

Oscar Wilde

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Paris Art Studies

The
British Aesthetic Movement – a
Chronology

1835 – The slogan “l’art
pour l’art” (“art for art’s sake”)
is coined by the writer Théophile Gautier in France during the Romantic period,
in the preface of his celebrated novel Mademoiselle
de Maupin.

1848 – Founding of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood in London by
the painters Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt and Everett Millais.
Theirs was the first art movement in England to challenge the precepts and
styles of the Royal Academy and to try to re-instill in modern painting a sense
of purity, beauty nature and the spiritual.

1851 – Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace in Hyde
Park, London. Organized by Henry Cole and Prince Albert, its object is to
promote peace and goodwill among the nations by bringing together industrial
and cultural artifacts created by all. Its phenomenal public success
inaugurates an era of pride and world dominion in Great Britain. Critics,
however, find most objects badly designed, mechanical and tasteless.

1853 – Opening of Japan to international trade. Japanese
artifacts arrive in great numbers in American and European markets.

1856 – Publication of Owen Jones’ Grammar of Ornament. Its 1000 illustrations from all cultures
of the past will provide new designers with a vast repertory of ornamental
patterns, notably Islamic.

1857 – Founding of Sough Kensington Museum (today Victoria
and Albert) by Henry Cole. Its collections, notably in the decorative arts were
meant to educate artists and the public in history and good taste.

1859 – The American painter
James MacNeill Whistler arrives in
London from Paris. He will be a most influential member of the Aesthetic

movement, central figure of Chelsea, propagator of Japonisme and a link to the French Impressionists.

1861 – The founding of

Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company, Art Workmen by William Morris signals a return to craft and fine workmanship. His

famous credo was: "Have nothing in your house which you do not think beautiful or know to be useful".

1862 – South Kensington International Exhibition: first appearance of a

« reformed » style in the decorative arts in reaction to vulgarity and confusion of 1851 Exhibition. Morris, the architect Philip Webb and the artists Dante Gabriel Rossetti,

Edward Burne Jones, Ford Madox Ford

all contribute to the renewal of British art and design in great part inspired by the Medieval art and architecture. Morris moves to Tudor House in Chelsea, then a semi rural district soon to acquire one of the most important artistic colonies in London. E. W. Goodwin and Christopher Dresser lean more towards Japanese inspiration.

1863 – Whistler exhibits

"Symphony in White N. 1, the White Girl" at the Salon des refusés in Paris.

1866 – Publication of Poems and Ballads by Algernon Charles Swinburne. The mix of sensuality and cruelty notably in Laus Veneris or Dolores scandalizes public opinion.

1869 – Mathew Arnold

castigates British Philistinism in Culture and Anarchy.

1871 – The French artist

James Tissot settles in London in St John's Wood.

1873 – Walter Pater professor of Classics and

Philosophy at Oxford publishes Essays on the History of the Renaissance. He argues for the necessity of an intense experience of beauty for its own sake, distinct of any religious or moral considerations. He will be condemned by the bishop of Oxford and obliged to retract by the university authorities. His writings will greatly inspire the next generation of students, that of Oscar Wilde.

1875 – Opening of Liberty's in London, first shop to

specialize in Japanese and Far Eastern ornaments, fabrics and objets d'art.

1876 – Whistler's "Peacock Room" created for the home of

his patron, the shipping magnate F.R. Leyland, in Prince's Gate, London, becomes the icon of the Aesthetic style.

1877 – Inauguration of the Grosvenor Galleries in London by

Lindsay Coutts, which will become the principal venue for the exhibition of the Aesthetic movement artists.

1878 – Goodwin's Japanese

style cabinet decorated by Whistler "Harmony in Yellow and Gold" is much admired at the Paris World's Fair drawing international attention to the new

British aesthetic movement.

Celebrated libel case brought by Whistler against John Ruskin writer, critic and defender of the Pre-Raphaelites. In reviewing Whistler's "A Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket" shown at the Grosvenor galleries Ruskin wrote: "(I) never expected a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face". Though Whistler won the case he had to bear the legal costs (£ 3000) which precipitated his bankruptcy.

1881 – First performance of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *Patience* or *Bunthorne's Bride* mocking the pretensions of the followers of Aestheticism.

1882 – Death of Rossetti.
Oscar Wilde undertakes his much publicized American tour to spread the gospel of Aestheticism. Publication by Walter Hamilton of "The Aesthetic Movement in England". In the same year the Goncourt brothers in France coin the word "esthète".

1885 – Gilbert and Sullivan's production of *The Mikado* assures that knowledge and taste for Japonisme spreads to a vast new audience.

1886 – Death of Goodwin.

1893 – Death of Albert Moore.

1895 – The trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde accused of homosexual acts tarnishes the reputation of Aestheticism of which he was one of the great champions.

1896 – Death of Morris and Frederick Leighton.

1898 – Death of Burne-Jones and Aubrey Beardsley (at 25 of tuberculosis) .

1904 – Death of Watts.

1910 – Roger Fry organizes the first Post Impressionist exhibition at the Grafton galleries, London. The event, asserting the primacy of French modern art, spells the death of British Aestheticism, associated by the new "Bloomsbury" generation to the dead and dusty Victorian era.

Principal figures of the Aesthetic movement:

Artists:

Lawrence Alma Tadema
1836-1912 (Dutch)

Aubrey Beardsley 1872-1898

Edward Burne-Jones 1883-1898

Walter Crane 1845-1915
(illustrator)

Frederick Leighton 1830-1896

John Everett Millais
1829-1896

Albert Moore 1841-1893

Edward Poynter 1836-1919

Charles Ricketts 1866-1931 (illustrator)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1828-1882

Frederick Sandys 1829-1904

Simeon Solomon 1840-1905

James Tissot 1836-1902
(French)

John William Waterhouse
1849-1917

George Frederick Watts
1817-1904

James Abbott McNeil Whistler
1834-1903 (American)

Photographers:

Julia Margaret Cameron
1815-1879

Frederick Evans 1853-1943

Decorative arts:

William de Morgan 1839-1917
(ceramicist)

William Morris 1834-1896
(furniture, tapestry, wallpaper)

John Moyr Smith 1839-1912
(ceramicist)

Edward William Godwin
1833-1886 (furniture)

Architects and designers:

Christopher Dresser
1834-1904

Thomas Jeckyll 1827-1881

Philip Webb 1831-1915

Notes:

Aubrey Beardsley
(1872-1898)

He co-founded The Yellow Book with American writer Henry Harland, and for the first four editions he served as art editor and produced the cover designs and many illustrations for the magazine. He was also closely aligned with Aestheticism, the British counterpart of Decadence and Symbolism.

Most of his images are done in ink, and feature large dark areas contrasted with large blank ones, and areas of fine detail contrasted with areas with none at all.

Beardsley was the most controversial artist of the Art Nouveau era, renowned for his dark and perverse images and grotesque erotica, which were the main themes of his later work. Some of his drawings, inspired by Japanese shunga artwork, featured enormous genitalia. His most famous erotic illustrations concerned themes of history and mythology; these include his illustrations for a privately printed edition of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and his drawings for Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*, which eventually premiered in Paris in 1896.

William Blake
Richmond

Mrs Luke Ionides 1882

The sitter, Elfrida Ionides, was married to Luke Ionides, of the famous British family of art patrons. She wears a loose, flowing dress and amber beads. In 1881 the ornate sofa was illustrated in a book on advanced interior decoration. The screen is made of embroidered Japanese kimono silk. This setting and her costume epitomise the ideals of the Aesthetic Movement.

Edward Burne Jones

Love song 1865 – Arthurian landscape, influence of Carpaccio, inspired by old Breton song:
Alas, I know a love song, / Sad or happy, each in turn.

Laus Veneris (praise of Venus) – 1873-78 – inspired by eponymous Swinburne poem on Tannhauser tale, knight enslaved by physical love and Venus – melancholy, claustrophobic love sickness. Languid Venus, maidens trying to entertain her with music, intrigued knights out the window.

The Wheel of Fortune 1875-83 portrays a giant wheel, turned by Dame Fortune, carrying the three nude figures — presumably a king, a poet, and a slave, as indicated by the crown and laurel wreath. Dame Fortune towers above the three men, her heavy clothing and cap covering most of her body in contrast to the almost complete nudity of the mortals. Their faces seem strangely void of

expression, Dame Fortune gazing down dispassionately and both the slave and king looking into the distance. Only the poet looks, not at Fortune's face but at her feet, with a mildly pleading air. The figures are reminiscent of Michelangelo's works as well as the ancient Greek and Roman sculptures he based his work on, with their idealized bodies and Dame Fortune's distinctive contraposto.

Sir Frederick
Leighton

Pavonia 1858-59 – model is Nanna Risi cobbler's wife met in Rome – posed for many painters

Countess Bronlow c. 1879 – Aristocratic lady in languid aesthetic pose and flowing dress

John Everett Millais

Kate Perugini 1880 - She was Dickens' youngest surviving daughter, and according to her siblings her father's favourite child;[2] he named her after his friend William Charles Macready. As a girl, she also bore the nickname "Lucifer Box" for her hot temper.

Louise Jopling
1879 – prominent woman artist - She joined the Society of Women Artists (1880) and the Royal Society of Portrait Painters (1891); she became the first woman to be admitted to the Royal Society of British Artists (1901). During the years of her marriage with Jopling, she became the primary earner of the family. "She found this responsibility weighty and stressful, necessitating constant production, regular sales and a continual search for commissions and clients. In 1879, despite her own illness and that of her son Percy, she produced eighteen works."

Albert Moore rejects narrative in pictures – combines Greek w Japanese aesthetic in v. original way.

Edward Poynter – Mary Constance
Wyndham 1886

Mary Constance Wyndham was born on 3 August 1862. She married Hugo Richard Charteris, 11th Earl of Wemyss, son of Francis Richard Charteris, 10th Earl of Wemyss and Lady Anne Frederica Anson,

on 9 August 1883.¹ She died on 29 April 1937 at age 74. She was the daughter of Hon. Percy Scawen Wyndham and Madeline Caroline Frances Eden Campbell.² Her married name became Charteris.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti –

Bocca Bacciata 1859 – Fanny Cornforth – Titianesque inspiration – his housekeeper, lower class , life long affair.

John William Waterhouse

St Cecilia 1895

Cecilia lived in Rome around 230 AD. She is famous for taking a lifelong vow of chastity which she kept despite her enforced marriage. She converted her husband to Christianity and both suffered martyrdom. "While the profane music of her wedding was heard, Cecilia was singing in her heart a hymn of love for Jesus, her true spouse." In medieval times, a misreading of her Acts led to her connection with church music and when the Academy of Music was established at Rome in 1584, she was adopted as its patroness.

Frederick Watts

'Blanche, Lady Lindsay', of 1876-7. Lady Lindsay (hostess of intellectual and artistic salon) is playing the violin and, in front of her is a tapestry of music-making angels. She looks back at us over her shoulder. But this picture is no paean to Art with a capital A. Yes, her expression shows a sort of rapture at the music that she's playing. But it also shows a look of incipient pleasure, and you feel that the whole upper part of her body is going to shake into a rumbustious dance at any moment as if she were playing in a rough tavern. Art is pleasure, not platitude. This picture exemplifies the revealing power of Watts' work and it makes us question whether he really was a Grosvenor Gallery man - at least, in that institution's later years when it became associated with a languid decadence that would be the subject of laughter and, after Wilde's fall, of scorn.

James McNeil Whistler -

Symphony in white n. 1, the White Girl 1862 – Jo Hiffernan shown at salon des refuses 1863

Little White Girl ‐ Symphony in White n. 2 1864

Jo Hiffernan. Swinburne poem about it: “before the mirror”

“Deep in the gleaming glass she sees all past things pass”

fallen white rose in hand - Japanese fan in other - Blue and white porcelain - Red lacquer bowl

Purple and Rose; the Lang Leizen of the six marks 1864

Orientalist shop - Western girl - Title refers to maker’s stylized signature on rare pieces of b&w

Harmony in Grey ‐ Miss Cecily Alexander 1872-74

Posed as Manet’s Lola de Valence, inspired by Velasquez, 70 sittings ‐ model cross and tired end in tears

Peacock room (1876) the dining room for Liverpool shipping magnate FR Leyland’s London house at Prince’s Gate (S. Ken.) London

Whistler paints completely over original leather and beige scheme by Thomas Jeckyl (who much shaken goes mad and dies in asylum ‐“that’s the effect I have over people”) during Leyland’s absence in the summer and shows it to the press before Leyland himself can see it. Also has affair w Mrs Leyland. Big fall out.

Now artist superior to patron.

Gold scab ‐ an arrangement in filthy lucre ‐ 1879 nasty caricature of Leyland painted year of his bankruptcy painted in his White House confiscated by creditors, Leyland is a hideous peacock sitting on White House playing piano. Though

Leyland becomes owner of house he never erased painting.

Paints Goodwin's Butterfly

Cabinet ‐ a Harmony in yellow and gold

1877 ‐ exhibited at Paris World's Fair of 1878 ‐ originally a fireplace transformed in to cupboard.

Thomas Carlyle - Arrangement in Grey and

black 1872-73. 78 year old

philosopher who admired Whistler's Mother

Margaret Cameron

Married to British Indian official. Gets involved in photography on her return to England, Isle of White at 50. Photographs all luminaries of her day. Invents the "close up";.

Mary Hillier her housemaid often poses for her compositions

Male aesthetic costume: knee breeches, loose flowing tie, velvet jacket (adaptation of French romantic costume from Murger's *vie de Bohème*)