance is perhaps compounded with an allusion to Eworth's allegory of Queen Elizabeth I sailing regally through a triumphal arch with Windsor Castle in the background (Royal Collection). Grant has also learned from Van Dyck and the Flemish school generally the idea of a limited and harmonious colour spectrum, ranging from yellowy-buff to grey-blue, the soft tonal transition creating pools of light and shadow. The application of paint is thick and rough creating an attractive texture rather like the shaggy coat of a dog, reminiscent of Rubens and his Scottish admirer, David Wilkie. In a work where no obvious symbol of rank distinguishes the Queen from her friends (for so they seem), it is appropriate that face lies in the exact centre of the painting and that her blue cravat adds a single note of pure colour in an otherwise muted palette.

Text adapted from *The Conversation Piece: Scenes of fashionable life*,
London, 2009



George Frederic Watts (1817–1904)
Self-Portrait, Aged 17
1834
Watts Gallery, Guildford

George Frederic Watts (1817–1904), *Self-Portrait, Aged 17*, 1834,
Watts Gallery, Guildford

Turning now to the self-portrait, a category unique to artists themselves, this work by **George Frederic Watts**, painted when he was just 17, is a striking declaration of ambition. His father showed the boy's drawings to **Sir Martin Archer Shee**, then President of the **Royal Academy**, who pronounced: "I can see no reason why your son should take up the profession of art." Watts entered the Royal Academy Schools in **1835** and promptly concluded, "finding that there was no teaching, I very soon ceased to attend." The portrait already demonstrates confident handling of oils. His wild, Byronic hair and open collar align him visually with the Romantic poets — **Byron**, **Shelley**, **Keats** — whose spirit of unconventional genius artists of the nineteenth century eagerly claimed as their own. Watts spent his long career, working until his late eighties, pursuing two interconnected visions: the **House of Life**, a cycle of allegorical murals confronting the moral dilemmas of his age, and the **Hall of Fame**, a portrait gallery of the age's greatest figures, painted at his own expense and his own

choosing. For Watts, portraiture was a moral act — recording character as example, not merely likeness.

Notes

The other category is the self-portrait. Necessarily only of artists.

Watts painted this self-portrait aged 17. Sir Martin Shee, then President of the Royal Academy, told Watts father 'I can see no reason why your son should take up the profession of art'

The painting shows he was proficient in oils.

He entered the RA School in 1835 but 'finding that there was no teaching, I very soon ceased to attend'.

His wild Byronic hair and open collar means he associates himself with the Bohemian Romantic poets. (The word 'Bohemian' was first used in the sense of an artistic person with an unconventional lifestyle in 1848.)

Watts was one of the first to select people he wished to paint – Hall of Fame. Imagined a building containing vast frescos of man's creation , evolution and today's moral dilemmas – House of Life

Key point: 'Romantic' painters such as Watts wanted to capture famous people as a moral example

George Frederic Watts

One of the few artists who selected the sitters he wished to paint was George Frederic Watts. He had two grand projects throughout his life that he called the 'House of Life' and the 'Hall of Fame'. He was not afraid to confront the moral dilemmas of his society and was appalled by the poverty of his time. We shall see some of his social realist paintings in a later lecture. After visiting Italy in the 1840s he envisaged a building, a temple containing Michelangelo-inspired frescos. Cosmic murals starting with man's creation and describing all the moral dilemmas of the age as a series of allegorical murals. It never happened as he dreamed but he dedicated his life to creating parts of his vision. Part of the House of Life was the Hall of Fame containing all of the famous people of his age and represented in such a way that their moral character would be captured. Watts selected the people he most admired

and painted them at his own expense. Watts lived until he was 87 and this long career resulted in an enormous output of 800 paintings. By the 1880s he was one of the most famous painters in the world. Since his death his reputation has fluctuated and many of his allegorical paintings are now out of fashion.

This is a self-portrait by Watts when he was just 17. Watts came from a lower middle-class struggling family that managed to send him to the studio of the sculptor William Behnes in Dean Street, Soho. His father managed to show his drawing to Sir Martin Archer Shee (1769-1850, portrait painter, became President of the RA in 1830 after Sir Thomas Lawrence who had overshadowed him), who pronounced: 'I can see no reason why your son should take up the profession of art'. This did not put off Watts but may have encouraged his lifelong scepticism about the powers of the Royal Academy. Behnes provided Watts with plaster casts of the Elgin marbles which were installed in the British Museum in 1832. Watts said, 'The Elgin marbles were my teachers. It was from them alone that I learned.' Watts was encouraged by Benjamin Robert Haydon, the great propagandist for the Elgin marbles which many believe inspired a whole generation of artists in Britain.

This portrait shows he was already proficient in oils when he entered the Royal Academy school in 1835 and he said, 'finding that there was no teaching, I very soon ceased to attend'. The teaching was notoriously poor as it was carried out by rota round the Academicians who mostly tried to avoid attending and teaching. Watts was already accomplished enough to earn a living from painting portraits of the middle classes along with an occasional aristocratic portrait. In the 1840s he was even commissioned to paint a portrait of Jeremy Bentham from his wax effigy now in University College, London.

We see Watts with what we would now call a Bohemian appearance (a term that originated in France in the 1840s) with his wild, Byronic hair and open collar. The idea of the artist as a wild, unconventional character that flouted conventions developed with the Romantic poets (George Gordon Byron, William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats) and was taken over by artists in the nineteenth century. A typical example is Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Presidents of the Royal Academy

1768-1792 Sir Joshua Reynolds

1792-1805 Benjamin West

1805-1806 James Wyatt (1746-1813), architect rival Robert Adam. Nicknamed 'The Destroyer' for his work on cathedrals. Presidency was a political appointment when West resigned.

1806-1820 Benjamin West

1820-1830 Sir Thomas Lawrence

1830-1850 Sir Martin Archer Shee (1769-1850), Irish, studied at Royal Dublin Society, met Reynolds, RA 1800.

1850-1865 Sir Charles Lock Eastlake

1866-1878 Sir Francis Grant

1878-1896 Lord Leighton

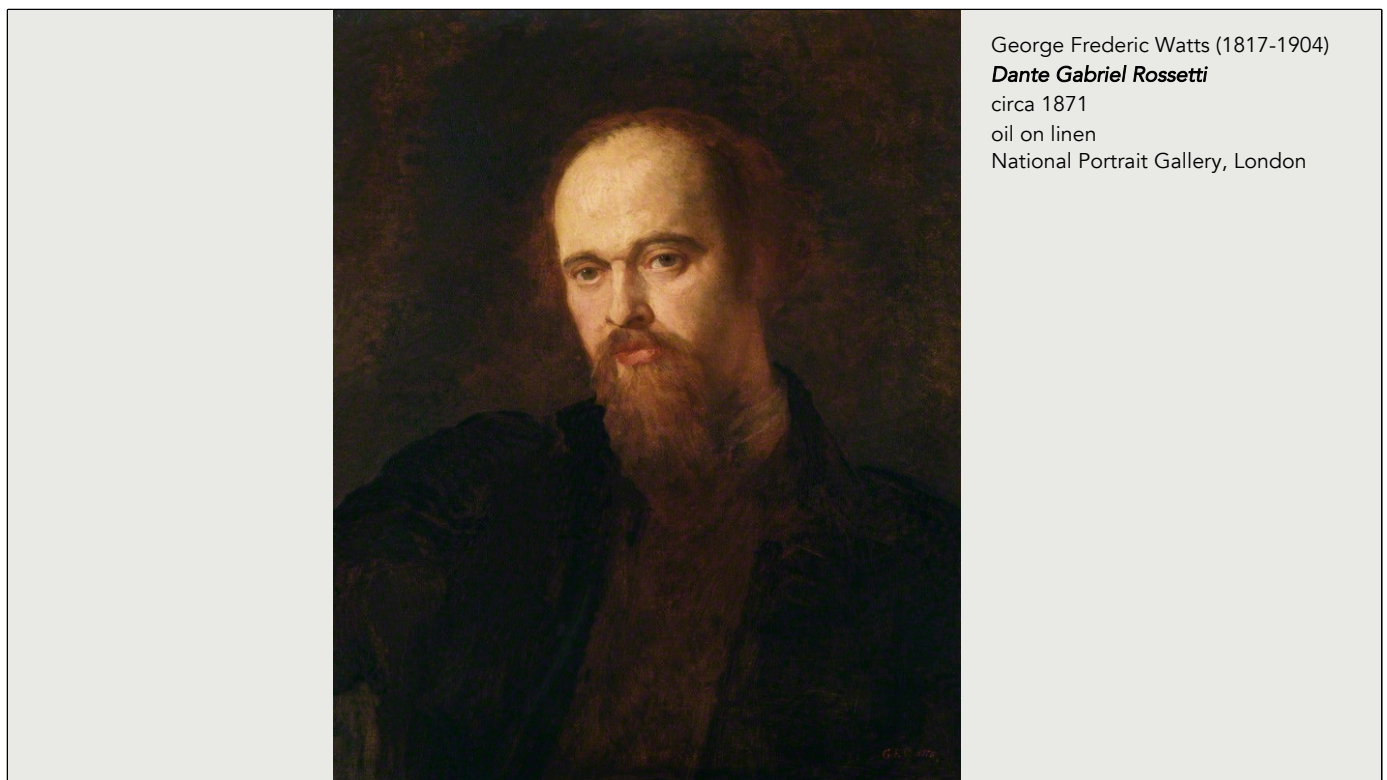
1896-1896 Sir John Everett Millais (Feb.-Aug.)

1896-1918 Sir Edward John Poynter

1919-1924 Sir Aston Webb

1924-1928 Sir Frank Dicksee

1928-1938 Sir William Llewellyn



George Frederic Watts (1817-1904)
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
circa 1871
oil on linen
National Portrait Gallery, London

George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), Dante Gabriel Rossetti, circa 1871,
National Portrait Gallery, London

George Frederic Watts painted **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** in **1871**, donating this portrait to the **National Portrait Gallery** as part of what he called his House of Fame series — a collection of seventeen likenesses of men he believed made or marred their country. Watts sat between **Thomas Lawrence** and **John Singer Sargent** in the lineage of British portraiture, and his ambition went beyond likeness. When **Alfred Tennyson** sat to him in **1859**, Watts described his aim so vividly that Tennyson wove the words into Lancelot and Elaine: a painter who, divinely through all hindrance, finds the man behind the face. Rossetti at forty-three looks inward and troubled, and with reason. By the year of this sitting he had begun taking chloral hydrate dissolved in whisky to treat his insomnia, a combination that deepened his depression. The following year, after the minor poet **Robert Buchanan** attacked his verse as fleshly and immoral, Rossetti suffered a complete mental breakdown with hallucinations and attempted suicide. He recovered sufficiently to paint again but never regained his former stability, and

he died of kidney failure in **1882**. Watts recognised in Rossetti something unconventional but genuinely revolutionary — a poet who painted and a painter who rarely exhibited, selling directly to patrons and reshaping British art from the inside.

Notes

Watts at his best was the bridge between Thomas Lawrence and John Singer Sargent.

When Alfred Tennyson sat to him in 1859 he asked him what he wanted to achieve in a portrait and Tennyson incorporated Watts's answer in Lancelot and Elaine,

a painter pouring on a face,
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and colour of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best
And fullest.

Watts chose to represent men that he thought made or marred their country and he confessed to Cecil Rhodes, 'I'm not sure myself which you are doing'. Rhodes was an ardent believer in British colonialism and Rhodesia was named after him.

Rossetti was uncertain about this portrait, he looks melancholy, he is 43 and had started to take chloral with whisky to sleep

By this time Watts and Rossetti were established artists but Watts was the better known

Watts was a self-confessed workaholic, painting from dawn to dusk and only stopping for health reasons

Watts was described as England's Michelangelo.

Rossetti was known as a poet but little known as a painter as he rarely exhibited, he sold directly to his patrons

Watts was a pioneer of the Symbolist movement.

Key point: Rossetti was captured by Watts. He was unconventional but a sincere and revolutionary artist

Watts presented 17 portraits to the National Portrait Gallery including this portrait of the influential poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. This one of Watts 'House of Life' series of portraits of famous and influential people.

By 1871, Rossetti had started to take chloral with whisky to cure his insomnia but it accentuated his depression and paranoia. This was the year that Rossetti was attacked by a minor poet called Robert Buchanan for writing 'fleshly' poetry. He defended the attack but it changed him completely and he suffered a mental breakdown the following year complete with hallucinations and accusing voices. He attempted suicide but gradually recovered and was able to paint again. He died of kidney failure in 1882.

(Note that chloral or chloral hydrate dissolves in water or alcohol and was prescribed in the nineteenth century as a sedative. It became a recreational drug and in alcohol was called 'knockout drops' and was used to prepare a Mickey Finn. Michael Finn managed the Lone Star Saloon in Chicago and he or his 'house girls' would slip clients chloral hydrate. They then dragged them to a back room, robbed them and dumped them in an alley. When they awoke the next morning they would be unable to remember what happened.)



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)
Self-portrait
1847
National Portrait Gallery, London

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), Self-portrait, 1847, National Portrait Gallery, London

This self-portrait shows **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** at nineteen — the same Bohemian free spirit that art historian **Timothy Hilton** described as passionate, charismatic, and feckless in equal measure. Son of Gabriele Rossetti, Professor of Italian at King's College London, Rossetti co-founded the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** the following year alongside **John Everett Millais** and **William Holman Hunt**. He thrived on patronage rather than public exhibition, supported by figures including Frederick Richards Leyland and William Graham. His life was shaped by his turbulent relationship with **Elizabeth Siddal**, a dressmaker and painter he met in 1850; they married a decade later, and her death by laudanum overdose in **1862** sent him into a prolonged psychological spiral involving séances and guilt. His most significant poem, **Jenny**, exploring desire, commerce, and respectability, had been buried in Siddal's coffin and was only recovered by exhumation seven years later. Despite depression, his influence was considerable. **Roger Fry**, whom Kenneth Clark called the greatest influence on British taste since

Ruskin, wrote in 1916 that Rossetti, more than any artist since **Blake**, was a forerunner of new ideas in English art — a judgement that still holds.

Notes

This is Rossetti when he was 19.

He looks similar to Watts self-portrait when he was 17, the same Romantic, Bohemian look ('Bohemian' was used in Paris in the 1840s and first used by Thackeray in 1848 and widely used by the 1860s)

The following year he helped found the Pre-Raphaelites with John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt.

He became dependent on a few patrons – early on Lady Trevelyan and James Leathart (lead manufacturer and secretary of Government School of Design), later major patrons Frederick Richards Leyland (1832-1892, ship owner, Speke Hall Liverpool, 49 Princes gate) and William Graham became disillusioned and, according to Rossetti, his biggest buyer in later years was Turner of Manchester.

Roger Fry wrote in 1916, 'Rossetti more than any other artist since Blake may be hailed as a forerunner of the new ideas' in English Art. Roger Fry was 'the greatest influence on taste since Ruskin' according to Kenneth Clark. He gave us the name Post-Impressionism, emphasized the formal, promoted modern art in Britain, taught at the Slade School and was a member of the Bloomsbury Group.

Key point: although Rossetti suffered from depression he was very influential during his relatively short life

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Rossetti was the son of an Italian scholar Gabriele Rossetti, Professor of Italian at King's College London, was described by art historian Timothy Hilton as 'self-possessed, articulate, passionate and charismatic' but also 'ardent, poetic and feckless'. This is Rossetti as a young man drawn by himself. Rossetti presents himself as a Bohemian free spirit with a long, untamed mane of hair and a knowing look at the age of 19.

Rossetti's life has been the subject of many documentaries, sufficient to say he was successful enough to be supported by private patrons with needing to

exhibit, which he hated. He met Elizabeth Siddal in 1850 when she was sitting for his friend Walter Deverell. Her family had an ironmongery business and she was a dressmaker and painter. Rossetti's fortunes started to change in 1853 when he met John Ruskin, the leading art critic of the day. The following year his father died and he experienced a life-long sense of guilt because he had neglected his father in his last years. He was described by Barbara Leigh Smith as 'very gentlemanly, even tender in manner, with a sweet mellow voice'. The same year Ruskin founded the Working men's College and Rossetti offered his services to teach art. In 1855 Rossetti sold a painting and went to Paris and the Universal Exhibition which had a section on British Pre-Raphaelite art. Their fame had already spread to France.

Rossetti was moody and depressed with periods of impulsiveness and his relationship with Siddal had many ups and downs. It was at this time that he met Jane Burden, who later married William Morris and Fanny Cornforth, née Sarah Cox (1835–c.1906). In 1859 he painted one of his most important works, a picture of Fanny Cornforth. His relationship with Cornforth led to him rewriting a poem about a prostitute which he had begun much earlier. 'Jenny' explores the complex relationship between sex, desire, respectability, and commerce. The following year 1860 he married Siddal by special license. Eleven months later she gave birth to a still born child and suffered from post natal depression and ten months later in 1862, when Rossetti was out, she took an overdose of laudanum. The verdict was accidental death but a note that Rossetti suppressed points to suicide. Rossetti put the original manuscript of his poems in her coffin and the following year Fanny Cornforth moved back into his new house in Cheyne Walk. Three years after Siddal's death her memory began to haunt him and he started attending séances and 'communication' with his dead wife was a regular event at his house.

Rossetti now wanted to publish all his poetry but he had buried his most important work, 'Jenny', in Siddal's coffin. Retrieving them would be difficult because exhumation was strictly controlled but he knew the home secretary Henry A. Bruce. Permission to open the coffin came on 28 September 1869, and it was found the collection was damaged by water but readable, and—in keeping with the whole macabre incident—'Jenny' had been pierced by a worm.

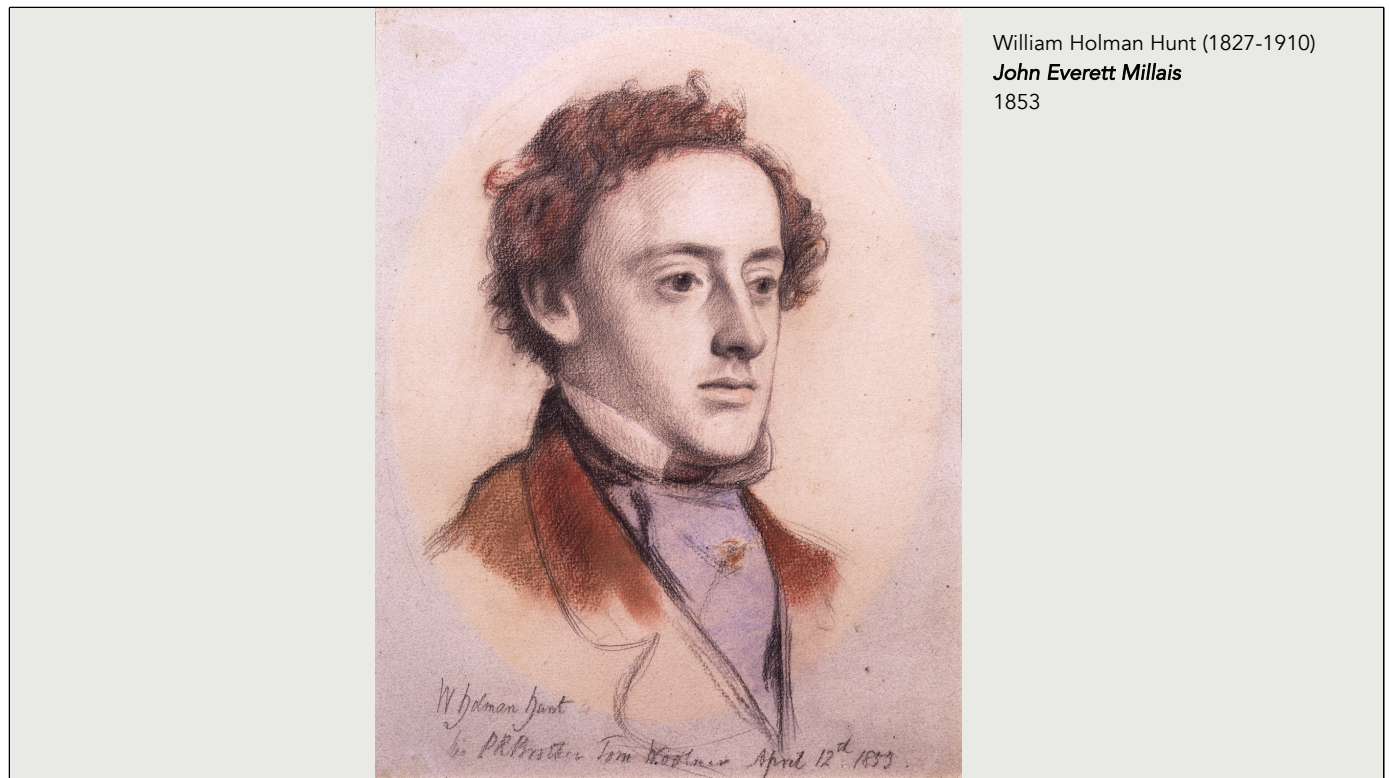
Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862)

Painted by Walter Deverell, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and

Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

William Michael Rossetti, her brother-in-law, described her as,

'a most beautiful creature with an air between dignity and sweetness with something that exceeded modest self-respect and partook of disdainful reserve; tall, finely-formed with a lofty neck and regular yet somewhat uncommon features, greenish-blue unsparkling eyes, large perfect eyelids, brilliant complexion and a lavish heavy wealth of coppery golden hair.'



William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), John Everett Millais, 1853

This portrait shows **John Everett Millais** at twenty-five, drawn at the moment the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** was beginning to fracture. Millais was the most extraordinarily gifted student the **Royal Academy Schools** had ever admitted — accepted at just eleven years old, he won a silver medal three years later and exhibited a history painting, **Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru**, at the Royal Academy in **1846** aged seventeen. He was so young, and so conspicuously talented, that older students tormented him by holding him upside down and using his thick blond hair to sweep the floor. He could paint flawlessly in any style, which only sharpened the resentment. Together with **William Holman Hunt** and **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**, Millais co-founded the Brotherhood in **1848**, and it is Hunt who best embodied its founding rigour. Where others drifted, Hunt sustained the movement's commitment to precise observation and moral seriousness across his entire career. The Brotherhood eventually expanded to seven members, including the sculptor **Thomas Woolner**, the critic **Frederic George Stephens**, and **James Collinson**, though it was always the core

three who defined its ambitions and its reputation.

Notes

This is a portrait of John Everett Millais, the greatest child prodigy the country has ever seen; he entered the RA School aged 11.

Hunt and Millais were the other two original founders, with Rossetti, of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Hunt was hard-working and maintained the spirit of Pre-Raphaelitism all his life.

Could paint in any style, so young he was teased by the other, older student and used as a broom.

Key point: Holman Hunt was a hard working artist who maintained his Pre-Raphaelite aims to the end of his life

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910)

The artist William Holman Hunt was also a founder member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He trained at the Royal Academy Art school and married twice. After a failed engagement to his model Annie Miller he married Fanny Waugh. When she died in childbirth in Italy he married her sister Edith. As this was illegal at the time in Britain he was forced to travel abroad to marry her. This led to a serious break with other family members including fellow Pre-Raphaelite Thomas Woolner who had been in love with Fanny and had married Alice, the third sister of Fanny and Edith.

John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

This is a portrait drawing of Millais when he was 25 and when the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was starting to break up. Millais, Hunt and Rossetti were the three key founding members.

He was a true child prodigy, he was only 11 years old when he was accepted to enter the Royal Academy School, its youngest ever student. He won a silver medal three years later and was displayed in the Royal Academy exhibition in 1846 when he was 17, with a history painting called Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru (London, V&A). He was the sort of artist that could flawlessly paint anything in any style. As he was so young he was teased by the other students at the Royal Academy and he said they would turn him upside down and use his thick mop of blond hair as a broom to sweep the

floor.

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

The three founders were joined by William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919, brother of Dante and Christina, organizer, bibliographer, editor of *The Germ*, civil servant and critic, married Lucy Madox Brown), James Collinson (1825-1881, artist, devout Christian, became a catholic but returned to Anglicanism to marry Christina Rossetti but his conscience forced him back and they broke off the engagement, he accused Millais of blasphemy and resigned the PRB), Frederic George Stephens (1828-1907, art critic, destroyed all his paintings, wrote under the pseudonym Laura Savage, supported his tutor Holman Hunt until they fell out over a damaged painting and a money gift for Hunt's son) and Thomas Woolner (1825-1892, sculptor and poet, emigrated to Australia and returned to become a successful sculptor, had a rough and combative personality) to form the seven-member "brotherhood". Other artists were associated such as Ford Madox Brown, Walter Deverell, George Price Boyce (watercolour artist and Rossetti's neighbour and friend).

A self-portrait of John Everett Millais, showing him from the chest up. He is wearing a dark, textured jacket over a white shirt and a dark cravat. He has dark, wavy hair and a serious expression. He is holding a dark, flat object, possibly a palette or a book, in front of him. The background is a dark, mottled brown.

John Everett Millais (1829-1896)
Self-portrait
1881
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), Self-portrait, 1881, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

By the time **Millais** painted this self-portrait for the **Uffizi Gallery's self-portrait collection** in **1881**, he was 52 years old and had long since shed any trace of his early bohemian revolt. The Uffizi's collection, the oldest and most comprehensive of its kind in the world, holds around 1,500 self-portraits, and an invitation to contribute was a mark of international standing. He presents himself not as the rebellious co-founder of the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** but as a working artist in a casual jacket, painted in the muted browns of the Old Masters. A dramatic sidelight picks out one eye — the all-seeing eye of the craftsman. Where many late Victorian artists cultivated images of themselves as free spirits and social outsiders, Millais did the opposite: he became a wealthy country gentleman devoted to hunting, shooting, and fishing, and ultimately the first artist to be awarded a hereditary title, becoming a **baronet**. His colleague **Frank Holl** died aged 43, exhausted by portrait commissions, shortly after Millais wrote to him warning that portrait painting kills the sensitive artist. Millais

understood the pressure because he had transformed artistic ambition into something rare: a flourishing, disciplined, and lucrative career.

Notes

This is Millais aged 52 by then very wealthy, a sporting country gentleman

He was the first artist to be given a hereditary title, of baronet.

He became President of the RA after Sir Frederic Leighton but died the same year.

His statue outside Tate Britain after 47 years of argument was moved to the rear of the building.

Millais wrote to his friend, the artist Frank Holl, 'Portrait painting is killing work to an artist who is sensitive, and he must be so to be successful, and I well understand that you are prostrated by it.' Holl died age 43 a few months after this letter, in the previous decade he had painted 198 portraits.

Key point: Millais was a child prodigy who made his art a successful business and became President of the RA

John Everett Millais

In 1881, when he was 52, he was honoured by being asked by the Uffizi Gallery in Florence to donate a self-portrait. There are approximately 1,500 self portraits in the Uffizi Collection, the oldest, most important, and most comprehensive collection of its kind in the world. The self portraits are from artists around the world and many modern and contemporary artists continue to donate their self portraits to the Gallery.

Self-portraits seem to give us an insight into the artist's personality but we must remember that they are often used by the artist to promote their skill or as experiments in technique. In the late nineteenth century artists cultivated a notion of themselves as free spirits whose liberation was manifested in sexual promiscuity, cultivation of working-class attributes and asocial behaviour. This was a way for the artist to elevate their status by placing themselves outside the norms and conventions of bourgeois society. Millais was not this type of artist. He became a very wealthy, country gentleman interested in hunting, shooting and fishing. He shows himself here as a working artist in a casual

jacket in in the muted brown tones of the Old Masters. There is a dramatic side light accentuating his single, all-seeing artists eye.

Biography

Millais became a country gentleman and a member of the RA (and for six months its President before he died of what at first was thought to be influenza, but turned out to be throat cancer, he had been a constant pipe-smoker).

Hunt remembers in his autobiography the golden-haired Millais being manhandled to the front of the Royal Academy to receive a first prize when he was very young. If it can be said of anyone he was a born painter.

The fact that he joined the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) shows the extent of his revolt against the establishment but he was made an Associate Royal Academician in 1853. However, in the end he probably changed the Academy more than it changed him and he changed it by making the PRB approach acceptable. Following the splitting apart of the original PRB all traces of his bohemian and rebel life were wiped out and he became respectable, later very rich and then a Baronet and President of the Royal Academy.

As a young man he was extremely athletic. His party trick was to jump high into the air without any run (like Bill Gates).

He was vain about his appearance. Nearly every photograph of him shows him in profile, as he felt that his profile was so exceptionally handsome.

He was an outdoor man, every inch a Victorian hearty.

He was addicted to field sports-hunting, shooting, and fishing.

He was a sociable popular man.

He was an indulgent father, particularly to his daughters.

He spent his evenings in the Garrick Club, when in London.

He did not visit sitters to paint their portraits, they came to his studio. In 1886 a large retrospective of his work was held at the Grosvenor Gallery. After his death Sir George Reid, President of the Royal Scottish Academy of Art said, 'he was one of the kindest, noblest, most beautiful and lovable man I ever knew or hope to know'.



Frederic Leighton (1830-1896)
Self-portrait
1880
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), Self-portrait, 1880, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Frederic Leighton sat at the heart of the Victorian art establishment — yet his career began with the same provocative sensibility that defined the avant-garde. His self-portrait, painted for the **Uffizi Gallery** in Florence alongside that of **Millais**, shows him robed in Oxford doctoral scarlet, a heavy gold medal marking his presidency of the **Royal Academy**. The Parthenon frieze fills the background: a deliberate statement of classical authority. **Whistler**, never generous with rivals, skewered this duality perfectly — remarking that Leighton was Colonel of the Royal Academy and President of the **Artists Rifles**, and that he painted a little too. But Whistler's jibe obscures something important. In **1859**, Leighton painted **Pavonia**, a sensuously direct portrait of the model **Nanna**. That same year, **Rossetti** painted **Bocca Baciata**, using the model Fanny Cornforth with equal frankness. Both pictures signalled a new, uninhibited approach to depicting women. Rossetti remained a rebel; Leighton moved to London in **1860** and built a life of impeccable respectability. The distinction is not one of ambition but of

strategy — and Leighton's establishment position never extinguished the boldness that launched his career.

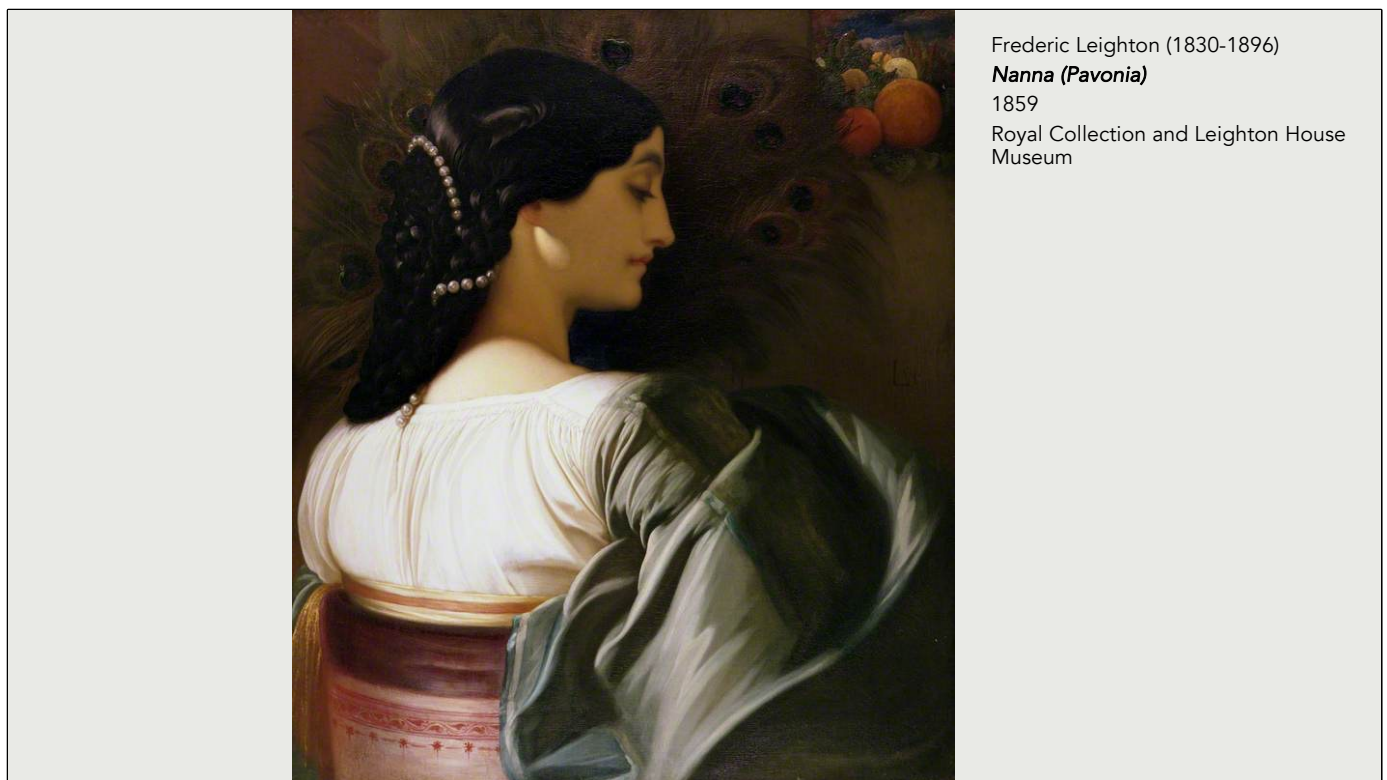
Notes

Key point: Leighton was an establishment figure but at the forefront of innovation

Frederic Leighton

In this self-portrait, Leighton presents himself as the epitome of the establishment. He shows himself against a background of the Parthenon frieze, wearing the red gown of an Oxford scholar (he was conferred the university's doctoral degree in Civil Law in 1879) and wearing a heavy gold medal as president of the Royal Academy. This portrait, like that of Millais, was also painted for the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Leighton was an enthusiastic volunteer soldier in the Artists Rifles and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel causing Whistler to describe him as 'Colonel of the Royal Academy and the President of the Artists Rifles – aye, and he paints a little!'.

Leighton became an establishment figure but remember he painting Pavia in 1859, a picture of the model Nanna, the same year Rossetti painted Bocca Baciata, a picture of the model Fanny Cornforth. Rossetti continued to be a rebel and a drug addict while Leighton came to London in 1860 and became a respectable member of society.



Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), Nanna (Pavonia), 1859, Royal Collection and Leighton House Museum

This work arrives at a moment when **Leighton** was just twenty-nine years old, and already demonstrating a confidence that belied his age. Born in Scarborough in 1830 into a prosperous medical family, his grandfather having served as physician to the Russian royal family and accumulated considerable wealth, Leighton enjoyed financial security that allowed him to pursue artistic ambition on his own terms. His father funded him throughout his career, though not without reservation. Leighton wrote in 1879 that his parents had discouraged any thought of his becoming an artist unless he could be, in his own words, eminent in art. **Nanna Risi**, known across Rome as La Nanna, was the wife of a Trastevere cobbler and the mistress of the German painter **Anselm Feuerbach**. Leighton, describing her as a very handsome model, painted her repeatedly after returning to Rome in October **1858**. The **peacock feather** dominating this composition is no idle prop: the subtitle **Pavonia** derives from the Italian pavone, meaning peacock, and positions her dark, brooding glamour in

deliberate contrast to the companion work **Bianca**, painted three years later, whose dove imagery and pale luminosity complete an unambiguous pairing of opposing beauties.

Notes

But Leighton was at the forefront of the innovative when he was young (29) as he painted this 'portrait' of a well known model in Rome

Nanna (Pavonia)

King Edward VII, King of the United Kingdom (1841-1910), when Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (1841-63)

Purchased from the artist by George de Monbrison; from whom acquired by King Edward VII, when Prince of Wales, 1859

Nanna Risi, known as 'La Nanna', the wife of a cobbler living in Trastevere, became a professional model and was the mistress in Rome of the German painter Anselm Feuerbach. Described by Leighton as 'a very handsome model', she sat to him on many occasions after his return to Rome early in October 1858.

Three years after this work Leighton painted his 'Bianca' (404569) of identical size, which seems to be intended as a pair. Leighton contrasts two different styles of beauty: the dark brooding glamour of the peacock in 'Nanna', which is subtitled 'Pavonia' ('pavone' is a peacock in Italian) and which features a peacock's feather and the light wholesome radiance of the dove in 'Bianca' (a name which means 'white' in Italian). This pairing may not have occurred to Leighton when he painted this earlier picture, but the idea of a distilling a particular character or essence of beauty certainly seems intended.

Lord Frederic Leighton (1830-1896)

He was born in Scarborough, Yorkshire to a medical family. His father was a doctor, and his grandfather had been the primary physician to the Russian royal family in St. Petersburg, where he amassed a large fortune. Leighton's career was always cushioned by this family wealth, his father paying him an allowance throughout his life. Leighton's parents were worried about his choice of career as he wrote in a letter of 1879, "My parents surrounded me with every facility to learn drawing, but, strongly discountenanced the idea of

my being an artist unless I could be eminent in art".



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)
John Ruskin
1853-1854
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), John Ruskin, 1853-1854, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

The portrait of **John Ruskin** painted by **John Everett Millais** at **Glenfinlas** in the Scottish Trossachs is far more than a commission — it is the record of a rupture. Ruskin chose the waterfall site himself, drawn by its geological formations, which he studied independently while Millais worked. Over four months in that shared cottage, Millais and Ruskin's wife **Effie** fell in love, and Millais later described completing the portrait back in London as "the most hateful task I have ever had to perform" — by then he understood that Ruskin had mentally tormented her. The canvas holds all three figures in tension: sitter, wife, and artist, each concealing something from the others. Ruskin himself was no narrow critic. His writing, eventually gathered into a **39-volume Library Edition** completed in **1912** by **Edward Tyas Cook** and **Alexander Wedderburn**, ranged across geology, political economy, environmental pollution, and social reform. **Tolstoy** called him one of the most remarkable men of any country or generation and translated his ideas into Russian. Ruskin's influence on how Victorian Britain

thought about art, labour, and nature was structural, not incidental.

Notes

This portrait introduces the towering figure of John Ruskin (1819-1900). Ruskin supported the Pre-Raphaelites and took Millais with him and his wife to Glenfinlas in the Trossachs. He selected this waterfall as he was interested in the rock formations and undertook his own studies of these. Millais, Ruskin and his wife Effie Gray (Euphemia Chalmers Millais, Lady Millais née Gray, known as Effie Gray, Effie Ruskin or Effie Millais, 1828–1897) shared a small cottage for four months and during this holiday Millais and Effie had fallen in love. Millais had to finish the portrait in his studio back in London which he described as the 'the most hateful task I have ever had to perform'. This was because by then he realised that Ruskin had mentally tormented Effie.

Key point: a portrait that involves a three way relationship between sitter, his wife and the artist

Ruskin wrote over 250 works which started from art criticism and history, but expanded to cover topics ranging over science, geology, ornithology, literary criticism, the environmental effects of pollution, mythology, travel, political economy and social reform. After his death Ruskin's works were collected in the 39-volume "Library Edition", completed in 1912 by his friends Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn.

Tolstoy described him as, "one of the most remarkable men not only of England and of our generation, but of all countries and times" and quoted extensively from him, rendering his words into Russian



Thomas Richmond (1802-1874)
*Euphemia ('Effie') Chalmers Gray,
then Effie Ruskin then Effie Millais
then Lady Millais*

1851

Oil on board, arched top
National Portrait Gallery, London

Thomas Richmond (1802-1874), Euphemia ('Effie') Chalmers Gray, then Effie Ruskin then Effie Millais then Lady Millais, 1851, National Portrait Gallery, London

Millais painted this portrait on commission from **Ruskin's father**, who paid the artist twenty pounds' worth of wine for it. When it was shown at the **Royal Academy in 1851**, Effie wrote to her mother that it was the most lovely piece of oil painting, though much prettier than herself — she thought she looked like a graceful doll. The gold and enamel bracelet she wears was bought by Ruskin in Geneva as they travelled to Venice in 1849. Effie Gray was born in **Perth**, in Bowerswell, the very house where Ruskin's grandfather had taken his own life. Her family knew Ruskin's father, a wealthy wine merchant, and actively encouraged the match. Ruskin had written the fantasy novel **The King of the Golden River** for Effie in 1841, when she was twelve. They married in **1848**, and when she met Millais five years later the marriage had never been consummated. Effie later described to her father Ruskin's own explanation: that he had been disgusted by her person on their wedding night, having imagined women were quite different

to what he saw. Their marriage was annulled in **1854**, causing a major public scandal. Effie married **Millais** the following year and bore him eight children.

Notes

The portrait was commissioned by Ruskin's father and the artist was given £20 in wine for it. After it had been shown at the Academy in 1851, Effie wrote to her mother: '...it is the most lovely piece of oil painting but much prettier than me. I look like a graceful Doll but John and his father are delighted with it'. She is wearing a gold and enamel bracelet brought for her by Ruskin in Geneva when they were on their way to Venice in 1849.

Effie was born in Perth in the house where Ruskin's grandfather had committed suicide. Her family knew Ruskin's father, a wealthy wine merchant, and they encouraged the match. They married in 1848 and when she met Millais five years later she was still a virgin. Ruskin's reasons for putting off consummating the marriage are not clear. Effie later wrote to her father, He alleged various reasons, hatred to children, religious motives, a desire to preserve my beauty, and, finally this last year he told me his true reason... that he had imagined women were quite different to what he saw I was, and that the reason he did not make me his Wife was because he was disgusted with my person the first evening 10th April.

Effie was regarded by society as extremely beautiful and much sought after to attend parties and balls and so the reason for Ruskin's disgust have been much debated by art historians. Ruskin wrote to his lawyer:

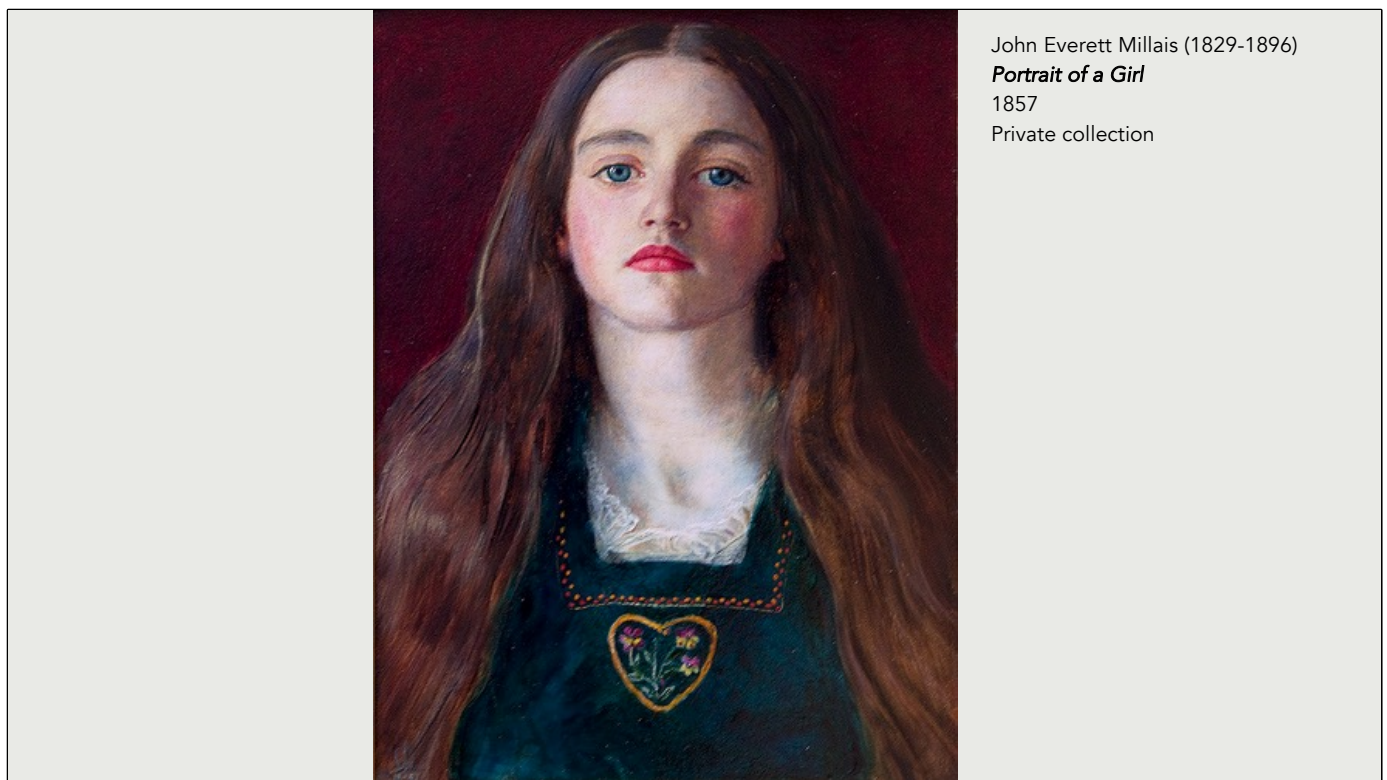
It may be thought strange that I could abstain from a woman who to most people was so attractive. But though her face was beautiful, her person was not formed to excite passion. On the contrary, there were certain circumstances in her person which completely checked it.

Whatever the reason, with the support of her family and a number of influential friends, she filed for an annulment, causing a major public scandal; their marriage was annulled in 1854. In 1855, she married John Millais and eventually bore him eight children. The annulment meant that she could never attend an event where the Queen was present. When Millais was dying the Queen relented through the intervention of her daughter, Princess Louise, and allowed Effie to attend an official function.

Effie Gray

Born Euphemia Chalmers Gray in Perth, Scotland, she married John Ruskin on 10 April 1848, who wrote *The King of The Golden River* (1841) especially for her. From 1851, Ruskin became a patron of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and Effie modelled for John Millais's painting *Order of Release* (1852-3). At the end of June 1853, they travelled to the Scottish Highlands, where Millais painted Ruskin's portrait at Glenfilas. Effie left Ruskin for Millais on 25 April 1854, and successfully sought an annulment, causing a major public scandal. She married Millais on 3 July 1855 and they went on to have eight children together.

Effie Gray, initially known by the pet name of "Phemy", was born in Perth, Scotland, and lived in Bowerswell, the house where Ruskin's grandfather had committed suicide. Her family knew Ruskin's father, who encouraged a match between them. Ruskin wrote the fantasy novel *The King of the Golden River* for her in 1841, when she was twelve years old. After their marriage in 1848, they travelled to Venice where Ruskin was researching his book *The Stones of Venice*. Their different personalities are thrown into sharp relief by their contrasting priorities. For Effie, Venice provided an opportunity to socialise, while Ruskin was engaged in solitary studies. In particular, he made a point of drawing the Ca' d'Oro and the Doge's Palace, or Palazzo Ducale, because he feared they would be destroyed by the occupying Austrian troops. One of these troops, Lieutenant Charles Paulizza, made friends with Effie, apparently with no objection from Ruskin. Her brother, among others, later claimed that Ruskin was deliberately encouraging the friendship to compromise her, as an excuse to separate.



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)
Portrait of a Girl
1857
Private collection

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Portrait of a Girl*, 1857, Private collection

Painted in the summer and autumn of 1857 at **Bowerswell**, the Gray family home in Perth, this portrait of **Sophie Gray** — Millais's thirteen-year-old sister-in-law — was sold under the title **Portrait of a Girl** to **George Price Boyce**, a friend of Rossetti, for sixty guineas. The anonymising title is significant: this is not straightforwardly a portrait in the conventional Victorian sense. Where women of the period were expected to appear demure and averted, Sophie meets the viewer with a directness that sits far more comfortably with twenty-first century eyes than it would have with Victorian ones. Art historians describe it as alive with electric energy, and that confrontational gaze has consistently provoked questions about Millais's relationship with his subject. Effie, Millais's wife and Sophie's elder sister, had previously been married to the critic **John Ruskin**. Millais and Effie were living with Sophie's family at Bowerswell when the work was made, and Sophie was beginning to displace Effie as his favoured model. The painting appeared at **Tate Britain's 2012 Pre-Raphaelites exhibition**, and was

misidentified as another sitter in exhibitions between **1898 and 1923** — a confusion that only sharpens the central question of who, exactly, this image shows us.

Notes

This is Millais's sister-in-law, Sophie Gray (1843-1882), aged 13. 10th of 15 children of George Gray and Sophia Margaret Gray, née Jameson (1808–1894)

Is this a portrait? It was called Portrait of a Girl and sold to George Price Boyce for 60 guineas.

It is a very sensual, "knowing" and direct image, which, almost inevitably, has provoked questions about the nature of Millais' relationship with his sister-in-law.

"Alive with electric energy". Women of this period were not portrayed in a confrontational manner as it was unacceptable to Victorian society. The image is far more familiar to 21st century eyes than those of Victorian society.

Effie, Millais lived with Sophie and her parents in Bowerswell, Perth. She started to displace Effie as his muse.

The change from a child to a stunning teenager can be seen in three paintings Autumn Leaves, Spring (or Apple Blossom) and this portrait.

It is rumoured that Effie sent her away but her parents continued to allow Millais to chaperone her.

Was Millais too interested in her, did his wife Effie complain?

Sophie suffered later (1868, aged 25) from anorexia nervosa, became obsessed, became incoherent, placed in care and died aged 39. She was cared for by Dr Thomas Harrington Tuke (1826–88), a leading practitioner in lunacy who had treated Millais' friend, the painter Edwin Landseer.

Millais wife Effie had been married to the art critic John Ruskin.

The painting was displayed in 2012 at Tate Britain's major exhibition on the Pre-Raphaelites, Victorian Avant-Garde.

In 1859, Boyce commissioned Rossetti to paint Fanny Cornforth (Bocca Baciata).

Boyce wanted to show Sophie and Alice and the RA exhibition of 1858 but Millais asked him not to as he had not completed his large painting Spring and did not want to be represented by two small portraits. He was having a

hard time as the critics, led by Ruskin, turned against him. In later exhibitions (1898 to 1923) this portrait of Sophie was misidentified as Alice.

Key point: a painting that raises questions about the nature of a portrait, is it a girl or Sophie Gray?

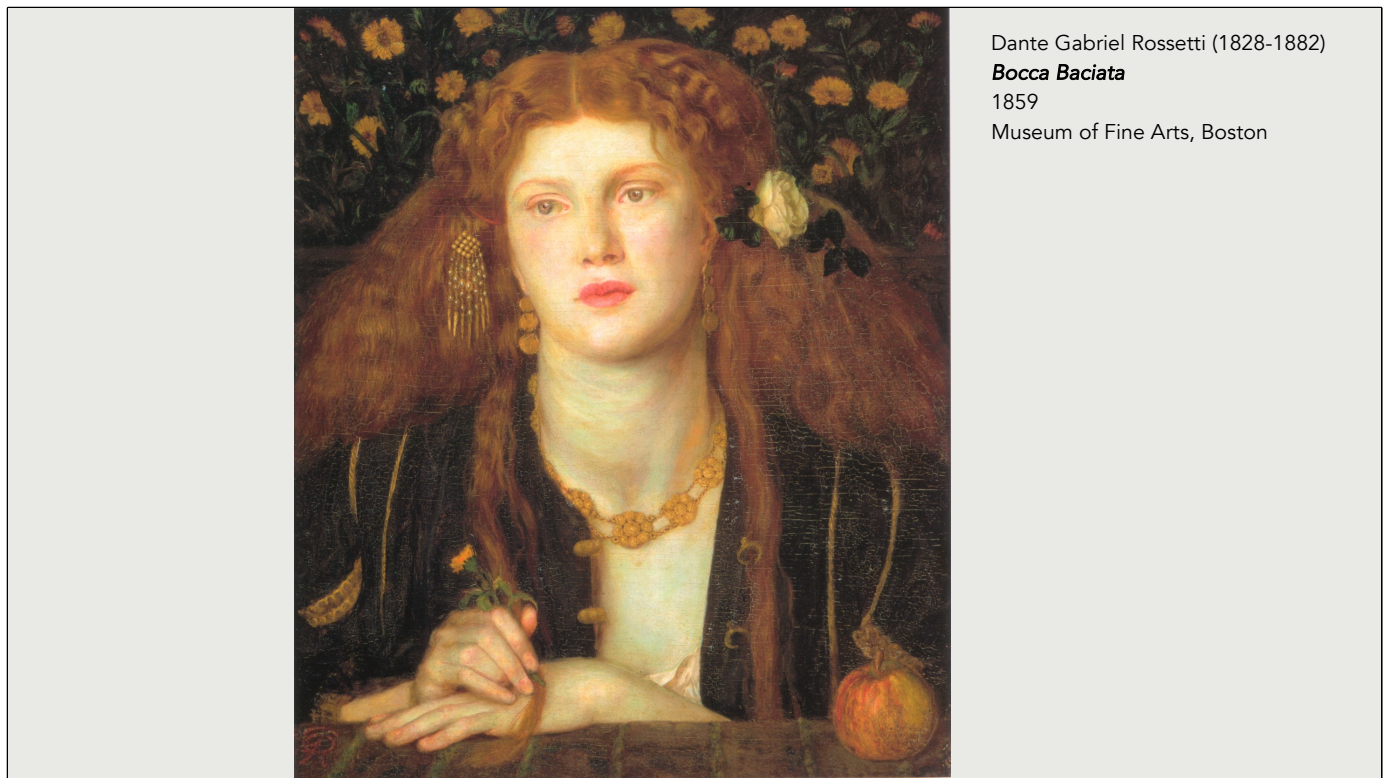
Sophie Gray

Sophie Gray (1843-1882, also known as Sophy) Millais's sister-in-law, was only 13 when this portrait was painted and it was titled *Portrait of a Girl* and, I think strangely, was sold to George Price Boyce a friend of Rossetti and joint lover of Fanny Cornforth. The painting, or portrait of Fanny Cornforth was hung alongside that of Sophie Gray. It is difficult to understand why her parents did not want this portrait of Sophie. After Millais and his then wife Effie moved to Annat Lodge, close to Bowerswell in Scotland, her family home, she was readily available for sitting, and it seems she was beginning to displace Effie as a favoured subject. Sophie was one of Millais's favourite models in the 1850s, see *Autumn Leaves* (1856). This painting was painted in the summer and autumn of 1857 when Millais and Effie were living with her parents and sisters at Bowerswell, the family home in Perth.

There is another portrait of Alice, another of his favourite models. Both works were bought by George Pryce Boyce for himself and on behalf of his sister Joanna, also an artist. The portrait of Alice is a straightforward portrait of an immature girl.

The sensual and 'knowing' look has raised questions about Sophie's relationship with Millais and there is some evidence that Millais wife, Effie, sent her away because they were growing too close. Eleven years later Sophie became unwell and was suffering from what is now called anorexia nervosa. She became obsessed with piano playing and her speech became incoherent. She married Caird, later made a baronet (like Millais) and had a daughter called Baeatrice who Millais painted and who died aged 14 in 1888. She was placed in the care of Dr Thomas Tuke who had treated Edwin Landseer but her mental state continued to be a problem for the rest of her life. She died at the age of 39.

See <http://www.leicestergalleries.com/19th-20th-century-paintings/d/portrait-of-a-girl-sophie-gray/10207>



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Bocca Baciata*, 1859, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Painted in **1859**, ***Bocca Baciata*** marks the moment Rossetti began introducing a new type of powerful female figure into British art — and the question of whether it constitutes a portrait at all is precisely what makes it so instructive. The model was **Fanny Cornforth**, known to Rossetti's circle, yet the work was never offered to the public as a portrait. Its title, meaning "the kissed mouth," comes from the final line of **Boccaccio's Decameron**, Day Two, Story Seven, in which Alatiel, a woman of devastating beauty, passes through eight lovers and thousands of encounters yet is received by her husband as a virgin. The moral is deliberately slippery. Rossetti loads the image with the Victorian language of flowers: the rose signals innocence, the apple evokes temptation and downfall, and the marigold denotes despair. **William Holman Hunt** condemned the work in **1860** as advocating mere sensory gratification. **Alan Bowness** countered more precisely, identifying it as a voluptuous, inscrutable image rooted in **Venetian Cinquecento** painting, particularly the type of devotional figure portrait

Rossetti had recently seen in **Giovanni Bellini's** portrait of **Fra Teodoro of Urbino**, then held at the South Kensington Museum. Subject and symbol pull in opposite directions — that tension is the point.

Notes

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882, died aged 54), *Bocca Baciata*, 1859, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516, died aged 86), *Portrait of Fra Teodoro of Urbino as Saint Dominic*, 1515, National Gallery, recorded first in 1797 in the Palazzo Pesaro, Venice; on loan to the National Gallery since 1895 from the Victoria and Albert Museum, which acquired it in 1856.

Very different type of portrait, or is it a portrait?

Companion piece to *Portrait of a Girl*.

Bocca Baciata ('Kissed Mouth') is from the last line of Boccaccio's *Decameron* Day 2 Story 7.

So she, who had lain with eight men, in all, perhaps, ten thousand times, was bedded with him as a virgin, and made him believe that a virgin she was, and lived long and happily with him as his queen: wherefore 'twas said: 'The mouth that has been kissed loses not its freshness; still it renews itself even as does the moon'.

William Holman Hunt (1860) criticised the image for being a 'remarkable for gross sensuality of a revolting kind ... I see Rossetti as advocating as a principle the mere gratification of the eye'.

Symbolism of painting – apple (temptation and downfall), rose (Innocence), marigold (despair and grief)

Or was it a reference to Bellini, substituting the face of the saint would have been regarded as a good joke by his friends

Acquired by South Kensington Museum in 1856 and seen by Rossetti. It is either St Dominic for which Fra Teodoro was a model or a portrait of the friar at St. Dominic. The lily is St. Dominic's attribute and the book is labelled Sanct. Dominic. The monks name is on the parapet. Is this a portrait? One of Bellini's last works of his long life.

Key point: in 1859 Rossetti started to paint a new type of female figure that introduced the idea of the powerful female

Bocca Baciata

I have switched to a very different type of portrait to discuss the problem of defining what we mean by a portrait. This is the first single female figure painted by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and it established a style that was later to become his signature work. It is also regarded as the first example of an 'art for art's sake' painting which was painted not as a portrait or to make a moral point but purely to look beautiful. However, we know the model was Fanny Cornforth and all his friends knew her but it was not expected to be regarded by the public as a portrait. It could be seen by some as a keepsake picture as found in Heath's Book of Beauty. These books were bought by women as examples of how to look beautiful but this painting contains many overt symbols that, together with its title *Bocca Baciata*, suggests it could be making a moral point. The moral of this painting is unclear however as the title refers to a line in a story in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In the story (Day 2, Story 7,) a woman called Alatiel is described as the most beautiful woman in the world. She is shipwrecked and has adventures and many lovers who fight and die over her. She eventually returns home and the story ends (translated): So she, who had lain with eight men, in all, perhaps, ten thousand times, was bedded with him as a virgin, and made him believe that a virgin she was, and lived long and happily with him as his queen: wherefore 'twas said: 'The mouth that has been kissed loses not its freshness; still it renews itself even as does the moon'.

Rossetti title comes from the last line of the story and means the kissed mouth. We can see, therefore, that this is no typical, Victorian moral tale.

Like any good work of art it has many possible interpretations. Its ambiguity draws us in and allows us to read our own meaning into the picture. We see a beautiful woman whose beauty leads men to fight and die. The rose symbolises her innocence but the apple refers to temptation leading to downfall. The marigold, according to the 'language of flowers' means despair and grief, the consequences of her beauty in Boccaccio's story. The use of flowers to convey a message was very popular in the Victorian period and

there were many books describing how to interpret the meaning of flowers.

Returning to what we mean by a portrait. In her book *Portraiture*, Shearer West, Professor of Art History, University of Birmingham, identifies the attributes of a portrait. It involves a direct relationship between the sitter and the artist and likeness is often the essence of a portrait. Because of this element of 'copying' the sitter portraiture has often been dismissed as a low form of art as it does not involve creativity. From the Renaissance to the early nineteenth century it was seen as a mechanical exercise and therefore not fine art. However, as we have seen portraiture was placed second after history painting. The reason for this is that portraits were only painted of important, noble people and they were therefore akin to history paintings as they provided the viewer with models for emulation.

Portraiture was not an invention of the Renaissance nor a Western art form. There were Polynesian skull cults and skulls modelled out of clay in Jericho in 5000 BCE. The ancient world was replete with portraits both in ancient Greece and Rome. Although there is little portraiture in the middle ages (although see the mosaic of Emperor and Empress Justinian and Theodora in San Vitale, Ravenna) it blossomed in the fifteenth century.

Despite 'likeness' being part of the definition of a portrait the social position of the sitter can result in social or artistic conventions that reconstruct the sitter as a type or example of their period. Portraits can therefore be placed on a spectrum between a specific likeness and a general type. Secondly, a portrait is a balance between a representation of a face and body and the character or virtues of the person. Finally, portraits often result from a negotiation between the artist, the sitter and the patron who may all be different people or the same person in a self-portrait.

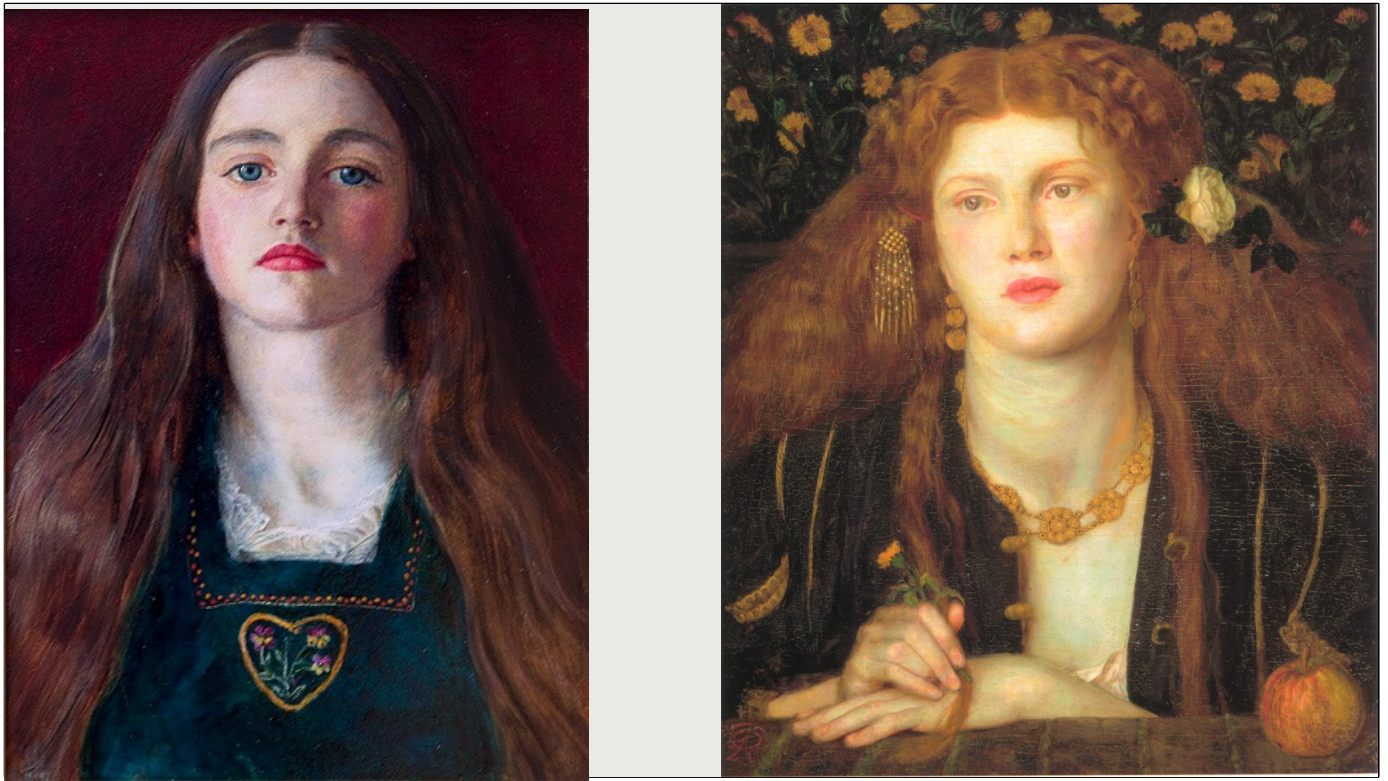
The painting was thought to have been influenced by John Everett Millais' portrait of his sister-in-law Sophie Gray (now known to be Sophy, 1843-1882) which was completed two years before and was known to Rossetti. It was painted as a present for his friend George Price Boyce to go alongside this 'portrait'.

Alan Bowness's characterization of the picture is succinct and exact:

Here is something quite new for Rossetti—a voluptuous, inscrutable image, coarse and sensual perhaps, but experienced in precisely the way that differs so essentially from the early work. And Venetian Cinquecento painting now provides Rossetti with a model that replaces his earlier preference for Florentine and Sienese Quattrocento.

Rossetti saw as most artists do, in terms of technique (letter to William Bell Scott on November 13, 1859:

I have painted a little half-figure in oil lately which I should like you to see, as I have made an effort to avoid what I know to be a besetting fault of mine—& indeed rather common to PR painting—that of stipple in the flesh. I have succeeded in quite keeping it at a distance this time, and am very desirous of painting . . . various figures of this kind, chiefly as a rapid study of flesh painting.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Bocca Baciata*, 1859

These two pictures once hung side by side, and that pairing tells a story far beyond portraiture. **George Price Boyce**, a watercolourist and close friend of both **Millais** and **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**, acquired the portrait of **Sophie Gray** for sixty guineas. He then commissioned Rossetti to paint **Bocca Baciata** in **1859**, a portrait of **Fanny Cornforth**, a lover the two men shared, to hang directly alongside Sophie's image. The contrast between the two pictures is pointed. Sophie is alert and self-possessed, wearing heart's ease, the flower of remembrance and fidelity. Fanny is languid, heavy-lidded, holding a marigold — a flower associated with grief. **William Holman Hunt**, a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, condemned *Bocca Baciata* as remarkable for gross sensuality of a revolting kind, accusing Rossetti of advocating the mere gratification of the eye. As the art historian Cooper has noted, this pairing revealed the erotic potential already latent in the image of the young Sophie Gray — potential the artist himself may never have intended, but which Boyce's acquisition made impossible to ignore.

Notes

The two previous pictures hanging side-by-side.

George Pryce Boyce bought the picture of Sophie Gray for 60 guineas. He commissioned or encouraged Rossetti to paint *Bocca Baciata*, a picture of Fanny Cornforth, a lover they both shared.

Boyce is said to have bought the *Portrait of a Girl* for his sister Joanna but this is not clear.

Sophie is assertive, knowing is wearing 'heart's ease'. Fanny is dreamy, languid and is holding a marigold for grief.

Unlike Millais' 1854 portrait of Sophy, his later work was not kept by the family. It was sold to George Price Boyce, a friend of Millais' pre-Raphaelite "brother", Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who painted a portrait of Fanny Cornforth, a lover he shared with Boyce, to hang alongside that of Sophy. Entitled *Bocca Baciata* ("the mouth that has been kissed") after a theme in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Rossetti's picture (1859) was described by William Holman Hunt, another member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as "remarkable for gross sensuality of a revolting kind ... I see Rossetti as advocating as a principle the mere gratification of the eye". As Cooper has remarked, this "after-life" of Sophy Gray demonstrated its "erotic potential".

See <http://fannycornforth.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/the-portraits-of-sophia-gray.html>



James Abbott McNeill Whistler
(1834-1903)
Arrangement in Gray: Portrait of the Painter
c. 1872
Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), *Arrangement in Gray: Portrait of the Painter*, c. 1872, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit

Arriving after the mid-century realists, **James Abbott McNeill Whistler** reshaped what painting could mean. Born in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1834, he trained in Paris, where he encountered **Henri Fantin-Latour** at the Louvre, and through him met **Gustave Courbet** and **Édouard Manet**. **Charles Baudelaire's** insistence on finding beauty in modern everyday life proved equally formative. By 1859 Whistler had settled permanently in London, developing his conviction that art should concern itself with the arrangement of colour and tone, not moral instruction or narrative sentiment — a position allied with the **art for art's sake** movement. His 1890 book **The Gentle Art of Making Enemies** was not ironic; Whistler genuinely courted conflict and collected adversaries throughout his career. In **Arrangement in Grey: Portrait of the Painter**, made around 1872 and now in the **Detroit Institute of Arts**, he adopts a Rembrandt-like stance, holding the tools of his trade, with his signature stylised butterfly — its tail sharpened into a stinger — visible in the background. Titling works as musical

compositions, arrangements or harmonies, Whistler insisted that tonal relationships carried meaning independently of subject matter, a claim that fundamentally challenged Victorian assumptions about what painting was for.

Notes

James Abbott Whistler (1834-1903), Arrangement in Gray: Portrait of the Painter, self portrait, c. 1872, Detroit Institute of Arts

Whistler was the next generation. He was an American who trained in Paris but lived in London most of his life.

He was a difficult character and in 1867 he threw a 'friend' through a plate-glass window (Sir Francis Seymour Haden, artist, etcher, surgeon, Whistler's half-brother-in-law, married to Whistler's half-sister Deborah, had come to Paris to bury his partner and Whistler's friend James Traer and found Haden was slandering him) and he insisted his students always called him 'master'. He also got into a fight with a construction worker in Paris and Haden had him thrown out of the Burlington Fine Arts Club, which was assisted by a woman with whom Whistler had an alleged affair writing about his low character. In 1890 Whistler wrote *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*.

He was not a prodigy but came to painting slowly.

He developed a unique style of art that rejected subject painting, moralising and sentiment.

Key point: Whistler was a controversial artist who helped redefine the nature of art

James Abbott McNeill Whistler

Whistler was an American born in Lowell, Massachusetts, who spent most of his life in London where he died. He was a leading exponent of 'art for art's sake' and rejected sentimental and moral paintings. He gave his works the names of musical works, such as 'arrangement', 'harmony' or 'nocturne' to emphasize the importance of tonal harmony both in music and painting.

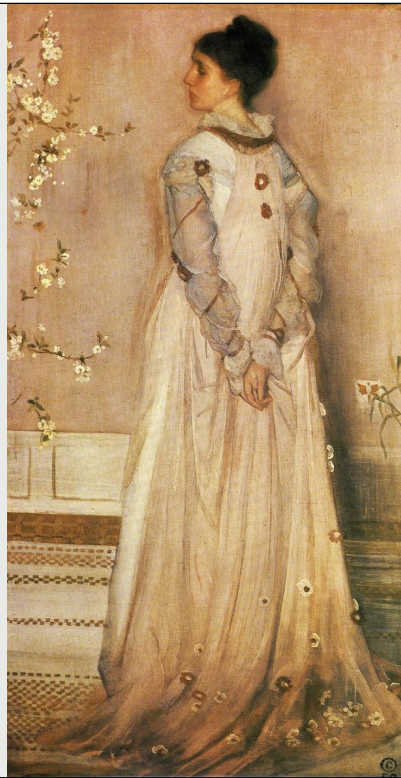
Whistler came to London when he was young as his father was a railroad engineer and had a project in Russia. His father died of cholera in Russia and he moved back to his mother's home in Connecticut. He went to the Military Academy at West Point but did very badly because of his near-sightedness,

poor grades, casual dress on parade, long hair, inability to follow rules and sarcastic comments. He was eventually dismissed and joined the etching division of the US Coast Survey where he learned etching techniques. With some money he made selling paintings he left for Paris, never to return to the US.

In Paris he made friends with Henri Fantin-Latour, whom he met at the Louvre and through him, Whistler met Gustave Courbet, Alphonse Legros, and Édouard Manet. Also in this group was Charles Baudelaire, whose ideas influenced Whistler. Baudelaire challenged artists to find beauty in the everyday aspects of modern life and to portray the brutality of life faithfully, avoiding the old themes of mythology and allegory.

In 1859 he moved to London which he adopted as his home and over the next ten years he developed a unique style based on his theory that art should be concerned with the arrangement of colours in harmony, not with a literal portrayal of the natural world. In this self-portrait he adopts a Rembrandt-like pose and holds the tools of trade in his hand. In the background is the symbol he adopted of a stylized butterfly with a long stinger for a tail.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler
(1834-1903)
***Symphony in Flesh Colour and Pink:
Portrait of Mrs Frances Leyland***
1871-1873
The Frick Collection, New York



James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), *Symphony in Flesh Colour and Pink: Portrait of Mrs Frances Leyland*, 1871-1873, The Frick Collection, New York

Whistler's *Symphony in Flesh Colour and Pink: Portrait of Mrs Frances Leyland*, painted between 1871 and 1874, began at **Speke Hall**, Leyland's Tudor mansion near Liverpool, and was completed at Whistler's own home at **2 Lindsay Row** in London. Throughout the 1871 season, Frances Leyland posed there regularly, wearing a dress Whistler had designed himself — one of many he created for her. The painting's extraordinary surface unity comes from Whistler's refusal of conventional perspective. The chequered floor lies flat against the picture plane rather than receding, and the gauzy fabric of the gown dissolves into near-abstraction at the hem. Frame, costume, floor, and figure resolve into a single visual field. Standing in for Frances during sittings was **Maud Franklin**, who was only fourteen or fifteen at the time. She later moved in with Whistler in 1875, became his primary model, and bore him two daughters before the relationship ended when he married **Beatrice Godwin** in 1888. In **1874**, Whistler hired the

Flemish Gallery on **Pall Mall** to display the work alongside oils, drawings, and etchings — paying four times his annual rent for the privilege. For Whistler, controlling the viewing environment was never incidental. It was integral to the work itself.

Notes

Started at Leyland's home, Speke Hall (wattle and daub Tudor mansion near Liverpool, started in 1530, leased to Leyland for 10 years) but taken back to London to finish at Whistler's home, 2 Lindsay Row. Throughout the 1871 London season Mrs Leyland came to pose at Whistler's house.

Whistler's designed the dress (and many other dresses) as well as the design of the room and the frame.

Mrs Frances Leyland understudy was Maud Franklin (1857-c.1941), who stood in for her when Maud was only 14 or 15. She moved in with Whistler in 1875 and became Whistler's primary model around 1877. She and gave birth to two daughters by Whistler, Ione (c.1877, 'eye-oh-nee') and Maud (1879). She exhibited her own paintings in 1884-8, continued to model after the relationship ended, struggled financially, moved to Paris when Whistler married Beatrice Godwin in 1888 and married J. Little a wealthy New Yorker and had a son. After his death she married another wealthy American (Richard Abbott) and moved to Cannes where she died c.1941.

In 1874 Whistler displayed the painting in his own gallery. He hired the Flemish Gallery behind 48 Pall Mall for £315, four times what he paid for his house and painted the walls pinkish grey, the floors bright yellow and the couches rich, light maroon. Balanced by plants, flowers and Chinese vases. Thin blinds below the skylight subdued and mellowed the effect. He displayed 13 oils, 36 drawings and 50 etchings.

Whistler's Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room was completed in 1876-7. Leyland was shocked and they quarrelled and Leyland, who had not authorised the work offered half the 2,000 guineas Whistler wanted to charge. Leyland also treated him like a tradesman by offering to pay him in pounds rather than guineas. Whistler is reported to have said to Leyland, "Ah, I have made you famous. My work will live when you are forgotten. Still, per chance, in the dim ages to come you will be remembered as the proprietor of the Peacock Room."

Adding to the emotional drama was Whistler's fondness for Leyland's wife, Frances, who separated from her husband in 1879. She never seems to have slept with Whistler but he flirted with her sister Elizabeth and is said to have proposed marriage to her. Another result of this drama was Thomas Jeckyll who, so shocked by the first sight of his room, returned home and was later found on the floor of his studio covered in gold leaf; he never recovered and died insane three years later. Thomas Jeckyll was a British architect experienced in the Anglo-Japanese style who was appointed by Richard Norman Shaw who Leyland had appointed to remodel and redecorate his house.

From Frick Website,

"For the wife of his chief patron of the 1870s, Whistler created an Aesthetic masterpiece in which subject and setting form one harmonious visual field. The gossamer fabrics of Frances Leyland's gown, which Whistler himself designed, seem to dissolve into a formless passage of paint at the bottom of the picture. Flouting the rules of one-point perspective, Whistler paints the chequered rug and parquet floor with squares that lie flat against the picture plane, rather than receding into space. As a result, they correspond with the incised basket-weave pattern of the frame, which Whistler also designed. The picture is a perfect synthesis of subject, costume, setting, and frame."

Whistler's fashionable breakfasts were an early example of performance art. He colour co-ordinated the furnishings, the room, his own clothes, the menu and the food and he expected his guests to do the same. For Whistler inharmonious combinations were physically painful.



George Frederic Watts (1817-1904)
Julia Margaret Cameron (née Pattle)
c.1850-1852

George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), Julia Margaret Cameron (née Pattle), c.1850-1852

Julia Margaret Cameron came to photography unusually late, receiving her first camera as a gift in 1863 at the age of 48. Her entire significant body of work emerged across just eleven years, before she returned to Ceylon in 1875 and her output largely ceased. Cameron's artistic ambitions were explicit. She wrote that she longed "to arrest all the beauty that came before me," and she located that ambition within a specific technical tradition. **David Wilkie Wynfield** taught her the soft-focus approach she would make her own — the so-called fancy portrait, an imaginary rendering of real or invented figures — and she credited him directly: "to my feeling about his beautiful photography I owed all my attempts and indeed consequently all my success." Her family background shaped the terms in which she understood beauty. Born into Anglo-French aristocratic circles and considered the plain one among celebrated sisters, her great-niece **Virginia Woolf** summarised the dynamic bluntly in her 1926 introduction to the **Hogarth Press** collection: where one sister was Beauty and another

Dash, Cameron was Talent. The technique underlying her prints was **wet plate collodion**, developed by **Frederick Scott Archer** and published in 1851, which required coating glass with cellulose nitrate solution, sensitising it in silver nitrate, and exposing it before the plate dried.

Notes

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)

Took up photography aged 48 (1863) when she was given a camera as a present. Nearly all of her surviving work is from the 11 year period 1864-1875. In 1875 she returned to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1875 and almost none of her work from that period survives.

She strove to capture beauty. She wrote, "I longed to arrest all the beauty that came before me and at length the longing has been satisfied."

"Annie, my first success", 29 January 1864. Cameron's first print with which she was satisfied

The basic techniques of soft-focus "fancy portraits" (imaginary portrait of a real or imaginary character), which she later developed, were taught to her by David Wilkie Wynfield. She later wrote,

"to my feeling about his beautiful photography I owed all my attempts and indeed consequently all my success".

Born in India to an officer of the British East India Company and Adeline de l'Etang daughter of Chevalier Antoine d l'Etang probable lover of Marie Antoinette.

From a family of celebrated beauties and was considered an ugly duckling.

Her great-niece Virginia Woolf wrote in the 1926 introduction to the Hogarth Press collection of Cameron's photographs, "In the trio [of sisters] where...[one] was Beauty; and [one] Dash; Mrs. Cameron was undoubtedly Talent".

Cameron stated her photographic mission thus: "My aspirations are to ennoble Photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the real and Ideal and sacrificing nothing of the Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry and beauty."

Wet Plate Collodion

In the March 1851 issue of *The Chemist*, Frederick Scott Archer published his wet plate collodion process. The collodion (cellulose nitrate dissolved in ether and ethanol) was an alternative to egg white and decreased exposure times. It became the most widely used photographic medium until the gelatin dry plate, introduced in the 1870s, eventually replaced it. There are three subsets to the collodion process; the Ambrotype (a positive image on glass), the Ferrotypes or Tintypes (a positive image on metal) and the glass negative, which was used to make positive prints on albumen or salted paper.

The process is:

Clean the glass extremely well

In the light pour salted (iodide or bromine) collodion onto the glass, tilt and pour unused back into the bottle.

In the dark (or orange light) immerse in silver nitrate for 3-5 minutes.

Lift, drain and protect in light proof slide holder

Expose for less than a second up to several minutes.

Develop using ferrous sulphate and fix using potassium cyanide or sodium thiosulphate.

Dry and varnish.



Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)
**Charles Somers Somers-Cocks, 3rd
Earl Somers**
c. 1860
Photography

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879), Charles Somers Somers-Cocks,
3rd Earl Somers, c. 1860

Turning now from painting to photography, we meet **Julia Margaret Cameron**, one of the most influential photographers of the nineteenth century. Born in Calcutta, where her father served with the **East India Company**, she did not take up photography until she was 48 — a remarkable late beginning that produced an extraordinary body of work. Her husband Charles Hay was a well-connected jurist and member of the Law Commission, and his retirement brought the family back to London's cultural centre. Cameron's sister **Sarah Prinsep** had married the artist John Prinsep in 1835, and their home at **Little Holland House in Kensington** became a gathering point for the leading artistic and intellectual figures of the day. Those society connections gave Cameron direct access to the most celebrated minds of Victorian Britain, and she photographed them with striking intimacy and psychological depth. This self-portrait shows her command of light and composition, qualities that the art historian **Helmut Gernsheim** identified as setting her apart from the commercial portrait studios of

her era. The sitter here, **Charles Somers Somers-Cocks**, was Cameron's brother-in-law, who sat in the House of Lords after succeeding his father as **3rd Earl Somers** and had married Virginia Pattle in 1850.

Notes

Switching to photography, this self-portrait is by someone who has become one of the most influential of nineteenth century photographers Julia Margaret Cameron.

She was born in Calcutta as her father was an official with the East India Company and did not take up photography until she was 48.

She married an older and well connected man (Charles Hay, jurist, member of the Law Commission) who retired from India back to London

Her sister Sarah Prinsep had married the artist John Prinsep in 1835. They lived in Little Holland House, Kensington and famous artists regularly visited. Her society connections enabled her to take photographs of most of the artistic and intellectual members of society.

More in a later class on Photography.

See <http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/j/julia-margaret-cameron/>

Charles Somers Somers-Cocks

Brother-in-law of Julia Margaret Cameron.

Charles Somers Somers-Cocks, 3rd Earl Somers (1819-1883) was an MP until he succeeded his father when he entered the House of Lords.

In 1850 he married Virginia Pattle.



Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)
Julia Jackson her niece
1867

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879), *Julia Jackson her niece*, 1867

Here the family connections at the heart of Cameron's circle come sharply into focus. **Julia Jackson** was Cameron's niece and one of her most photographed subjects, appearing in over twenty portraits taken around 1867, shortly before Jackson's marriage to Herbert Duckworth. Cameron's images of Jackson are distinctive within her body of work: rather than casting her as muse or saint, they present her as a near-abstract embodiment of beauty and grace, the figure dissolving into light and shadow until she becomes something closer to a psychological state than a social portrait. Jackson's biography itself reads like a Victorian novel. Born in Calcutta in 1846, she grew up visiting her aunt **Sarah Prinsep's** salon at **Little Holland House**, where **George Frederic Watts**, **Edward Burne-Jones**, and **William Holman Hunt** all painted her. Widowed young, she later married the critic and editor **Sir Leslie Stephen**, and their children included the painter **Vanessa Bell** and the writer **Virginia Woolf**. In *To the Lighthouse*, published in 1927, Woolf transformed her mother into Mrs. Ramsay, a woman perpetually suspended in thought, carrying, as Woolf wrote,

the torch of her beauty erect into any room she entered.

Notes

Julia Margaret Cameron was the great aunt of Virginia Woolf (born Adeline Virginia Stephen)

Virginia Woolf's mother was Julia Prinsep Duckworth Stephen (née Jackson, 1846–1895) a renowned beauty who modelled for Edward Burne-Jones in 1866.

Cameron registered all her photographs with the copyright office and kept detailed records, which is why so many survive.

Julia Prinsep Stephen [née Jackson], (1846–1895), celebrated beauty and philanthropist, the second wife of Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), was born on 7 February 1846, in Calcutta, India, the youngest of the three daughters of John Jackson MD (1804–1887) and his wife, Maria (1818–1892), one of the seven famously good-looking Pattle sisters. As a frequent visitor to Little Holland House she was greatly admired: she met Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), George Frederic Watts (1817–1904), and William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), all of whom drew and painted her. In 1864 both Holman Hunt and the sculptor Thomas Woolner proposed to her. (Her mother claimed that every man who met her in a railway carriage fell in love with her.)

Met Museum Description

This ethereal image is of an almost bodiless entity, as we might imagine a portrait of the soul or of a psychic state laid bare. The subject is Cameron's namesake and niece, Julia Jackson, at the age of twenty-one and shortly before her marriage to Herbert Duckworth. The more than twenty portraits of Julia are exceptional in the artist's oeuvre, for they do not portray her as a muse, sybil, or saint, but rather as generalized embodiments of unspecified ideals of purity, beauty, and grace.

Three years later, she was a widow and the mother of three children. Her second marriage, in 1878, to the great Victorian intellectual Sir Leslie Stephen, produced the painter Vanessa Bell and the writer Virginia Woolf. In her novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Woolf portrayed her mother as the searching, sensitive Mrs. Ramsay, ever suspended in thought. She "bore about with her, she could not help knowing it, the torch of her beauty; she carried it erect into any room that she entered."

Wikipedia

In 1838, Julia Margaret Pattle married Charles Hay Cameron, a jurist and member of the Law Commission stationed in Calcutta, who was twenty years her senior. In 1848, Charles Hay Cameron retired, and the family moved to London, England. Cameron's sister, Sarah Prinsep, had been living in London and hosted a salon at Little Holland House, the dower house of Holland House in Kensington, where famous artists and writers regularly visited. In 1860, Cameron visited the estate of poet Alfred Lord Tennyson on the Isle of Wight. Julia was taken with the location, and the Cameron family purchased a property on the island soon after. They called it Dimbola Lodge after the family's Ceylon estate.

George Charles Beresford
Virginia Woolf
1902



George Charles Beresford, Virginia Woolf, 1902

Weaving from the wider circle of **Little Holland House**, we turn to one of its most compelling figures. **Julia Prinsep Jackson Stephen**, born in 1846, was the niece and goddaughter of **Julia Margaret Cameron**, and like her aunt by marriage, a central presence in that Kensington artistic world. Named after two of her mother's favourite sisters, Julia and Sarah Prinsep, she grew up surrounded by the celebrated **Pattle sisters**, whose social magnetism drew **Thackeray**, **Tennyson**, Browning, and Meredith to the house regularly. **G. F. Watts** lived there outright, and **Burne-Jones** was brought to convalesce, deepening his connection to the circle. Julia Stephen herself was recognised as one of the great beauties of her generation and sat for Watts, Burne-Jones, and Cameron. Her first marriage was to Herbert Duckworth; her second, to the historian **Leslie Stephen**, produced two daughters who would reshape twentieth-century culture: **Virginia Woolf** and **Vanessa Bell**. Julia died of influenza in 1895, when Virginia was thirteen, and the loss triggered the first of Virginia's several serious mental collapses. Her absence cast a long shadow across both daughters' lives and work.

Notes

Julia Margaret Cameron was the great-aunt of Virginia Woolf, not her aunt.

Another important person in art circles was Julia Prinsep Jackson Stephen (née Jackson, formerly Mrs Duckworth) (1846-1895), beauty, wit and philanthropist; former wife of Herbert Duckworth, and later wife of Sir Leslie Stephen; mother of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. She was the niece and goddaughter of Julia Margaret Cameron and, like her, a member of the artistic circle which gathered at Little Holland House. She was a renowned beauty and a favourite of the Pre-Raphaelites and sat for Burne-Jones, as well as G. F. Watts and her godmother. From her second marriage to the historian, Leslie Stephen, she was the mother of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. She died from influenza, when Virginia was 13, which led to the first of Virginia's several nervous breakdowns.

Julia Prinsep Jackson Stephen was named after her mother's two favourite sisters, Julia and Sarah (sometimes Sara) Prinsep. Her mother was often at the home of the Prinseps, Little Holland House in Kensington where Thackeray, Tennyson, Browning and Meredith were frequent visitors and G. F. Watts lived in the house. Burne-Jones was taken to the house when he was ill and other Pre-Raphaelites, such as Holman Hunt were frequent visitors. Sarah was mother of the artist Valentine C. Prinsep, R.A. (1838-1904).

Julia, Maria and Sarah were known as the celebrated 'Pattle sisters'.

John Thomson (1837-1921) and
Adolphe Smith
The Temperance Sweep
1877
Photography
LSE Digital Library, London



John Thomson (1837-1921) and Adolphe Smith, *The Temperance Sweep*, 1877, LSE Digital Library, London

Before oil paint and canvas, portraiture was a privilege reserved for those with wealth or social standing — photography dismantled that hierarchy. **John Day** was born in Lambeth, the son of a road-mender, and was pushed out of his home before he was eleven years old. His father drank away the boy's meagre earnings and decided he could no longer afford to keep him. Day slept under railway arches, washed his one shirt in the canal, and took whatever work came his way — flour-milling, chimney-sweeping — rarely earning more than **three shillings a week**. No painter would have sought him out as a subject. No patron would have commissioned his likeness. By **1877**, Day had transformed his circumstances entirely. Living near **Lambeth Walk**, he ran his own sweep's business, subscribed to benefit societies, and was known throughout the neighbourhood as the **temperance sweep** — a vocal advocate against the very drinking culture that had cost him his childhood home. Photography gave us this portrait. Without it, Day's face, his story, his survival would have left no visual trace. The medium

proved that the question of who deserves to be recorded was always a question of power, not of merit.

Notes

Photography enabled portraits to be produced of people who were previously unrecorded.

This is John Day, turned out of his home aged 10, slept rough, obtained some work. In 1877 was a happy father of a large family in Lambeth Walk. A master sweep who is prosperous and respected.

Key point: Photography allowed people to be recorded that previously could not afford a portrait and who no one thought it worthwhile to record.

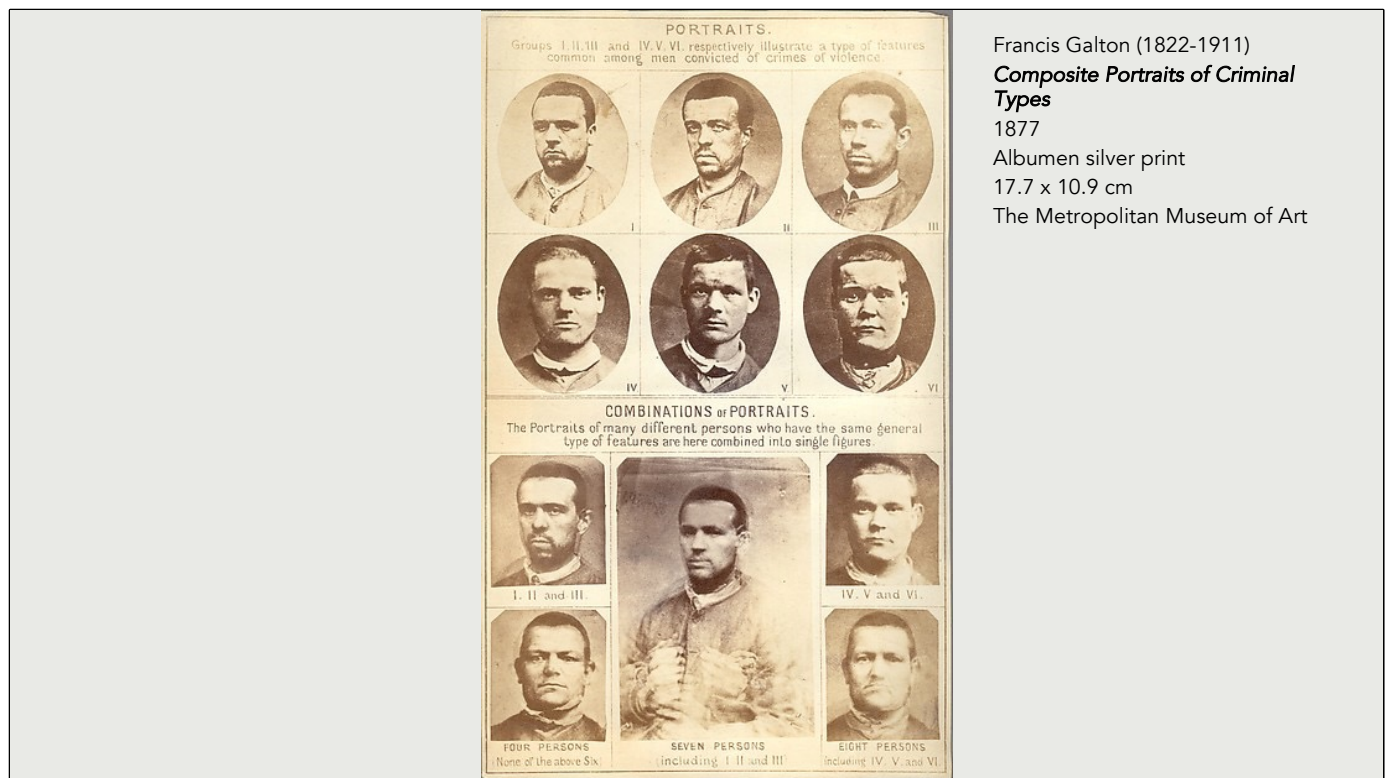
LSE Digital Library:

Born in Lambeth, the son of a road-mender, John Day was sent out to work when scarcely more than ten years old. His father was decidedly addicted to drink, and was in the habit of taking his son on Sunday to public-houses, where drink was sold in defiance of the Licensing Act. So long as the child had a few halfpence for beer, he was in the parental eyes a good boy; but when his meagre earnings had been thus uselessly spent, his father came to the conclusion that he could not afford to keep him, and that it was high time the boy should fight his own way in the world. He was therefore turned out of his home, and had to resort to the friendly, if cheerless shelter of railway arches; or at times he would sleep on a barge, and profited by the opportunity to wash his solitary shirt in the canal, and hang it up on the rigging of his temporary home, while he disported himself amidst the tarpaulin till it dried. At time when there was nothing to be done at the flour-mill, he obtained a little work as assistant to a neighbouring chimney-sweep; but in either employ he rarely made more than 3s per week.

[...]

He is now the happy father of a large family, he lives in a house near Lambeth Walk, where he once humbly worked in the capacity of a mere assistant. As a master sweep he has an extensive connexion. The money he earns enables him to subscribe to several benefit societies, and he is entitled to receive from them 10s. a week in sickness, while his wife will have £46 given her at his death, or he will receive £18 should she die first. Altogether he is both

prosperous and respected throughout the neighbourhood, where he ardently advocates the cause of total abstinence, and is well known as the temperance sweep.



Francis Galton (1822-1911)
Composite Portraits of Criminal Types
 1877
 Albumen silver print
 17.7 x 10.9 cm
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Francis Galton (1822-1911), *Composite Portraits of Criminal Types*, 1877, 17.7 x 10.9 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Building on photography's power to document the human face, we arrive at one of art history's most troubling intersections with science. **Physiognomy**, the belief that facial appearance reveals inner character, was debated by ancient Greek philosophers, dismissed by **Leonardo da Vinci** as having no scientific foundation, and outlawed in Tudor England alongside palmistry. **Johann Kaspar Lavater**, writing across the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, gave it renewed intellectual credibility, and its influence spread into literature — **Charles Dickens**, **Thomas Hardy**, and **Charlotte Brontë** all used detailed physiognomic description to signal personality to their readers. Around 1800, **Franz Gall** and **Johann Spurzheim** extended these ideas into **phrenology**, mapping personality traits onto specific regions of the skull. Later, the criminologist **Cesare Lombroso** argued that criminal tendencies were innate and physically identifiable. It was **Francis Galton** who brought photography directly into this debate. Through **composite photography**, he layered multiple portraits into single

images, claiming to extract the defining features of health, beauty, and criminality. The image on screen shows his composite of convicted thieves set against honest army officers — a striking illustration of how photographic authority was weaponised to make deeply suspect ideas appear scientifically rigorous.

Notes

While we are talking of photography I must introduce a subject with a long history in art and that is the belief that a person's character can be determined from their faces by the shape of their head.

Physiognomy is the belief that a person's character can be determined from his or her facial appearance. It was accepted by ancient Greek philosophers but fell out of favour during the middle ages and was revived by Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801) in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

It was outlawed in the Tudor period along with palm reading and was dismissed by Leonardo da Vinci as having 'no scientific foundation'.

Detailed physiognomic descriptions were provided in the works of Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy and Charlotte Brontë in order to conjure up a picture of a particular personality type.

Around 1800 Franz Gall and Johann Spurzheim developed a theory of phrenology that associated particular areas of the skull with particular personality traits.

In the late nineteenth century Sir Francis Galton developed a technique for taking photographs of different people and then combining them into a single picture. This was called composite photography and he used it to define the characteristics of health, disease, beauty and criminality. Galton was an English Victorian statistician, sociologist, psychologist, anthropologist, eugenicist, tropical explorer, geographer, inventor, meteorologist and proto-geneticist. He devised a method for classifying fingerprints, conducted research on the power of prayer (concluding it had no effect), invented the term eugenics, devised the first weather map and proposed a theory of anticyclones.

One of the first criminologists was Cesare Lombroso who argued that some people are born with criminal tendencies and these could be identified by physical (congenital) defects.

In the photograph above Galton has combined photographs to show us what

he thinks are typical criminal faces of those who commit larceny compared with the composite faces of honest army officers.

Walter Sickert (1860-1942)
*The Acting Manager or Rehearsal:
The End of the Act*
c. 1885



Walter Sickert (1860-1942), *The Acting Manager or Rehearsal: The End of the Act*, c. 1885

Walter Sickert painted this portrait of **Helen Couper-Black** — later Helen Carte — when she was twenty-four, and the result is a study in theatrical chiaroscuro that would have satisfied **Rembrandt**. The figure leans back with an ambiguity that hovers between repose and exhaustion, entirely fitting for a woman who would go on to run both the **D'Oyly Carte Opera Company** and the **Savoy Hotel** with formidable precision. In his 1922 memoir, **Henry Lytton** recalled that her legal adviser, shown one of her letters, declared it must have been written by a solicitor — he refused to believe any woman could draft a document so rigorously qualified. Helen had studied mathematics, logic and philosophy at the **University of London** from 1871, completing her course just before the university began awarding degrees to women. Sickert's fascination with theatre was lifelong. Born in Munich, brought to England to avoid German conscription, he briefly pursued acting under the name Mr Nemo before training under **Whistler**, who sent him to Paris to meet **Degas** — another committed

painter of theatrical life. That encounter shaped everything. The deep shadows and raking light in this portrait carry Degas's influence into a distinctly London interior.

Notes

Helen Couper-Black (later Carte) was an outstanding business woman here depicted by Walter Sickert aged 24

Sickert adored the theatre and loved to paint inside

A powerful piece of chiaroscuro that would have pleased Rembrandt.

Is she collapsed in exhaustion after a rehearsal?

Helen Carte (1852-1913) was the second wife of impresario and hotelier Richard D'Oyly Carte. She ran the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company and the Savoy Hotel from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th. She attended the University of London from 1871-74 and studied mathematics, logic and philosophy but she completed her course a few years before the University of London awarded degrees to women. She became a business manager for Richard Carte and married him in 1888. In his 1922 memoir Henry Lytton wrote:

She was a born business woman with an outstanding gift for organisation. No financial statement was too intricate for her, and no contract too abstruse. Once, when I had to put one of her letters to me before my legal adviser... he declared firmly 'this letter must have been written by a solicitor.' He would not admit that any woman could draw up a document so cleverly guarded with qualifications.

Walter Sickert

Pupil of Whistler and friend of Roger Fry (1866-1934, artist, art critic and member of the Bloomsbury Group), he was married three times, a rumbustious and charismatic man. A quintessentially English artist who travelled abroad to the English enclave of Dieppe and the English tourist location of Venice. However, he was born in Munich to a Dutch father and an English mother who was the illegitimate daughter of the English astronomer Richard Sheepshanks. Walter was brought to England to avoid German conscription, failed to get a job at the British Museum, and decided to

become an actor using the pseudonym Mr Nemo. He enrolled at the Slade but left to become Whistler's assistant. Whistler sent him to Paris where he met Degas, another great painter of the theatre.

He took copper plates and an engraving needle around with him. He was very successful in his business dealings and was well paid.



Unidentified photographer
*John Singer Sargent in his
studio in Paris*
1885

Unidentified photographer, John Singer Sargent in his studio in Paris, 1885

From Lawrence at the century's opening, we turn to the painter who defined its close: **John Singer Sargent**. Born in **Florence in 1856** to American expatriate parents, Sargent never attended school in any conventional sense, yet grew into a figure of remarkable cosmopolitan range, fluent in English, French, Italian, and German, and deeply accomplished in music and literature alongside painting. His biographer **Stanley Olsen**, writing in 1986, described the young Sargent as wilful, curious, and determined after his mother, yet shy, generous, and modest after his father — a tension that animated his entire career. His itinerant childhood across Paris, Florence, Germany, and Switzerland gave him an outsider's acute eye for social performance, precisely the quality that made him devastating as a portrait painter. A contemporary quip nailed his paradoxical identity: an American born in Italy, educated in France, who looks like a German, speaks like an Englishman, and paints like a **Spaniard** — that last point a direct reference to his veneration of **Velázquez**. As Sir

Thomas Lawrence had commanded the portrait world at the century's opening, Sargent commanded it at the close. On the easel before us is the painting that made — and nearly destroyed — his reputation.

Notes

We finally arrive at the other great portrait artist of the nineteenth century. This is John Singer Sargent, the leading society portrait painter at the end of the nineteenth century as Sir Thomas Lawrence had been at the beginning. He travelled extensively as a child-Paris, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and had no formal education but was highly literate. He was described as 'an American born in Italy, educated in France, who looks like a German, speaks like an Englishman and paints like a Spaniard.' The last point refers to his veneration for Velazquez.

On the easel is his most famous and notorious painting.

Key point: Sargent was considered the leading portrait painter of his generation and one of the greatest portrait artist of the nineteenth century.

John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)

Sargent was considered the leading portrait painter of his generation and one of the greatest portrait artist of the nineteenth century.

His father was an eye surgeon but after his older sister dies at the age of two his mother suffered a breakdown and they spent the rest of their lives travelling. They were based in Paris but travelled to Germany, Italy and Switzerland. They stopped in Florence, where Sargent was born in 1856. His parents lived modestly on a small inheritance and avoided society. Although he had no formal education he grew up to be a highly literate and cosmopolitan young man, accomplished in art, music, and literature. He was fluent in English, French, Italian, and German. At seventeen, Sargent was described by Stanley Olsen in his book *John Singer Sargent: His Portrait*, 1986 as 'wilful, curious, determined and strong' (after his mother) yet 'shy, generous, and modest' (after his father).

John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)

Study of Mme Gautreau

c.1884

206.4 x 107.9 cm

Tate, London



John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), *Study of Mme Gautreau*, c.1884, 206.4 x 107.9 cm, Tate, London

Sargent's pursuit of **Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau** was anything but passive — he lobbied a mutual friend to arrange the sitting, describing himself as "a man of prodigious talent" with a desire to paint her. Born in Louisiana, she had moved to France at the age of eight and married **Pierre Gautreau**, a French banker and shipping magnate, before becoming one of Paris's most conspicuous figures: pale-skinned, dark-haired, with an hourglass figure she accentuated using lavender powder and henna. The two collaborated deliberately to cause a stir at the **Paris Salon of 1884**, and the result, **Madame X**, delivered scandal rather than triumph. The original canvas showed one shoulder strap sliding down, provoking outrage over what critics called a flagrant insufficiency of clothing. The portrait destroyed any prospect of Sargent establishing himself as a society painter in France, though it later secured his reputation in England and America. Scholars including **Deborah Davis** have since questioned the mythology surrounding Gautreau herself, arguing that claims of glamorous affairs and universal

admiration were largely fabricated after the fact, and that she was rarely mentioned in society pages before the controversy. Sargent, for his part, was unambiguous: when he sold the work to the **Metropolitan Museum of Art**, he declared it the best thing he had ever done.

Notes

The intention was to create a positive sensation in Paris but the picture went too far and shocked and scandalised the public. However, Sargent later wrote: 'I suppose it is the best thing I have ever done'.

There are mixed views of Madame Pierre Gautreau from 'stopped traffic in the street' to poorly educated and boorish.

Key point: a controversial portrait that scandalized society showing how little it takes to shock

Madame X

Sargent and Madame Pierre Gautreau (1859-1915) collaborated on this portrait in order to create a sensation at the Paris Salon of 1884. She did not commission it but Sargent pursued her unlike most of his clients. Sargent wrote to a mutual friend:

I have a great desire to paint her portrait and have reason to think she would allow it and is waiting for someone to propose this homage to her beauty. ...you might tell her that I am a man of prodigious talent.

She moved to France when she was eight and was later introduced to French high society. She became one of Paris's conspicuous beauties, as she was a pale-skinned brunette with fine features and an hourglass figure. She used lavender-coloured face and body powder to enhance her complexion, to dye her hair with henna, and to color her eyebrows.

The original portrait had one shoulder strap hanging down and people were shocked and scandalized. It was described as a 'flagrant insufficiency' of clothing. Although the painting failed to establish as a society artist in France it achieved its objective in England and America. When he sold it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art Sargent wrote to the director, 'I suppose it is the

best thing I have ever done'.

Most writers believe she attracted much admiration due to her elegance and style and she married Pierre Gautreau, a French banker and shipping magnate and she was rumoured to have had numerous affairs. Her beauty is described as 'having stopped traffic in the street'. However, some research indicates all this was the creation of later writers and she was rarely mentioned in society pages until the scandal of the public portrait and no affairs are known to have taken place. She has been described as poorly educated, boorish, vapid and naïve and she fell into obscurity after the scandal.

Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830)
Portrait of Elizabeth Farren



Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), *Portrait of Elizabeth Farren*

Victorian portrait painting served a remarkable range of purposes, from political propaganda to intimate personal records. **Thomas Lawrence** dramatised the powerful and celebrated through lively brushwork and theatrical lighting, while **George Hayter** conveyed state pomp with a directness that edged into propaganda. **William Charles Ross** satisfied a wealthy clientele's appetite for portrait miniatures — an intimate tradition photography would soon displace. **Edwin Landseer** brought groups together in so-called conversation pieces, images designed to prompt social reflection as much as record likeness. **George Frederic Watts** pursued a grander ambition with his Hall of Fame, systematically documenting the famous and notorious for posterity. **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** pushed portraiture furthest from convention, using a likeness as the vehicle for narrative and emotional atmosphere. **John Thomson** crossed into documentary territory, turning photographic portraiture toward working-class subjects in *The Streets of London*. **Walter Sickert** honoured everyday life — music-hall performers, impresarios, ordinary figures — by treating it with the

same seriousness previously reserved for the elite. Yet Byron's sardonic lines from **Don Juan** hang over all of it: to have, when the original is dust, a name, a wretched picture and worse bust.

Notes

What is a Portrait Painting?

Lawrence: dramatizing the great and the good. Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), Portrait of Elizabeth Farren, painted portraits of inspiring leaders and beautiful women using lively brush strokes and dramatic lighting.

Ross: providing an intimate record (replaced by photography). William Charles Ross (1794-1860) there was a fashion among the wealthy for portrait miniature.

Hayter: conveying pomp and majesty. George Hayter (1792-1871) produced what could be seen as propaganda.

Landseer: 'conversation pieces'. Edwin Landseer (1802-1873) produced groups in conversation that acted as conversation pieces

Watts: recording the famous and infamous for posterity. George Frederic Watts (1817-1904) produced his 'Hall of Fame' recording the great and the good for posterity.

Rossetti: evoking a feeling and telling a story. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) used a 'portrait' to tell a story and invoke a feeling.

Thomson: capturing an image of a previously unknown class. John Thomson (1837-1921) captured photographic images and recorded life stories in The Streets of London.

Sickert: celebrated everyday life. Walter Sickert (1860-1942) captured the feeling of everyday lives, such as that of music hall performers and impresarios, and so honoured it.

A portrait is a record of a person or a group for posterity but this reminds us of Byron's cynical comment on the end of fame,

To have, when the original is dust,

A name, a wretched picture and worse bust

Don Juan, Canto I, 218

John Everett Millais (1829-1896)
The Order of Release, 1746
1852-3
Tate Gallery



John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *The Order of Release, 1746*, 1852-3, Tate Gallery

These three questions open up fascinating territory around the works and figures we've been examining. **Effie Gray**, whose grey eyes and auburn hair fascinated contemporaries, was painted by **John Everett Millais** in ***The Order of Release, 1746***, exhibited in 1853. Millais deliberately changed her hair to black, as he explained in an 1852 letter, to contrast it with the child's colouring — a small but telling artistic decision that sits alongside the painting's broader significance as a turning point away from the densely detailed manner of his early **Pre-Raphaelite** work. On portraiture, both **Landseer** and **Winterhalter** exercised real authority over pose and presentation when working with **Queen Victoria**. Victoria selected the portrait type — equestrian or otherwise — but Winterhalter in particular advised royal sitters on wardrobe and arranged them to best compositional advantage. The question of **John Ruskin's** character is the most charged. He fell in love with **Rose La Touche** when she was nine, but waited until she was eighteen to approach her as a suitor, then waited again until she was

twenty-one at her request, only to be rejected. His biographer **Tim Hilton** calls Ruskin a paedophile directly; other biographers contest this. No evidence exists that Ruskin was sexually active with anyone.

Notes

Interesting Questions

Effie Gray's hair was golden auburn, her eyes grey and she "had a devastating effect on men of all ages". The Order of Release, 1746 is a painting by John Everett Millais exhibited in 1853. It is notable for marking the beginnings of Millais's move away from the highly detailed Pre-Raphaelitism of his early years. Millais changed her hair to black in order to contrast it with the child's hair (from a letter by Millais, 1852). Quote from *Effie: A Victorian Scandal* by Merryn Williams.

Who posed the Landseer and Winterhalter portraits of Queen Victoria? Queen Victoria commissioned the type of portrait, for example, an equestrian portrait, but both artists largely determined the pose. It is known that Winterhalter advised his royal sitters on their wardrobe and posed them to best advantage.

John Ruskin's paedophilia is disputed. He fell in love with Rose La Touche when she was nine but did not approach her as a suitor until she was 18 and she asked him to wait until she was 21, which he did. She then rejected him. He certainly liked very young girls and one of his biographers Tim Hilton states without explanation that Ruskin "was a paedophile". Other biographers argue he did not fit the profile. There is no evidence that he ever had sexual relations with anyone, including his wife.



James Abbott McNeill Whistler
(1834-1903)
Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl
1861-2
National Gallery of Art, Washington

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, 1861-2, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Moving from the portrait of Fanny Cornforth, where beauty itself was the subject, we turn to another full-length figure study that provoked fierce debate. **James McNeill Whistler** painted ***Symphony in White, No. 1*** in 1861 in his Paris studio on the Boulevard des Batignolles. His model was **Joanna Hiffernan**, an Irish artist's model and his companion for six years from 1860. She was celebrated as intelligent and sympathetic as well as striking in appearance, and the two were deeply entwined personally and professionally — she later helped raise Whistler's son after they separated. Originally called ***The White Girl***, Whistler renamed it to stress his commitment to art for art's sake. He described it to George du Maurier simply as a gorgeous mass of brilliant white, barring the red hair — a purely formal account of light and tone. The **Salon des Refusés of 1863**, where **Napoleon III** displayed works rejected by the official Salon jury, brought it before more than a thousand visitors a day. Critics linked it variously to Wilkie Collins, to lost innocence, even to the **Pre-Raphaelites**. Whistler

rejected all such readings. For him, the painting was an arrangement of colour. Whether we accept that or read deeper symbolic meaning into the wolf-skin rug beneath her feet is a choice every viewer makes.

Notes

Additional Portraits

This is one of his earliest paintings in the new style with a title linking it to the abstract nature of music

It was first shown at the Salon des Refusés in 1863 and critics had many interpretations of the meaning.

Key point: what is the painting about, Whistler would say it is just an arrangement of colours

Whistler's The White Girl – Joanna Hiffernan

We have seen the portrait of Fanny Cornforth that was intended as a comment on beauty not as a portrait. This full-length painting is a portrait of Joanna Hiffernan (c. 1843-after 1903) and Irish artists' model and muse romantically linked to Whistler and the French painter Gustave Courbet (1819-1877). Whistler had a six year relationship with her starting in 1860. She was described as not only beautiful but intelligent and sympathetic and was Whistler's constant companion. When they broke up, possibly because of her affair with Courbet when Whistler was away in South America, she helped to raise Whistler's son, the result of an affair with parlour maid Louisa Fanny Hanson. In 1861 she sat for this picture in a studio (Boulevard des Batignolles) in Paris.

This painting was originally called The White Girl but he later started to refer to it as Symphony in White, No. 1 to emphasise his commitment to his 'art for art's sake' philosophy. It was rejected by the Royal Academy and the Salon in Paris but accepted at the Salon des Refusés in 1863. The Salon des Refusés was held as a result of the Salon jury refusing two-thirds of the paintings submitted including paintings by Courbet, Édouard Manet and Camille Pissarro. Emperor Napoleon III heard of the artists' complaints and, sensitive to public opinion, he decided to display the rejected works to allow the

public to decide. This painting and Édouard Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* are the two most famous works on display. More than a thousand visitors a day crowded in critics had mostly favourable views of this painting. One thought it showed a new bride's lost innocence, others linked it to Wilkie Collins's novel, *The Woman in White*, others thought she was a ghost or apparition. French critics linked it to the English Pre-Raphaelite movement and so regarded it as somewhat eccentric.

The woman holds a lily and there are flowers scattered on the floor. Art historians have found the most interesting element is the bear or wolf skin rug she is standing on. Whether it is a bear or a wolf has been debated and the animal's face contains elements of both. It is generally regarded as signifying animal passions which have been controlled by the woman or women. When the painting is hung at the normal height it is the most obvious element of the painting but critics at the time did not comment on it. Perhaps we try to read too much into paintings. Whistler in a letter to George du Maurier described it as '...a woman in a beautiful white cambric dress, standing against a window which filters the light through a transparent white muslin curtain – but the figure receives a strong light from the right and therefore the picture, barring the red hair, is one gorgeous mass of brilliant white.' In other words, like many artists, he described it formally in terms of light and colour. The 'Symphony' title also suggests he intended it to be an abstract assembly of formal elements rather than a symbolic painting with a deep meaning. However, as meaning is brought by the viewer we are entitled to interpret it as we wish.



Samuel Luke Fildes (1843-1927)
*Applicants for Admission to a
Casual Ward*
1874
Royal Holloway College

Samuel Luke Fildes (1843-1927), *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*, 1874, Royal Holloway College

Luke Fildes trained at the South Kensington and Royal Academy schools before becoming both a painter and illustrator, and it was illustration that led directly to his most socially urgent work. Returning from a dinner one evening, he passed a police station and witnessed a crowd of destitute people queuing for overnight permits under the **Houseless Poor Act of 1864**, which allowed the homeless to sleep in casual workhouse wards. He noted the scene, returned repeatedly, befriended the constable on duty, and spoke with the people in the queue. Those encounters became the basis for a drawing published in **The Graphic** newspaper, which Fildes then expanded into the large canvas shown at the **Royal Academy**. What distinguishes the painting is its documentary precision rooted in genuine relationship: Fildes invited several of the people he had met in the queue to his home to sit for him as portrait subjects. These are therefore real individuals rendered with psychological particularity, not generic symbols of poverty — yet their names remain unrecorded. The work sits at the intersection of

Victorian social reform, press illustration, and academic painting, demonstrating how the expanding illustrated press gave artists both a platform and a conscience.

Notes

Luke Fildes

Samuel Luke Fildes was an English painter and illustrator who was born at Liverpool and trained in the South Kensington and Royal Academy schools.

The Houseless Poor Act (1864) permitted homeless people to sleep in the casual wards of workhouses. In this painting, Fildes shows a group of poor people queuing up to receive one of the prized tickets handed out by the police that allowed them to sleep in the workhouse. The original drawing was first published in The Graphic newspaper with information about the Act.

Fildes, wrote:

I had been to a dinner party, I think, and happened to return by a police-station, when I saw an awful crowd of poor wretches applying for permits to lodge in the Casual Ward. I made a note of the scene, and after that often went again, making friends with the policeman and talking with the people themselves. This was my chance, and I at once began to make studies for my Graphic picture. From that I elaborated the large canvas afterwards exhibited at the Academy.

The artist got to know some of the people he met in the line and invited them to his house to sit for him so these are portraits of the poor but we do not know their names.



Daniel Maclise (1806-1870)
Henry VIII's first interview with Anne Boleyn
 1835
 Private collection

Daniel Maclise (1806-1870), *Henry VIII's first interview with Anne Boleyn*, 1835, Private collection

Daniel Maclise rose from clerical work in a Cork bank to become one of the most intellectually forceful history painters of Victorian Britain. After saving enough to travel to London, he won the highest prize available to students at the **Royal Academy**, where he first exhibited in **1829** at just twenty-three. He largely confined himself to subject and history painting, producing portrait sketches of the famous for **Fraser's Magazine** and illustrations for **Charles Dickens**, while also executing monumental canvases such as **The Death of Nelson**. Elected a full Academician in **1840**, Maclise poured enormous physical and mental energy into large-scale works, and that effort visibly cost him his health — he declined the presidency of the Royal Academy in **1865**, unable to take on the burden. The paintings reward serious attention: they are powerfully argued and imaginatively constructed, driven by an Irish sensibility alert to historical drama and literary narrative. Yet critics then and now consistently note the same limitations — a harsh, dull palette, a metallic surface finish, and a theatrical staging that can work against

the emotional conviction the compositions otherwise command.

Notes

Daniel Maclise (1806-1870), Irish history, literary and portrait painter who worked in London. Worked in a bank before leaving to study art in Cork. Saved and travelled to London and was awarded highest prize open to students at RA. First exhibited 1829 (aged 23). Confined himself to subject and history painting with some portraits. RA (1840). Illustrated Dickens. Portraits of the famous for Fraser's magazine. Painted many large history paintings (The Death of Nelson). The effort cost him his health, declined presidency of RA in 1865. His paintings are powerful intellectually and imaginatively but harsh and dull colouring, metallic hard surface finish and often theatrical.



Daniel Maclise (1806-1870)
Henry VIII's first
interview with Anne
Boleyn
1835

23-12 VICTORIAN PORTRAIT PAINTING

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



Victorian portrait painting encompassed far more than recording faces. From Thomas Lawrence's swagger portraits and Hayter's state propaganda, through Winterhalter's flattering royal domesticity and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's charged psychological intensity, to Whistler's tonal abstractions and Sargent's scandalous Madame X, the form constantly reinvented itself. Photography democratised access, while Cameron and Mayall extended portraiture's reach into documentary and commercial territory alike. Together, these works reveal who Victorian Britain chose to see, and how it wished to be seen.



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

