

The Pre-Raphaelites in their Time

Britain's first and best-known radical art movement emerged from within the Royal Academy in 1848. Its original members were rebellious art students who were disillusioned with contemporary practice. They looked back to Italian art before Raphael, seeing the pre-1500 period as one of great sincerity. They called themselves the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

In an age of rapid industrial and urban expansion, the Pre-Raphaelite artists like Rossetti, Hunt and Millais, and pioneering design reformers such as William Morris, sought a return to pre-industrial values of art and design in truth to nature and materials, and good workmanship. In addition, the arts of the Middle Ages and Middle East were important sources of stylistic inspiration.

The Bible, literature and contemporary life were preferred over subjects derived from classical mythology. The brotherhood also rejected contrived studio lighting and took canvases outside to paint directly from nature. Although attempting to convey exactly what they saw, they created a heightened reality of dream-like intensity with minute details and bright, dazzling colours.

MAG Interpretation/Gallery 5/panel

Their art was a new kind of history painting for a new age.