



Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco photos

Masters of visual pleasure

Colorful exhibition captures movement's devotion to nature, romance



By Charles Desmarais

They called themselves “the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,” a phrase that sounded stuffy even when it was first pronounced in the mid-19th century. The names even of the group’s founders — William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti — are not widely known among museumgoers. Yet few artistic movements had so profound an effect on the way we think about art and artists today.

“Truth and Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelites and the Old Masters,” an exhibition at the Legion of Honor that opens Saturday, June 30, pays scant attention

“Truth” continues on E2

Truth and Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelites and the Old Masters: 9:30 a.m.-5:15 p.m., Tuesdays-Sundays. Saturday, June 30-Sept. 30. \$13-28. Legion of Honor, Lincoln Park, 100 34th Ave., S.F. 415-750-3600. <http://legionofhonor.famsf.org>

Above: John Everett Millais’ “Mariana” (1851). **Left:** Raphael’s “Self-Portrait” (1504-06).

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Pure visual pleasure transcends time

“Truth” from page E1

to whatever continuing relevance the group may have. It indulges, instead, in the pure visual pleasure of an idiosyncratic style that drew upon the greatest moment in European painting, the dawn of the Renaissance. The show will be on view through Sept. 30.

To observe that remnants of Pre-Raphaelite art are with us today is not to say that artists of later eras paid much attention to their example. Their graphic fascination with nature and their lascivious embrace of ornament relate most closely to the allied Arts and Crafts movement and to Art Nouveau — trends of modern art that, though much beloved, from today’s vantage point appear to have led to sublime dead ends.

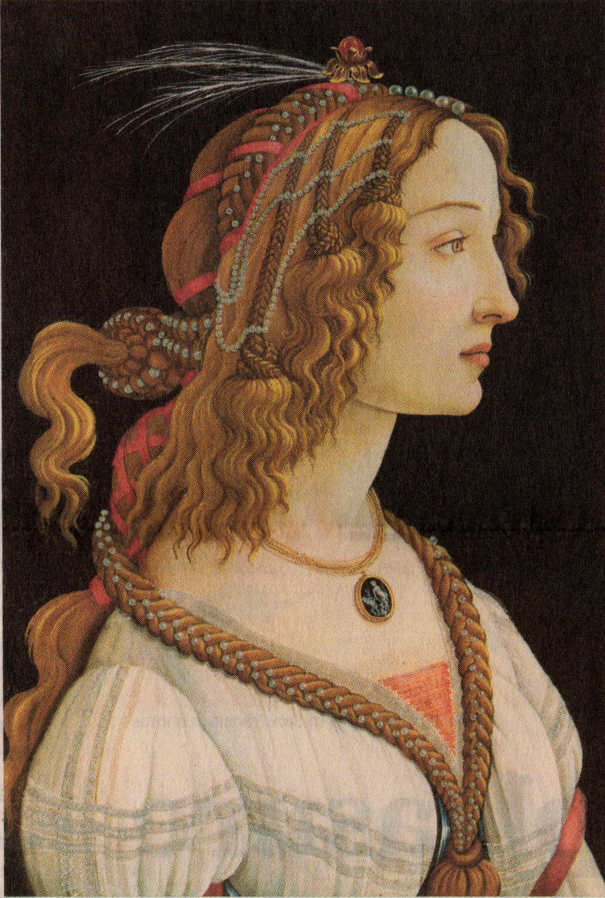
And yet, the Pre-Raphaelites’ insatiable appetite for realistic detail, lurid color and, above all, passion for romantic story are deeply ingrained in the public psyche as ideals in art. Their historicist, moralistic pictures had the greatest influence, it would seem, on children’s book illustrators, artists who trade in images that both reflect and shape our fundamental visual literacy. Think of Howard Pyle, N.C. Wyeth and their followers, whose pictures charged the imaginations of successive generations, enlivening adventure books that are still widely read.

Meanwhile, the abundance of beautiful women depicted in moody reverie feeds a popular expectation that art of feeling must be solemn, if not sad. As in today’s movies, pop songs and romance novels, loss and longing generally trump joy.

“Truth and Beauty” injects new life into works that, by reason of such triviality, are often dismissed by art historians. In the presence of the works themselves, however, any sense of emotional shallowness gives way to delight at their quirky technical ingenuity. Strong line and rich color combine in effects that remind us of mosaics. Sure



Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco photos
John Roddam Spencer Stanhope’s “Love and the Maiden” (1877) is on display at the Legion of Honor’s Pre-Raphaelites exhibition.



Sandro Botticelli’s “Idealized Portrait of a Lady (Simonetta Vespucci)” (circa 1475).

enough, designs for tapestries, stained glass windows and mosaics conclude the exhibition. The exhibition is

remarkable for other reasons, as well. For the first time in a major museum presentation, it takes the Pre-Raphaelite devotion to art historical precedent at face value, showing works from the early Renaissance (“pre-Raphael,” in other words), as well as other key sources, alongside Brotherhood pictures.

It is tempting to say that Sandro Botticelli, whose glorious 15th-century “Idealized Portrait of a Lady (Simonetta Vespucci)” introduces one central gallery, is the standout artist of the show. No



Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “Veronica Veronese” (1872) captures the era’s romance.

fewer than five paintings by the master are here, as well as other comparative works by Paolo Veronese, Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling.

Also included is Raphael’s own “Self-Portrait” of 1504-06, a starkly pared-down gem of vulnerability that conveys little of the bravado we see in the works of his 19th-century

The exhibition continues the Legion of Honor’s smart recent turn to use its best resources set into broader contexts.

ry devotees.

The exhibition continues the Legion of Honor’s smart recent turn to use its best resources — excellent curators and a collection with strong highlights — set into broader contexts.

The show was organized by Melissa E. Buron, director of the art division of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, of which the Legion is a part. About 30 percent of the works are from the museums, including drawings and other works on paper that are rarely shown, and paintings that look fresh and entirely different in this environment.

Volumes have been written about what the Pre-Raphaelites intended, and the exhibition goes to great pains to try to

explain their theoretical principles. What it does best, though, is to demonstrate how little theory had to do with their enterprise, and how quickly its adherents developed individual styles of their own.

For all their proclamations of “truth to nature,” members of the Brotherhood were not above creative distortion. Founder Dante Gabriel Rossetti developed a lovely but peculiar female archetype, with large hands, prominent nose and jawline, and long neck.

Where one artist might focus almost microscopically on, say, certain plants in a painting, women were universally depicted as sultry but distant. In this manner, the Pre-Raphaelite “brother” could have his women both ways — both sensual and spiritual.

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PUZZLE ANSWERS

Crossword Puzzle

MAKESITSO	HAPPY
OVERTOYOU	OLLIE
TEENANGST	SPELL
TENS	AARONHALL
ONETWO	ARIAS
SON	EASING
ALTER	BADLY
PUSHTHE	ENVELOPE
ARMAS	NATIVE
CLAM	CLEESE
SOFIA	ALMERA
SCHMOOZED	IGOR
MAHER	BREADLINE
USING	OBEDIENCE
GETTO	YESPERSON

Sudoku Puzzle

4	3	7	5	1	8	9	2	6
2	9	1	7	3	6	8	5	4
8	6	5	9	4	2	3	1	7
7	1	6	2	5	3	4	9	8
3	8	9	1	7	4	2	6	5
5	4	2	8	6	9	1	7	3
9	7	3	6	8	1	5	4	2
6	2	4	3	9	5	7	8	1
1	5	8	4	2	7	6	3	9

New York Times Crossword

CASPER	OLDHAND	SIGMAS
DIPLOLE	REVENUE	ONEACT
SILIPIN	DORSALPH	MEANLY
ESCAPES	LECARRE	
ALLTWER	PWNS	SALTBATH
BOBATEA	METED	BIGOTRY
FRERE	PNISHERS	AXIOM
ARR	DREADS	DOUBTS
BEGS	ELLIE	ENRON
HAUNTS	SHARK	SATOR
SEAMONSTER	DEEPTHREAT	
ART	HOPESO	ALDRIN
CLEF	GREAT	WHITE
KERRY	AMIS	NITE
HAUNTS	SHARK	SATOR
RAZZES	SHARK	MALLON
JAZZUP	DEAF	FEAR
ANAL	AMITY	ISLAND
WARE	LATTE	TENOR
STDS	TTSOK	SLIMY
SHOP		

Challenger

1	4	9	9	24
1	4	7	7	19
1	4	6	6	17
4	4	6	6	20
7	16	28	28	17

Chess

- 1. Rxf7! Rxf7
- 2. Qxf6 Qg8
- 3. Bc3 is lethal [Lastin Potkin '09]