



Art for Art's Sake

- During the 1870s and 80s aestheticism **became a fashion** associated with new forms of interior design, new styles of dress, and exotic objects such as blue and white porcelain and peacock feathers. More narrowly it was associated with a small group of artists focused on beauty as the sole purpose and objective of art. We look at the excitement of the period and the social changes taking place.
- **Art for Art's sake** or the **Aesthetic Movement** or **Aestheticism** and Aesthetes or the **Cult of Beauty**



A short video 'V&A: Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900', presented by Stephen Calloway, Curator.

- The 1851 Great Exhibition brought it home to many people that Britain was poor at design and many of the goods were ugly.
- The Aesthetic Movement was not just about painting it was about creating a complete environment that was tasteful, co-ordinated and cultivated. We still have that aim today.
- It started in the 1860s with Burne-Jones and others. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was the 'pin-up' boy but he did not become a popular playwright until the 1890s. He toured America in 1881 sponsored by Richard D'Oyle Carte as a marketing campaign in preparation for the tour of the Gilbert & Sullivan operetta *Patience*. Wilde's tour lasted a year because of its success. **His aim was to transfer the beauty he saw in art into everyday life.** His aim was to rediscover the art and beauty of the past, classical and Renaissance. Manly beauty was Aestheticism and the dandy returned.
- It was also called the 'Cult of Beauty', which raises the question of what we mean by beauty.



Beauty

- What do we mean by beauty?
- **Beauty** was an important, even a central concern for Victorian artists. What do we mean by beauty? One definition is that beauty is a characteristic of a person, animal, place, object, or idea that provides a perceptual experience of pleasure or satisfaction. We talk, for example, about a beautiful landscape. However, the prime example of beauty was classical beauty represented by the Venus Medici. Later in the century this switched to the Venus Miletos or **Venus de Milo**. There were many artists that attempted to recreate the beauty of the classical world through the use of classical dress.
- During the nineteenth century the **Venus de Milo** was regarded as an example of beauty. But,
 - 'The great fame of the Aphrodite of Milos during the nineteenth century was not simply the result of its admitted beauty, but also owed much to a major propaganda effort by the French authorities. In 1815, France had returned the Medici Venus to the Italians after it had been looted from Italy by Napoleon Bonaparte. The Medici Venus, regarded as one of the finest Classical sculptures in existence, caused the French to promote the Venus de Milo as a greater treasure than that which they recently had lost. The de Milo statue was praised dutifully by many artists and critics as the epitome of graceful female beauty. However, Pierre-Auguste Renoir was among its detractors, labelling it a "big gendarme".' (Wikipedia)

Aestheticism

- The literary roots of aestheticism can be traced back to the term 'aesthetics', defined by Alexander Gottlieb **Baumgarten** in 1735 and to French Romanticism. Its French origins are generally traced to Victor Cousin's 1818 Sorbonne lecture series but the first use of the term "l'art pour l'art" ('art for art's sake') was by Pierre Gautier in 1833.

- **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** introduced the word aesthetic in 1821 but it was still relatively unknown in 1846. **John Ruskin objected** to the term as it implied beauty is in some way sensual. Ruskin regarded beauty as moral not sensual or intellectual and coined the term Theoretic. Ruskin also thought that art must serve a moral purpose.

The Modern Rejection of Beauty

- **‘Art for art’s sake’ was rejected by Marxist art historians in the 1970s as they thought art always had a political role.** They rejected the idealist aesthetics of beauty and art for art’s sake was considered reactionary (i.e. a return to a previous state) in art and political terms. **Ironically, one hundred years previously the terms were considered politically radical as they rejected the need for a moral purpose.**
- The term was associated with **art’s autonomy** and freedom from any ideology. It was believed that art does not need to justify itself by making a moral point or telling a story, its sole aim is the creation of beauty, which itself is determined by the artist.
- James McNeill Whistler wrote,
 - *‘Art should be independent of all claptrap —should stand alone [...] and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism and the like.’* The term aesthetics became widely used in the 1860s and 70s and signalled a new way of looking at art.

Beauty and Fashion

- Also it did not confirm with the then conventional ideas of beauty, see Punch cartoon.

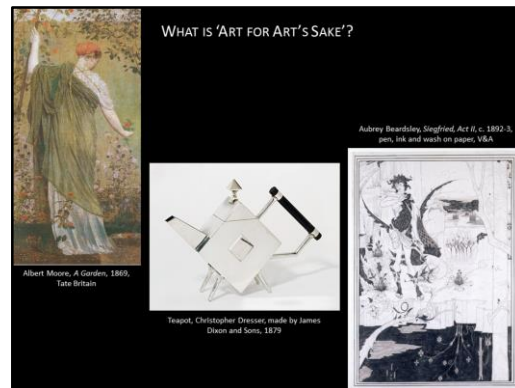
Other Aspects

- Art historians have often argued for simplistic answers such as aestheticism providing a **spiritual substitute** for religion in an age when faith was being questioned or it has been seen as an expression of the **commodity culture** of the late Victorian period (because of its emphasis on the production of objects and the fashionable association of the aesthetic symbols).
- The slogan ‘art for art’s sake’ is associated in the history of English art and letters with Walter Pater and his followers in the Aesthetic Movement, which was self-consciously in **rebellion** against **Victorian moralism**. It first appeared in English in two works published simultaneously in **1868: Pater’s review of William Morris’s poetry** in the *Westminster Review* and in *William Blake* by **Algernon Charles Swinburne**. A modified form of Pater’s review appeared in his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), one of the most influential texts of the Aesthetic Movement.

- A Latin version of 'art for art's sake', '*Ars gratia artis*', is used as a motto by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and appears in the circle around the roaring head of Leo the Lion in its motion picture logo.

The Beauty of Landscapes

- Komar and Melamid (Russian artists) did a survey round the world of the most preferred type of painting which they found was a landscape with water and paths. However, their results are very suspect and the findings, although amusing, do not add a great deal to a understanding of what we mean by beauty.



Albert Moore, *A Garden*, 1869, Tate Britain

Teapot, Christopher Dresser, made by James Dixon and Sons, 1879

Aubrey Beardsley, *Siegfried, Act II*, c. 1892-3, pen, ink and wash on paper, V&A

What is the Aesthetic Movement?

- **The Aesthetic Movement** (also known as 'Art for Art's Sake', or Aestheticism or the Cult of Beauty) was not a group of artists like the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood but more a **shared view** of the **role of art** in society. No longer should artists try to instruct by painting moral lessons but it was their job to produce beautiful things. Their beauty was their sole justification. It was also known as the 'art for art's sake' movement. It became very fashionable during the 1870s and 80s and was satirized by the use of stereotypes such as fey men, masculine women, the love of blue china vases and peacock feathers.
- **It was an important art movement but it is one that few have heard of.** One of its leading proponents, Albert Moore, is hardly known and his work, when seen, is often dismissed as sexist and trite.
- It was a **rejection** of painting as way to convey a **moral message** or any **narrative meaning**. This left the aim of artists as the **creation of beauty**. Artists' aim was to create beautiful objects with no narrative or moral meaning.

Aestheticism and Decorative Art

- Such art is complete in itself (known as **autotelic**) as it does not refer to an external story. For this reason **fine art merges with decorative art** and design (think about decorative art such as wallpaper design to avoid any confusion with utility and functionality).
- In the 1860s it was associated with a collaboration between fine art and design by Whistler and the architect E. W. Godwin (1833-1886) who was influenced by Ruskin and the Gothic, then Japanese art and Whistler. Godwin influenced the Arts and Crafts Movement.

- In the 1870s it was associated with **Whistler, Leighton, Albert Moore and Burne-Jones** and the combination of colour, harmony and mood.
- The opening of the **Grosvenor Gallery in 1877** gave it a glamorous showcase.
- The attack by John Ruskin on Whistler work also gave it publicity.
- Aesthetic painting and decoration became **fashionable** among the wealthy and intellectuals.
- It was associated with 'The House Beautiful' and interior decoration and artists such as **William Morris, Walter Crane, Christopher Dresser** and most famously by **Oscar Wilde**.

Aestheticism and Decadence

- In the 1880s and 90s it was **satirized** by Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *Patience* and by George du Maurier in *Punch*.
- It entered its final **Decadent stage** and the work of **Aubrey Beardsley**.
- Note that **Decadent art** (a word known from the 16th century meaning a decay in standards and morals and applied to the Aesthetic Movement by hostile critics), **Degenerate art** (a term that was related to Darwin's theory of evolution and used by Max Nordau in his 1892 book *Degeneracy*) and **Fin-de-Siecle art** and art of the **Naughty Nineties** are often used interchangeably but can be distinguished. The French expression the *Belle Époque* is from 1871 to 1914 and refers to a 'golden age' of optimism, peace and new scientific discoveries. Within this optimism in England there was a strong feeling that the good times could not last and that society must guard against falling standards. Physical and mental fitness were linked and became part of the cultural reaction.

Notes

Albert Moore (1841-1893)

- In the late 1860s Albert Moore was one of the first artists to paint without a subject. His paintings were decorative and subtly coloured. The poet Algernon Charles **Swinburne** (1837-1909, nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature every year from 1903 to 1907 and 1909) said such paintings are the '**worship of things formally beautiful ... their reason for being is simply to be**'.

Christopher Dresser (1834-1904)

- Known as the 'father of industrial design' as he designed for the mass market. His ceramics and glass are often derived from organic forms but his metal objects are fully abstract. In the catalogue it was described as 'English Japanese'. The surfaces were often left plain and the designs were angular rather than organic. His designs were often considered so ahead of their time they were not put into production.

Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898, died aged 25 of TB)

- This drawing is an illustration relating to Act II of Richard Wagner's opera Siegfried.

It was published in the first issue of the art magazine *The Studio* in April 1893. It is very finely detailed and has echoes of Andrea Mantegna and other Renaissance artists and Edward Burne-Jones. Burne-Jones was an important mentor and hung it in his drawing room alongside prints by Albrecht Dürer.

Historical Background to Art for Art's Sake

- **Théophile Gautier** (1811–1872), who was the **first** to adopt the **phrase as a slogan**. Gautier was not, however, the first to write those words: they appear in the works of **Victor Cousin**, Benjamin Constant, and Edgar Allan Poe.
- It was in defiance of John Ruskin and later socialist realism painters who thought the value of art was to serve a moral or didactic purpose.
- Whistler wrote, *Art should be independent of all claptrap —should stand alone [...] and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism and the like.*
- Distanced from sentimentalism and Romanticism only remains in terms of the sensibility of the painter.
- It first appeared in two works of 1868 - Pater's review of William Morris's poetry in the *Westminster Review* and in *William Blake* by Algernon Charles Swinburne.
- George Sand in 1872 thought *L'art pour l'art* was an empty phrase as the artist had a duty to find a message and convey it to as many people as possible. Sand's real name was Amantine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin, known as 'Aurore', and she married 'Baron' Casimir Dudevant. She was known as a feminist, for her affairs with artists and for wearing men's clothes for their convenience and for the access they gave to men-only establishments.
- Walter Benjamin discusses the slogan in his seminal 1936 essay "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*" and describes it as part of the 'theology of art'. The final realisation of 'art for art's sake' he thinks is the gratification of the sense of perception changed by technology and he uses the link with fascism and Futurism (Filippo Tommaso Marinetti) as an example.



John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Autumn Leaves*, 1856, Manchester Art Gallery

Art for Art's Sake

- Millais described the painting as recreated from his memory of similar evenings and intended to invoke '**the deepest religious reflection**'. The fallen leaves remind us of death and the mood of the painting is one of nostalgia but the precise narrative details take us away from Millais's intention, which he said was to paint '**a picture full of beauty and without subject**'. Millais's scene of the setting sun, a figure with a scythe and the beautiful young girls burning leaves suggests death and renewal; the old must be disposed of and replaced by the new.
- **Autotelic** paintings, i.e. complete in themselves.
- However, works of art

Autumn Leaves

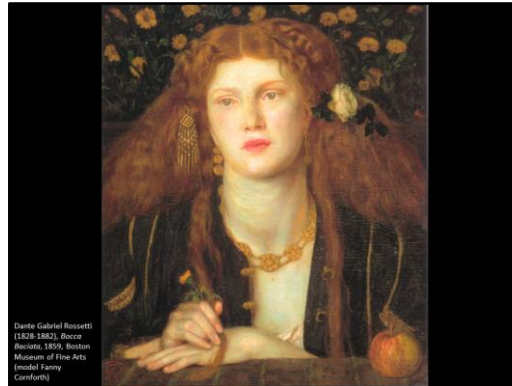
- *Autumn Leaves* was painted when Millais lived in **Perth**, where he moved following his **marriage to Effie Gray** in order to escape the bitterness and gossip surrounding the annulment of her marriage to Ruskin. Despite their personal animosity Ruskin described it as the best representation of twilight he had seen.
- It was painted after *The Blind Girl*.
- Millais believed that '*The only head you could paint to be considered beautiful by everybody would be the face of a little girl about eight years old.*'
- Perhaps to distance himself from the aesthetics of tight observation so closely associated with Ruskin, he experimented with paintings in which specific detail and narrative are suppressed in the interests of a general mood. This painting is generally seen to convey the bittersweet mood of a long-lost childhood when everything seems possible, but death in the form of a faint figure with a scythe is glimpsed in the fading twilight among the dead leaves. The painting had some poor reviews; for example, the *Art Journal* commented that it contained '**a significant vulgarity**,' because '**the principal figure looks out of the picture at the**

spectator', but it was **generally well received** and is said to have **influenced Whistler**.

- The painting is set in the evening and shows four children standing around a pile of smouldering leaves. The sun is below the horizon and is reflected from the clouds, and mist rises from the woods in the background. In the middle ground, there is an indistinct figure holding what looks like a scythe. The other figures are standing on a lawn from which the leaves may have been gathered. A simple feeling of nostalgia is disrupted by the unfamiliar and particular arrangement of the figures, particularly those on the right who are distracted. The overall feeling is one of melancholy but this is contradicted by the inclusion of four girls whom Millais knew, suggesting it could be a **group portrait**. The two girls on the left were modelled on Millais's sisters-in-law **Alice and Sophie Gray** and the two on the right were local **working-class** children called **Matilda Proudfoot** (helpful, quiet, shy, found at a local School of Industry, also the older girl in *The Blind Girl*) and **Isabella Nicol** (old-fashioned and thoughtful, younger girl in *The Blind Girl*, daughter of a local cleaner who worked in exchange for reading lessons for Isabella). The sisters-in-law on their own might suggest the painting was a portrait but the local girls refuse to be involved and they provide a counterpoint that rejects classification. The two central girls stare out at us, as if their work had suddenly been interrupted so that they could interact with us but the girls on the right are tied up in a world of their own. This may be a class distinction, the middle class girls are not afraid to exert their personality, the working class girls on the right look down avoiding confronting the artist. The youngest girl is not involved in the tidying of the leaves and is singled out by the brilliant red of her scarf while she stares distractedly holding a half-eaten apple. The central figure actively offers a handful of dead leaves, dutifully gathered by her companion, to the altar of nature while her acolytes look on distractedly.

References

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autumn_Leaves_\(painting\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autumn_Leaves_(painting))



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

Bocca Baciata

- This painting by Rossetti of 1859 is usually described as the **first** painting of the **Aesthetic Movement** as it is not a portrait, makes no moral point and represents female beauty.
- Rossetti adds a number of symbols, such as the marigolds and the apple, which suggests we need to interpret the painting like a coded message. Conventionally a marigold, in the language of flowers, signified grief, pain, and chagrin, that is, vexation resulting in humiliation or disappointment. In Christian symbolism, an apple represents temptation
- Rossetti broke new ground with *Bocca Baciata* as the painting marked a distinct change in his style, and it does not fall into any established genre. It was generally admired but Holman Hunt described the painting as advocating '**the animal passion** to be the aim of art'.
- Although the interpretation of the painting in aesthetic terms sees it as a simple representation of beauty it is clear that it has multiple social, cultural, political interpretations.
- In terms of the role of women it raises question about,
 - **Femme fatale** – dangerous woman who will seduce and ensnare her lovers. A common figure in the European Middle Ages inherited from the Biblical Eve. The trope became popular during the Romantic period and was used by the Pre-Raphaelites. It became fashionable in the late nineteenth century and was reinvented by Oscar Wilde as Salome who used her 'Dance of the Seven Veils' (invented by Wilde) to demand the head of John the Baptist. It is, of course, a phantasy, the projection of illicit male desires. The term was used in France with this meaning in 1800 or earlier but not in England until the late nineteenth century.

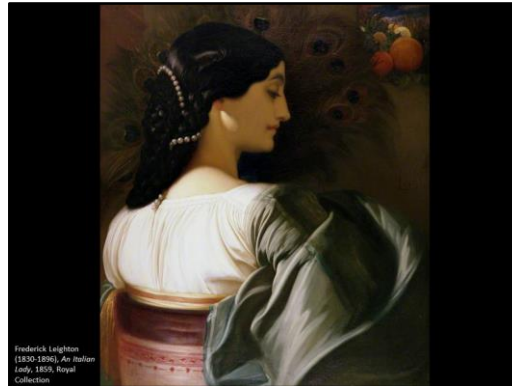
- **Fallen woman** - In a moral sense: That has lost purity or innocence; ruined. a fallen woman : one who has surrendered her chastity (OED). The idea relates back to Eve and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), Lord Byron and William Blake. It is also often linked to Hunt's *the Awakening Conscience*, Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (Peggotty and Emily) and Rossetti's *Found*. The term was used by Josephine Butler when writing about the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864.
 - **'Angel in the House'**, wife and mother and carer. The term is a narrative poem by Coventry Patmore first published in 1854. It only became popular in the late nineteenth century. It idealised his wife Emily whom he believed to be the perfect woman. The roles for a respectable woman were wife and then mother or unmarried carer of her ageing father.
- Rossetti broke most of the conventions associated with female representation in contemporary 'books of beauty' by painting the woman in *Bocca Baciata* with fuller, more voluptuous lips, a less pinched face, unrestrained hair and exotic jewellery, in a more compressed space so we feel physically closer to the head and body, which are pressed close to the picture plane. Also significant were his use of thick oils and sensual Venetian colours.
 - Rossetti had been **commissioned by George Boyce** to paint a portrait of Fanny Cornforth and the heavy, idiosyncratic features reinforce the fact that a particular person was being depicted. Its sensuousness can be judged from Arthur Hughes's comment: 'so awfully lovely. Boyce has bought it, and will I suspect kiss the dear thing's lips away before you can come over to see it.'
 - Rossetti's image has a full face and chin that do not conform to any of the standard types of beauty, and she has a long neck, which, although it was an established attribute of beauty, is so long and wide that it could almost be considered distorted. Rossetti was not painting a conventional 'perfect beauty' but a particular person. However, the title also refers us to a story by Boccaccio suggesting the woman was being used to represent the central character who was described as the most beautiful woman in the world.
 - She does not **meet our eye**, and her pose, though conventional, is made **disturbing** by her expression, which is **vacant** and charged with a slight **sullenness**, like a model who has sat for too long. This suggests volition and agency rather than passivity and so it conflicts with the view of the model as an impassive object. Other aspects of agency and female independence are present in the way Rossetti's has represented his model. For example, compared to women in books of beauty, her nose is not slim and pinched and her forehead is narrow, both signs at the time of a lack of refinement. The shoulders are broad, giving the appearance of **physical strength** rather than of a delicate and over-refined drawing-room beauty. With her flowing red hair, exotic and excessive jewellery and **robust**

features she could be seen as **coarse and sexually experienced**. The conventions at the time would therefore label her as a **fallen woman**.

- Although conventional Christian symbolism equates the apple with temptation the term 'apple' was not mentioned in the Bible and the fruit in the Garden of Eden was from 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. Theologians disagree about whether the term 'knowledge' should be interpreted narrowly or broadly but the Bible goes on to say that Eve decided to eat the fruit to make herself wise. Adam needed no convincing and ate the fruit he was given, which suggests the serpent chose Eve as she was the hardest to convince and her decision could be seen as the first example of female sexual power in the Christian tradition.
- In the Biblical account, God was unaware of Adam and Eve's transgression as he was elsewhere in the garden, but when he found out he constructed a complex curse, which included women, in future, experiencing pain during childbirth and obeying men. The acquisition of knowledge was concerned with the recognition of each other's nakedness and this implies that it became associated with sexual desire, which sexual selection equates with beauty. This loss of innocence was represented as the expulsion from a perfect garden and this has been interpreted in Darwinian terms as the evolutionary moment that humans developed a sense of right and wrong.
- This image is one of those that would have been criticized by Thomas Maitland when he wrote '**The Fleshly School of Poetry**: Mr D. G. Rossetti' in the magazine *Contemporary Review* (October, 1871).

References

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bocca_Baciata



Frederick Leighton (1830-1896), *An Italian Lady*, 1859, Royal Collection

Another artist of the Aesthetic Movement, also painted a beautiful women that is not a portrait. The model is known as Nanna and this painting has an interesting history.

Nanna Risi

- This is a portrait or painting of the Italian model **Nanna (or Anna) Rici**. In 1858 when Leighton met her in Rome she was a well known model and she sat for at least nine artists.
- Leighton painted four pictures of her and the German artist Anselm Feuerbach (1829-1880) painted her dozens of times. As far as we know Leighton was not emotional attached to her which gives the paintings an air of coldness. Leighton's European artistic training gave him a technical proficiency not generally found in English painters. His first painting to be displayed in London was bought by the Queen which established his reputation.
- Leighton met Nanna during the winter of 1858-9 and painted **four pictures** including this one in the Royal Collection. **The Prince of Wales** had stopped at Leighton's studio in Rome and wanted to buy the painting. However, it had already been promised to George de Monbrison but he agreed to give it up to enable the Prince to buy it. Monbrison was so disappointed that Leighton painted a copy which is now in the Leighton Museum in Kensington.
- Nanna was **tall, heavy set** with a temperamental and melancholy disposition. The contrast between her **smouldering looks** and the artists dispassionate interest accounts for the poised, tense atmosphere. When exhibited at the Royal Academy is received favourable reviews. One critic described her as 'coldly beautiful'.
- **Anselm Feuerbach** did love Nanna but she was married to a cobbler in Trastevere. She **left her husband and child** for him in 1861 and during the next five years he painted her at least twenty times. He gave her jewellery and insisted his friends treat her as an equal but the cost strained him financially. In May 1865 she **ran**

away with a **rich Englishman** but soon returned. However, Feuerbach would not be reconciled with her and when he met her again three years later he had a new model whereas Nanna had come down in the world.

References

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederic_Leighton,_1st_Baron_Leighton



Albert Moore (1841-1893), *Trunk of an Ash Tree with Ivy*, 1857

- Moore painted this watercolour when he was 16 and it shows the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites and the ash tree is a subject recommended by John Ruskin.
- Moore was born and first trained in York followed by the Royal Academy School in 1858 when he was 17.

Albert Joseph Moore (1841-1893)

- Moore was born in York the 13th son and 14th child of the well known portrait painter William Moore. Albert Moore was trained in art at school in York and was awarded a medal from the Department of Science and Art at Kensington before his twelfth birthday. He went to London to enter the Royal Academy School in 1858 aged 17. His early works shows the influence of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites but he **loved Classical sculpture** and the Elgin marbles in particular. In 1859 he was in France with the architect **William Eden Nesfield**. The 1860s saw Moore designing tiles, wallpaper and stained glass for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., and working as an ecclesiastic and domestic mural painter. During this period his works began to take on a markedly neo-classical character, Moore making an extensive study of antique sculpture, particularly the Elgin marbles in the British Museum. His concern for decorative, color harmonies became apparent in his paintings of the mid 1860s onwards. His works, typically single female figures with formalized proportions, neo-classical drapery and floral accessories, established a major strand of the Aesthetic Movement. He was a good friend of Whistler and is thought to have **influenced Whistler's** work in the late 1860s.
- Moore was **shy, introverted** and a painter's painter. He was of an independent disposition, and relied solely on his own judgment in matters both social and artistic. His somewhat outspoken views proved a bar to his admission into the ranks of the Royal Academy, for which he was many years a candidate, and where his works were long a chief source of attraction. Moore, one of the greatest and

most original Victorian artists was not even elected an Associate. Though suffering from a painful and incurable illness, Moore worked up to the last, completing by sheer courage and determination an important picture just before his death.

- In the late 1860s many artists were influenced by Japanese art and began to produce pictures without a specific subject. They were decorative and subtly coloured and typically showed women in classical dress. The Victorian poet Swinburne said such paintings are the 'worship of things formally beautiful ... their reason for being is simply to be'.
- There were many books written about **beauty** at the time and it was argued that it proved **Charles Darwin's** (1809-1882) theory of natural selection was wrong or at least insufficient to account for all aspects of the natural world. It was not until 1871 that Darwin published *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* that he answered these critics with an explanation of **how beauty arose**. However, the explanation takes us too far from our subject, which is specifically the rise of the Aesthetic Movement, also called the 'Art for Art's Sake' Movement.

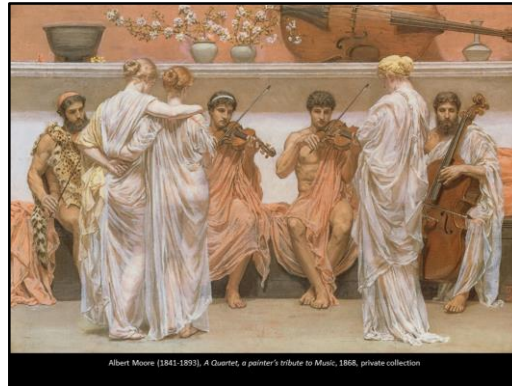


Albert Moore, *Azaleas*, 1868, Dublin City Gallery

- See John Nagler, 'The Victorian Web', and Asleson's *Albert Moore*, the text has been edited,
 - Once Moore started painting in this style it changed little throughout his life. ***Azaleas*** was the **first** of many deliberately **subjectless pictures**, showing a **single, classically clad figure**, standing by an azalea bush in a Chinese vase, holding a porcelain bowl. The **life-size** work was to be the **prototype** of numerous female figures. **Preparation** for the *Azaleas* was **extensive** and his abstract methodology was complicated.
 1. First, in a generic resemblance to the academic methods favoured on the Continent, Moore made numerous small **studies** of the draped and nude figure.
 2. Second he drew a **cartoon** that included a "system of line arrangement" by determining "the directions of the more **prominent lines** of the composition" and charting "a series of parallels to them throughout the drawing". The objective, explains Robert Asleson, was "to accommodate the human body to an **abstract, geometric armature**, now generated internally by the composition itself, rather than imposed externally by surrounding architectural elements". Moore oriented the figure in relation to these lines, adjusting the placement of the head in half a dozen alternative places before finally settling on what seemed to be the correct orientation.
 - Thirdly, he **transferred** the nude cartoon to the final canvas. The outline was fleshed out in oil colours then laden with a full scale drapery cartoon, thus enhancing the appearance of transparency. In spite of the meticulous preparations for *Azaleas*, it has a remarkably fresh and spontaneous look. Moore accomplished this feat by attempting to make each stroke perfect and **avoiding two passes of the brush** where one would suffice. "Spend an

hour if necessary thinking over a touch," he later advised his students, "but put it on in an instant as soon as you have made up your mind about it". The long brush strokes of the robe gently contrast with the energetic brushwork of the azalea. In fact, the technique emulated the fresco, with which he had experimented with a few years earlier.

- Although the woman's figure, pose, and drapery bear obvious **classical Grecian** inspiration, other aspects of the painting reveal **Eastern influences**. The **carp bowl** held in the woman's arms and the asymmetric geometric pattern of the azalea pot are reminiscent of **Japanese art**. Another Japanese element, the **yellow butterflies** flitting about, help integrate the woman's yellow dress into the predominately white background. The light colours are deliberately **Whistlerish**, and seem, to paraphrase Whistler, as if there were embroidered on the canvas, appearing here and there in the same way a thread appears in embroidery. In true Japanese fashion, repetition not contrast distinguishes Azaleas.
- Although some **critics** received Azaleas with **minimal enthusiasm**, they **grudgingly admitted the beauty** of Moore's picture. Curious and devoid of any narrative, one critic still found it "**brimful of undeniable talent — of genius almost — but daringly eccentric in design and execution**". But it was the **Pre-Raphaelites** who proclaimed Azaleas one of the **key pictures of the year**. Arch-aesthetic **Algernon Charles Swinburne** (1837-1909) praised *Azaleas* as an instance of pure art-for-art's sake: "**The melody of color, the symphony of form is complete: one more beautiful thing is achieved, one more delight is born into the world; and its meaning is beauty; and its reason for being is to be**". Moore thus reconciled the arts of Japan and Greece, and the aesthetic and classical, in a new Victorian combination.



Albert Moore (1841-1893), *A Quartet, a Painter's Tribute to Music*, AD 1868, 1868, private collection

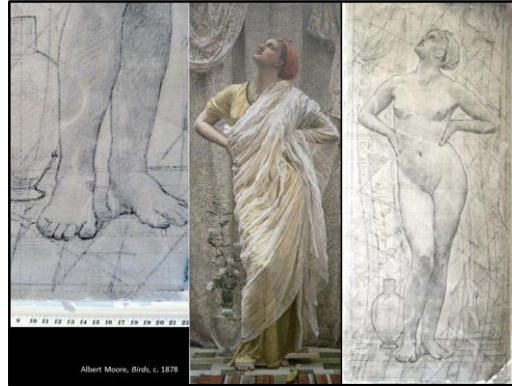
- The painting makes little sense to modern viewers but in 1869 it inspired young artists. It is not a recreation of a classical scene because of the anomaly of modern instruments. It is a harmonious, decorative design without a subject, **like a piece of music** itself. Moore revived formal qualities of beauty inspired by the human body and nature.
- Of the last painting Rossetti dismissed critics who tried to evaluate its merits base on historical accuracy. They were missing the point. "Whether or not azaleas were known to Grecian ladies, whether or not they came from America," wrote Rossetti, "are questions not difficult of solution, but of sublime indifference to Mr. Moore". The same applies to the musical instruments in this painting.
- He was influenced by Greek sculpture and **Japanese art**.
- He had a **complex multi-stage process** he used to create his work that consisted of a sketch, a full-size cartoon that was transferred and a method of tearing out sections of tracing paper as he added the colours. He first painted the nude figure and then painted the drapery over the top in order to produce an accurate nude form.
- The painting of the **nude figure** became a central project for artists associated with the Aesthetic Movement from the 1860s onwards.
- Although this painting makes little sense to the modern viewer when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1869, the painting '**fired so many young brains with enthusiasm, which inspired so many sonnets, and furnished so many aesthetic drawing rooms**' (Robin Asleson, *Albert Moore*, 2000). For Moore, producing genuinely authentic ancient settings was of little importance; rather his goal was to produce graceful, elegant paintings without a subject. Known as the quintessential aesthetic painter, Alfred Moore's works sublimate everything to composition and a subdued color palette.

- Moore sought to revive the formal qualities responsible for the beauty which the Greeks had drawn from nature and the human body. Moore was greatly influenced by Greek sculpture and Japanese art. In his biography on Moore, Robyn Asleson comments on Moore's extensive preparatory work.

References

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Joseph_Moore

See <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/moore/paintings/sawhney.html>



Albert Moore, *Birds of the Air*, c. 1878

- This shows part of Moore's complex process. After drawing small sketches he would produce a full-size cartoon shown on the right. Incidentally, most artists would draw nude figures and then clothe them as the final figure was then more accurate and life-like.
- Note the parallel lines of the grid that he used to align the elements of the drawing. There is no simple formula to the aligning but note how the curve of the vase aligns with the curve of the profile which aligns with the upper right arm.
- I went to the V&A to examine these drawings closely and took this photograph. You can see how the grid and the outline of the body are marked with small holes. It is assumed that these were used to copy the drawing onto the canvas, perhaps by pouncing although there is no evidence of charcoal dust. There are also many holes where there is no apparent reason to transfer the line. On some drawings there are holes scattered apparently randomly over features as well as following the lines.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Bocca Baciata*, 1859, Museum of Fine Art, Boston

Beata Beatrix, c. 1864-70, Tate Britain

Venus Verticordia, 1864-8, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery, Bournemouth

The Beloved ('*The Bride*'), 1865-66, Tate Britain

Monna Vanna, 1866, Tate Britain

Astarte Syriaca, 1876-77, Manchester City Art Gallery

- Starting with *Bocca Baciata* Rossetti produced a series of beautiful and sensual women, his '**stunners**'.
- '**Self-possessed, articulate, passionate and charismatic**', he attended **King's College School** in the Strand followed by Henry Sass's Drawing Academy (1841-45) when he enrolled at the Royal Academy School. He left and studied under Ford Madox Brown who he maintained a relationship with the rest of his life. He sought out William Holman Hunt after seeing *the Eve of St. Agnes*.
- He met Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris through their poetry magazine the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. They both admired Rossetti.
- Rossetti painted dense medieval paintings during the 1850s but switched in the 1860s and 1870s to powerful close-up images of women in a flat space and using thick colours.
- Women and models were **Fanny Cornforth**, **Elizabeth Siddal**, Jane Burden (Morris), Alexa Wilding. He became a founding partner in Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1861.
- Siddal modelled for Walter Deverell (who found her working in a milliners shop in 1849), Holman Hunt, Millais (including Ophelia) and Rossetti. When modelling she kept working part-time, an unusual and powerful position for a woman at the time.
- **Rossetti** met Elizabeth **Siddal** in **1849**, was his exclusive model by 1851 (thousands of paintings including most famously Beata Beatrix), Ruskin sponsored her in 1855,

Rossetti married her in **1860** although his family did not approve, in 1861 she became pregnant but the baby was stillborn, she became pregnant again and overdosed on **laudanum in 1862**, there is a rumour that he burned a suicide note. **Rossetti exhumed** her in **1869** by which time he was convinced he was going blind and couldn't paint. He was persuaded by **Charles Augustus Howell**, an art dealer and alleged blackmailer. Howell was **found dead** in Chelsea in 1890 with his **throat slit** and a sovereign in his mouth, a **ritual killing** for those guilty of slander. This was **hushed up** and his death put down to TB.

Bocca Baciata

- Modelled by **Fanny Cornforth**. Sometimes regarded as the first painting of the **Aesthetic Movement**. A painting that emphasizes the visual and sensual qualities of art over the moral or narrative possibilities. It flourished in the 1870s and 80s and is exemplified by J. M. **Whistler**, Albert **Moore** and Frederic **Leighton**. The critic Walter Hamilton was the first to name it in 1882 when he published the book *The Aesthetic Movement in England*. The term Aesthetic was used and satirized in the Gilbert and Sullivan opera *Patience* (1881). The term Aesthetic was invented by the German philosopher Baumgarten in 1750.

Beata Beatrix

- Modelled by **Elizabeth Siddal** and completed a year after her death.
- It depicts Beatrice Portinari from Dante Alighieri's (pronounced 'Ali-geri') poem *La Vita Nuova* at the moment of her death. Rossetti had translated the poem into English in 1845 when he was 17.
- The white dove represents his love for Siddal and the poppy her death from laudanum.
- There are a number of replicas, one in Chicago, a watercolour, a chalk drawing and another oil painting finished by his lifelong friend Ford Madox Brown after his death in 1882 (Birmingham Art Gallery).

Venus Verticordia

- It was repainted with **Alexa Wilding's** face in 1868. It was originally modelled by Rossetti's nearly six foot tall cook.

The Beloved

- It was modelled by **Marie Ford**
- It may have been inspired by the black woman in Manet's *Olympia*, which he saw in Manet's studio in November 1864.
- It was inspired by the Song of Solomon
- It was commissioned in 1863 by George Rae for £300, but took three years to finish. Rossetti's letters to Rae are one long saga of excuses.

Monna Vanna ('vain woman')

- Monna Vanna ('vain woman') is taken from Dante's *La Vita Nuova* (thirteenth century, literally 'the new life') in which the name 'Vanna' appears for the first time.
- Modelled by **Alexa Wilding**
- He considered it one of his **best works**, writing that it was '**probably the most effective as a room decoration that I have ever painted**' reinforcing the view that Rossetti painted for money but his real love was poetry.
- It was originally called *Venus Veneta* and was intended to be the Venetian ideal of female beauty. He later retouched the painting and changed the title to *Belcolore* ('beautiful colour') but it has retained its title *Monna Vanna*.

Astarte Syriaca

- Modelled by **Jane Morris**, and her daughter May (left attendant). Rossetti was having an adulterous affair with Jane and she stayed with him at Aldwick Lodge from November to March 1875-6, except for Christmas. The two male figures imply that Jane or women have the power to ensnare men. Astarte was a **Semitic goddess** of fertility, sexuality and war. Astarte appears in Assyrian, Babylonian, Syrian, Hebrew and Etruscan legends. The Greeks and Romans sometimes equated Aphrodite (Venus) with Astarte.
- Disraeli took office as head of the first Conservative government since 1846 and published the popular novel *Tancred* in which the beautiful Queen Astarte rules the ancient people living around Antioch in Syria. Astarte was often seen as the Syrian Venus.
- Asherah or Astarte denounced the Old Testament prophets. Rossetti again invokes the divine power of women which can be seen as a denunciation of patriarchal Victorian Britain.
- It is possible all these paintings represent Rossetti's fear of women and it would be interesting to find out more about his relationship with his mother.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Venus Verticordia*, 1864-8, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery, Bournemouth

Rossetti and 'The Fleshly School of Poetry'

- This painting is sometimes mentioned as marking a **turning point** in Rossetti's use of **sumptuous Venetian colours** and an increase in decorative accessories. These changes in his style were **unacceptable** to **Ruskin** and disagreements about this painting **led to them breaking up**.
- It was repainted with Alexa Wilding's face in 1868.
- Ruskin was disturbed by the flowers and wrote,

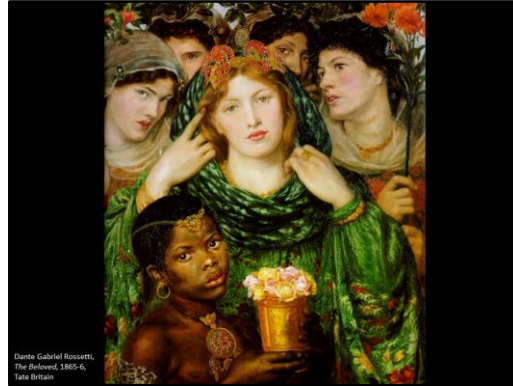
*They were wonderful to me in their realism, awful – I can use no other word – in their **coarseness**: showing enormous power, showing **certain conditions of non-sentiment** which underlie all you are doing now'.*
- What he meant by this was that Rossetti's female figures in for example, *Bocca Baciata*, *The Blue Bower*, *Fair Rosamond*, *The Beloved*, and *Monna Vanna* to a late work like *Astarte Syriaca* are all of powerful female figures, great worldliness and indifference and paradoxically spiritual presence. One art historian describes this figure

'The Venus of this picture is no Aphrodite, fresh and white and jubilant from the foam of Idalian seas, nor is she Love incarnate or human passion; but she is a queen of Love who loves not herself, a desire that is unsatiable and remorseless, absolute, supreme. . . . She is the Lust of the Flesh that perisheth not, though around her loves and lives and dreams are evermore becoming as nought'
- The title means '**turner of hearts**' but even this is ambiguous. Does it mean turn to chastity?
- **Robert Buchanan** criticized his poetry as he had not seen his paintings but by

implication his criticism applies to the paintings. Buchanan wrote an article called 'The Fleshly School of Poetry' (*The Contemporary Review*, October 1871) in which he criticized Rossetti, William Morris and Charles Swinburne for being too sensual and praising the body rather than the soul. The article was expanded into a pamphlet in 1872, but he subsequently withdrew from the criticisms it contained, and it is chiefly remembered by the replies it evoked from Rossetti in a letter to the *Athenaeum* (December 16, 1871), entitled *The Stealthy School of Criticism*, and from Swinburne in *Under the Microscope* (1872).

Notes

- The model for this painting was Alexa Wilding (born Alice, c. 1845-8 to 1884). She sat for more of Rossetti finished works than Elizabeth Siddal, Jane Morris and Fanny Cornforth. She came from a working class family and was born in Surrey and when Rossetti met her she was a dressmaker and wanted to become an actress. Wilding never married and on the 1881 census is listed with two children but they are thought to be those of his uncle and aunt who died at the same time. By this time she was a landlady and property holder, a considerable achievement.




Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Beloved*, 1865-6, Tate Britain

- Inspired by the *Song of Solomon* from the Bible.
- Her headdress is Peruvian and her dress is made from Japanese kimono fabric.
- Rossetti inscribed the frame:
 My beloved is mine and I am his. (*The Song of Solomon* 2:16).
 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.
 (*The Song of Solomon* 1:2).
 She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins her
 companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. (*Psalms* 45:14)
- It was commissioned in 1863 by George Rae for £300 but was not finished until the winter of 1865-6.
- The model was **Marie Ford** whose beauty Rossetti admired. The virgin bridesmaid on the left was modelled by **Ellen Smith**, the young boy was found outside a hotel and was added for his colour to act as a contrast with the bride's skin. The boy replaced a young biracial girl that Rossetti first used.

NEXT WEEK

LEIGHTON, WHISTLER, BURNE-JONES AND BEARDSLEY.
AESTHETICISM AS A FASHION, PARODY, DEGENERATION AND
DECADENCE





INTERESTING QUESTIONS

- The Pre-Raphaelites
 - Who is the woman in the doorway of Ramano painting?
 - Why was Burne-Jones *King Cophetua* and the *Beggar Maid* so well received and who are the two figures above?
 - What is the mystery in Madox Brown's *Work*?



Giulio Romano (1499-1546), *Portrait of a Woman*, Royal Collection, Windsor

Question 1 from Last Week: Who is the Woman in the Doorway?

- Traditionally the woman is identified as Isabella d'Este but she was reluctant to have her image reproduced. There are two by Titian and a drawing by Leonardo which show her with a round face, low forehead and short neck. Also, she would have been fifty when Romano arrived in Mantua. The dress pattern is often associated with Isabella d'Este but it was a widespread fashion.
- Another possible identification is that she is Margherita Paleologo who married Isabella d'Este's son Federico Gonzaga, the first Duke of Mantua who was described as having a long white face and a nose like her father. It has been suggested it is a wedding portrait and the woman coming in the door is Isabella d'Este attended by her other daughter-in-law Isabella of Capua and a nun. The maid pulling back the curtain suggests early funerary monuments (such as that of Cardinal de Braye who died in 1282).



Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, 1884, Tate Britain

Question 2 from Last Week: Why Was the Painting so Well Received and Who are the Two Figures Above?

- On seeing the painting Fernand Khnopff (a major influence on Gustav Klimt) wrote, 'Two chorister-boys perched above are singing softly, and in the distance, between the hanging curtains, is seen a dream, so to speak, of an autumn landscape, its tender sky already dusk, expressing all sweet regret, all hope in vain for the things that are no more, the things that can never be.'
- As mentioned the painting is based on the theme of the **inferiority of riches** and **power of love**. The rejection of the material for the spiritual held particular **relevance for a French generation** influenced by Symbolist writers and artists who had promulgated similar ideas. Burne-Jones's wife Georgiana stressed the importance of this aspect of *King Cophetua* and noted that her husband painted it during the divergence of opinion between himself and Morris, on the subject of **Socialism**. Jean Maxime ('Max') Monier de la Sizeranne wrote that it seemed to him and his friends as though in standing before it they had 'come from the Universal Exhibition of wealth to see the symbolical expression of the **Scorn of Wealth**'.
- There could be a more **personal explanation** as the face of the **beggar girl** looks like his wife **Georgiana** Burne-Jones (see his 1883 portrait of her). Burne-Jones had had an **affair** with **Maria Zambaco Cassavetti** from about 1866 to 1869. In 1869 Burne-Jones attempted to leave his wife, which caused a scandal, and she tried to persuade him to commit suicide with her by the canal in Little Venice. She continued to appear in his paintings, such as *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1872-7) and *Phyllis and Demophoön* (1870). Some have identified the face in this painting as that of **Frances Graham** who was born in 1858 and was the daughter of his patron William Graham, MP and merchant. She met him when she was 15 and he was 40

and described him later as 'my greatest friend for all my grown-up life). Burne-Jones doted on her and was distraught when she married John ('Jack') Horner in 1883 when she was 25 and he was 40. The **anemones** in the painting are a symbol of rejected love which may be a comment on his wife or his mistress.



- I said there was a murder mystery but it is a robbery 'of great violence'. See Gerard Curtis, 'Ford Madox Brown's Work: An Iconographic Analysis', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 74, No. 4. (Dec., 1992), pp. 623-636.
- The poster on the wall provides **three clues**, it mentions a '**bull terrier**' and the thief dressed in a '**billy-cock**' and '**Fustian**'. Brown later explained that it is a 'bull terrier pup'. The owner of the puppy is likely to be nearby and 'Fustian' is the colour of working men's corduroy, an olive green to burnt umber. A Billy-cock was a type of hat worn by the lower classes also called a wide-awake hat or Quaker-style hat. The person that satisfies all the requirements is not the obvious candidate leaning against the tree on the right but the chickweed seller by the poster.
- Why is he **hiding his face**? There are **two police officers**, one of the road stopping the orange seller and the other on horseback coming down the lane next to the elm trees.
- Brown suggested later that the chickweed seller has just **sold the valuable bull terrier pup** to the labourer. In the original design for work the chickweed seller was a dog seller. Brown also wrote that if it were not for the chickweed seller's 'gentle disposition ... he might have been a burglar'. This could be a clue and

phrased to put us off the scent.

- The bull terrier was bred to have a different head during the 1860s but this is the earlier head shape that Bill Sykes dog 'Bull's Eye' has in early illustrated versions of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838). There is another clue on the poster '**...ot one eye**'. This may mean the dog has a mark on one eye and this suggests Bill Sykes's dog and Bill Sykes also had a billy-cock hat and fustian coat.