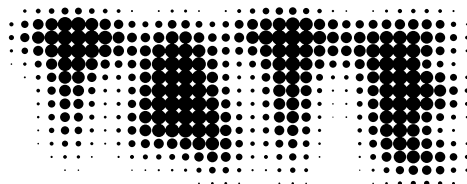


THE ROSSETTIS

RADICAL ROMANTICS

6 APR – 24 SEP 2023

LARGE PRINT GUIDE



CONTENTS

Concourse.....	4
Room 1	7
Room 2	17
Room 3	31
Room 4.....	61
Room 5.....	77
Room 6	95
Room 7	107
Room 8	125
Room 9.....	137

Concourse

THE ROSSETTIS

The poet Christina Rossetti and painter poets Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Rossetti (born Elizabeth Siddal) are the most well-known of the Rossetti generation. Born into a new Victorian age, they began as controversial figures and became international celebrities. They brought about a revolution in the arts, both in Britain and beyond.

The Rossettis' passionate, anti-establishment personalities challenge our ideas of Victorians. They experimented with everything – work and beliefs, life and love. They demanded poetry and painting express lived experience and feeling; their daring stories asked questions about art and beauty that remain relevant today.

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Exhibition organised by Tate Britain with Delaware Art Museum. Curated by Carol Jacobi, Curator, British Art 1850–1915, Tate, and James Finch, Assistant Curator, 19th Century British Art, Tate.

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ROOM 1

ROOM 1

1: POET

Love, Love, that art more strong than Hate,
More lasting and more full of art

From Christina Rossetti What Sappho would have said
had her leap cured instead of killing her 1848

There were four siblings in the Rossetti family: Maria (1827–1876), Gabriel (1828–1882) William (1829–1919) and Christina (1830–1894). Close in age, they were teenagers in mid-19th century London. Their parents were scholars of Italian heritage who encouraged the children to write, try their hand at art and realise their own extraordinary creative voices. Gabriel went to art school and he and Christina published poems when they were just 15 and 16 years old. The young siblings also worked as carers, teachers and clerks. Only Gabriel continued with full time study.

Christina's verse was inspired by personal experience and popular songs and sermons, as well as poetry of all eras. The poems in this room speak of love in many voices – tender and fierce, joyful and hopeless, the love between parents and children, and even voices from beyond the grave. In her lifetime, Christina published 900 poems and today her work is still more widely known than that of her brothers.

Image credit:

Filippo Pistrucci Portraits of Maria Francesca, Dante Gabriel, William Michael and Christina Georgina Rossetti as children 1843, watercolour, Private collection

FREESTANDING WALL

Dante Gabriel Rossettis, Ecce Ancilla Domini! (The Annunciation)

Gabriel's first three oil paintings portrayed his sister, Christina. They reflect their conversations throughout her troubled teenage years. Gabriel's first exhibition works cast Christina as the biblical Mary, echoing her transition to womanhood and search for identity in the ideas and activities of the church. Gabriel's fiercely original *The Annunciation* was inspired by medieval religious art, but takes a more modern, psychological view. Their brother Michael poses as the angel.

Gabriel and Christina's poetry and painting had a personal perspective that Gabriel called an 'inner standing point'. In *The Annunciation*, the Angel Gabriel has disturbed Mary from her dreams. We find ourselves in her curtained chamber, at the end of her narrow couch. Unusually, she is turned to face us. Her shock is expressed by the eerie

colouring, the telescoping space, her wide eyes and shrinking pose as the angel's shadow falls across the bed.

N01210

ANTICLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti 1848

Gabriel made this close and careful study of his sister as she turned 18. The portrait shows an assured young woman. Her slight smile and deep gaze, untidy collar and casually caught-back hair give her a thoughtful, practical air. At this time, two of her poems had been accepted for publication in the *Athenaeum*, a literary magazine. Her father had fallen ill and the family were seeking ways to finance the household. Christina took the role of his assistant and carer.

X83800

[Vitrine Captions]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The Dream, facsimile

The Dream page spread facsimile

Verses explored the psychological perspective or 'inner standing point' in poems about memory and dreams.

Gabriel's illustration visualised the speaker's recollection as she sits by the stream alone.

'Harkning the wavelets ripple o'er the sands;
Until again I hear thy whispered vow
And feel thy pressing hands.'

Z76344, Z76805

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Tasso and Leonora facsimile

Tasso and Sappho spread facsimile

Christina studied classical literature and two of the poems in *Verses* were written in Italian. She wrote poems about her role models, such as the ancient Greek poet, Sappho (c.630–570 BC) and the Italian Renaissance poet Torquato Tasso (1544–1595). Sappho and Tasso both took their own lives, and Christina herself lived with serious depression. Gabriel's illustration for 'Tasso and Leonora' doesn't reflect Tasso's mental disorientation explored in Christina's poem and the visionary effect of Leonora waking Tasso. Instead, the temptation and downfall to come is suggested by her shadow falling across his.

Z78341, Z76804

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Cross facsimile

The Ruined Cross spread facsimile

'And she had journeyed many miles,
Morning and eve untiringly,
To look again upon that Cross,
To look again and die.'

Death and illness were closer to people's everyday lives in an era before modern medicine and the National Health Service.

The transition from life to death preoccupied and fascinated Christina and Gabriel, inspiring some of their best-known works.

While Gabriel's drawing here is stylised and romantic, Christina's ballad-like verse sought authenticity through direct language and vivid description.

Z76328, Z76803

Verses

Christina was the youngest sibling but the first to enter the public eye with her collection of 42 poems, *Verses*, published when she was 16. She wrote the first poem when she was 11, presenting it with flowers to her mother on her birthday. The Rossetti family were close and worked collaboratively. They edited, transcribed and collected each other's work. *Verses* was dedicated to their mother, printed at their grandfather's private press and illustrated by the young Gabriel.

Z76467

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Study for Ecce Ancilla Domini! (The Annunciation)

Drawings Gabriel made of his sister brought visual and psychological naturalism to his paintings. Her straight hair and thin limbs, revealed through crumpled cotton, were different from the curved, draped figures in traditional religious paintings. The close composition, atmosphere flavoured by colour and use of intimate family and friends as sitters look forward to the chambers and bowers of Gabriel's later work.

T00287

ROOM 2

ROOM 2

2: MODERN RAPHAEL

ANTICLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

As a teenager, Gabriel wasn't sure whether to become a poet or a painter – he had a flare for both. The drawings in this room entwine figures in dramas of love and conflict, reflecting his enthusiasm for sensation and romance. Gabriel searched for stories in literature from around the world: popular folk ballads, Arabic tales from One Thousand and One Nights, gothic scenes from German author Goethe's Faust, and new tales of horror by North American writer Edgar Allan Poe.

Gabriel admired artists outside the establishment such as British artist and writer William Blake, French painter Eugène Delacroix and the satirical commentator of French modern life, Paul Gavarni. He sketched his own tableaux of the contemporary city. His lost drawing Quartier Latin. The Modern Raphael and La Fornarina (reproduced nearby) gives us a glimpse of the 16-year-old's idea of the bohemian modern artist. He wanted to modernise the approach of traditional painters such as Raphael (1483–1520).

Image credit:

Dante Gabriel Rossetti Dante Gabriel Rossetti 1847, pencil and white chalk on paper, National Portrait

Homeward Bound

Man and Woman in trousers

While in France, 15-year-old Gabriel saw Gavarni's illustrations of popular performers wearing trousers. Also at this time, some women labourers wore trousers while carrying out their work. These drawings are two out of five sketches Gabriel made of labourers in different variations of a drunken couple staggering down the street. Already, Gabriel's sketches are spontaneous and expressive. He pays attention to the entwined poses of the couple, each variation suggesting a different view of their relationship. As he develops as an artist he will often use expressively interlaced figures to explore complex emotional interactions.

X83779, X83781

Bivouac after the Ball

In this daring drawing of modern city life, a couple has retired from a dance to an out-of-the-way doorstep with their bottle and glasses. Gabriel lived in a crowded 19th-century city, and witnessed dramatic economic and social inequality between the classes and between women and men. He would have been aware of the buying and selling of sex, conducted across class divides, in theatres, dance halls, parks and streets. It was an urban spectacle visible to all.

X83118

Paolo and Francesca

The Rossetti's father, Gabriele Rossetti (1783–1854), was a scholar and translator of the Italian medieval poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and his children all continued this work. Dante's *Inferno* tells of the illicit love between Francesca and Paolo, both locked into arranged marriages, Francesca to Paolo's brother. In Gabriel's entangled composition, Paolo shows Francesca a book depicting the lovers Lancelot and Queen Guinevere; he leans forward while she eagerly pushes open the pages. The closed, curtained space and strange shadows intensify the tension. Afterwards the lovers are observed kissing and are condemned to death.

X83795

Girl Walking or Flying

X84340

Faust, 1846

In Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) macabre play *Faust*, a depressed young scholar sells his soul to the Devil for knowledge and power. *Gabriel* focuses on the escalating mental illness of Faust's lover, Margaret, and her terrifying visions. Here, she is imprisoned after drowning her baby. Margaret repents and accepts execution. At the end of the play she redeems Faust and they are united in Heaven.

X83783

Faust: Margaret in the Church 1848

Gabriel explored Goethe's Faust throughout his career. This drawing shows Mephistopheles, supernatural servant of the Devil, appearing to Margaret. Led to kill her mother and brother, pregnant and distraught, Mephistopheles even terrorises her when she tries to pray in church. Rossetti's version of this scene is more claustrophobic than traditional illustrations, using his characteristic curtain motif and looming shadows. It draws on Gavarni's modern life print of a shivering matchgirl (in the vitrine nearby).

N05745

Retro me Sathana – Get thee behind me Satan

X87090

The Sleeper

The Rossettis read the poems of the American writer Edgar Allen Poe (1809–1849) as soon as they were published. They shared his fascination with love's ability to dissolve the borders between life and death.

Poe's poem The Sleeper inspired a drawing by Gabriel of the same name. Gabriel's scene is set in a city rather than the valley of Poe's poem. The sleeping girl on the window seat

echoes the dead girl in the poem, raising questions about the difference between sleep and death. Gabriel returned to this theme in his poem, *My Sister's Sleep*.

X83131

2 x The Raven

Gabriel was the first of many artists to illustrate Edgar Allan Poe, making four drawings of his most famous poem *The Raven*. A student bereaved of his lover is visited by a raven who throws his shadow across the chamber and answers every question 'nevermore!', until, by the final verse, the student loses his sanity:

'And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor

 Shall be lifted—nevermore!'

Gabriel shows the moment when the student imagines his lover's scent brought by angels from the afterlife.

X83796, X83256

Blessed Damozel

The Blessed Damozel is a sequel Gabriel wrote to Poe's The Raven, written from the perspective of the dead lover. In a startling physical detail, the poem describes how she leans out to look for her man and her bosom warms heaven's golden railing. Her declaration, 'I wish that he were come to me, For he will come', has a sinister twist as it can only be realised by his death. Christina responded with another variation, in which the lover simply speaks from under the earth, indifferent whether they are remembered or not.

Z76681

I wish that he were come to me,

For he will come,' she said

Dante Gabriel Rossetti The Blessed Damozel 1847

Lady Bothwell's Lament

Gabriel illustrated Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament, believed to be an autobiographical song composed in the 17th century.

Lady Bothwell tells her baby about her seduction and abandonment by the child's father. She concludes, tenderly,

'My babe and I right saft will ly,

And quite forgeit man's cruelty.'

X83245

Hermia and Helena (from William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's dream)

X83797

The Man Without a Shadow

Gabriel's interest in shadows perhaps encouraged him to illustrate Peter Schlemihl or The Man with No Shadow, by the German writer Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838). It is a children's story about a man who sells his shadow for gold and finds himself alienated from society as a result. Gabriel's interlocking couple depicts the moment Schlemihl's lover notices the absence and recoils. The lonely hero eventually gives up the gold and immerses himself in the study of the natural world.

X83793

[Vitrine captions]

The Life of William Blake by Alexander Gilchrist

Until 1863, Blake's work was only appreciated by a small circle. His popularity increased through the publication of this biography by Alexander Gilchrist (1828–1861). After the author's death, the book was finished by his widow Anne Gilchrist (1828–1885), with help from William and Gabriel.

Z76824

Blake notebook

Gabriel searched for inspiration in popular artforms and countercultural figures such as the anti-establishment painter-poet William Blake (1757–1827). Today, Blake is one of Britain's most celebrated artists, but he was not well known at the time of his death. When Gabriel was an art student at the Royal Academy, his brother lent him 10 shillings (the equivalent of £75 today) to buy this notebook. Gabriel's frustration with the rules and traditions of the Academy chimed with Blake's, and he dropped out the following year. The Blake notebook remained in Gabriel's studio and influenced him and Elizabeth Siddal throughout their lives as painter-poets.

X84922

Gavarni, Les gens de Paris: petit commerce 1846

French illustrator Paul Gavarni (1804–1866) reflected Parisian society in his modern-life prints for popular journals such as *Journal des gens du monde* and *Le Charivari*. Young street-sellers and rough sleepers were a conspicuous sign of the poverty experienced by many in 19th-century cities.

The young Gabriel collected these inexpensive prints and admired Gavarni's expressive and irreverent style. The pose of a woman folded against a wall reappears in several of his works in this exhibition: *Faust*, *The Annunciation* and *Found*.

Z76815

William Michael Rossetti 2 x landscapes

In Victorian times most girls and women were educated at home while boys were sent to school. Gabriel and William attended Kings College School on the Strand, London, where their father taught Italian. Their art teacher was the British painter John Sell Cotman (1782–1842). William's early drawings of Cotman landscapes suggest that the boys learned by copying his works.

Gabriel left King's College to study art at Sass's Art Academy when he was 13. William stayed until he was 15, when he became a clerk in the government tax office to help the family finances.

X88084, X88083

Filipo Maenza, Portrait of the young Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Gabriel went to stay with the Maenzas, an Italian family living in Boulogne, France, when he was 15, to recuperate from illness. Their son, Filippo, three years older, shared his artistic enthusiasms. Gabriel wrote excitedly to his brother William about popular prints by Gavarni and other illustrators that he saw and collected.

Filippo's portrait of Gabriel was made before Gabriel began to fashion his image for the public. It reveals a pale, untidy, restless boy, but with an intense gaze we'll come to recognise in later images of the artist.

X86938

ROOM 3

ROOM 3A

ANTICLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

[Intermediate text]

Brothers and Sisters

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood brought together a community of men and women from different backgrounds – young first-generation Londoners, making their way in the fast-changing city. They inspired and supported each other, modelled for each other, quarrelled with each other and loved each other.

These lively relationships are recorded in the Pre-Raphaelite Journal, kept by William, and portraits made in homes and improvised studios. Gabriel's caricatures capture the bohemian informality enjoyed by the group.

Image credit:

Dante Gabriel Rossetti Caricature sketch of Pre-Raphaelites, August 1851, pen and wash, Huntingdon Library HM 12910

Woolner

X33140

Lady of Shalott

Both Elizabeth and William Holman Hunt experimented with illustrations of Alfred Lord Tennyson's (1809–1892) poem *The Lady of Shalott*. This is Elizabeth's earliest surviving work. Like Mary in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (hanging nearby), the *Lady of Shalott* is an artist. She is cursed to die if she leaves her castle, so can only transcribe the world through a mirror. When the knight Lancelot rides past, she is inspired with love. The mirror cracks and the loom breaks. She defies the curse to seek Lancelot though it leads to her death.

X41165

Frontispiece to 'The Germ' – Hunt, William Holman

N04636

The Proposal (The Marquis and Griselda)

In this scene from Chaucer's (1340–1400) medieval poem *Canterbury Tales*, a nobleman proposes to the worker Griselda. Like many Pre-Raphaelite works, it critiques the hierarchy of rich and poor and explores love across social classes. The marquis has put Griselda through cruel trials during their courtship, but she has taught him kinder ways. Here, Griselda thinks about her future. The open window suggests she will leave her father's cottage.

The Proposal is the only surviving complete painting by the Pre-Raphaelite brother Frederick Stephens (1827–1907). Griselda was modelled by Elizabeth.

N04633

A Baron Numbering his Vassals

Millais used a feudal, medieval setting to explore the class and labour conflicts of his own industrial and revolutionary times. The stout Baron and his haughty wife counting their 'vassals' contrast with the restless poses and thin bodies of the workers. Two dogs snapping at each other suggests conflict and sharp diagonals add to the tension. This is a design for a large oil painting that was never made.

N04277

Rienzi

William Holman Hunt's first Pre-Raphaelite painting was based on British writer Edward Bulwer-Lytton's (1803–1873) novel about the medieval Italian revolutionary Cola di Rienzo. Born into poverty, Rienzi becomes determined to free Rome from corrupt rule after his brother is killed by noblemen. The book inspired continuations of the Italian nationalist military campaigns in which Gabriele Rossetti had fought. Here, his sons take the heroes' roles. Gabriel is Rienzi with William as Adrian at his side. Holman Hunt painted the landscape on Hampstead Heath, with 'every detail I can see, and with the sunlight brightness of the day itself.'

X33189

Study for 'Christ in the House of His Parents'

This drawing shows Millais trying out a new composition for what was to be his most controversial Pre-Raphaelite painting Christ in the House of his Parents (on view in Tate Britain's collection displays) It depicts the Holy Family in an affectionate, domestic setting as working people, in keeping with the revolutionary ideals and respect for labour that enthused the Pre-Raphaelites at this time.

N04623

James Collinson The Child Jesus

Pre-Raphaelite brother James Collinson (1825–1881) was a fellow art student at the Royal Academy schools. This etching illustrates his poem *The Child Jesus*, in which childhood events symbolise future trials of his adult life. Here, children play at dressing up Jesus as their king, prefiguring the crowning with thorns before the crucifixion. The landscape is executed in Pre-Raphaelite natural detail.

Collinson converted from Catholicism to High Anglican Protestantism to become engaged to Christina, but he returned to his original faith and left the circle when Millais' *Christ in the House of his Parents* was publicly accused of blasphemy.

N02421

Christina Rossetti

Gabriel made this study of Christina for his painting of *Mary*. It reflects his sonnet about the patron saint of artists, *St Luke*, who, according to legend, painted *Mary* from life.

All the pictures in this room cast friends and family in personal dramas. The intense detail of the life studies reveals the artists' intimate perspective, derived from long, close observation of their sitters.

X86478

The Girlhood of Mary Virgin

Gabriel was an atheist, unlike his sisters, but the Pre-Raphaelites appreciated the spiritual and visual force of religious art, symbols and ideas. Gabriel's first Pre-Raphaelite painting cast his mother Frances and sister Christina in a domestic scene that depicted Mary with her mother.

The Pre-Raphaelites sought authenticity through 'truth to nature'. Mary studies a lily to create its image on cloth. Gabriel follows the same method, observing people and things in the bright, precise style of medieval artists. Mary's hair is painted in strands of gold.

N04872

John Ruskin

John Ruskin (1819–1900) was a highly regarded Victorian writer and art critic. He made his name as a commentator on the painter JMW Turner (1775–1851) and became a fierce public defender and patron of the Pre-Raphaelite circle.

X88037

Study of a Man Smoking a Long Pipe

The anti-establishment painter Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893) taught Gabriel outside the Royal Academy and later radically deployed Pre-Raphaelite social and artistic ideas in his work. Here he is shown with one of the many tobacco pipes that were smoked enthusiastically during Pre-Raphaelite meetings.

A00846

Hunt

Millais

Like William Blake before him, Gabriel and his fellow art students at the Royal Academy mocked its founder, the artist Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792). The 'slosh' in this caricature of William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais refers to their low opinion of the generic, conventional Academy style and their nickname for Reynolds, 'Sir Sloshua'.

Z76818, Z76819

Elizabeth Siddal with Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal (1829–1862) was a working-class woman who set out to paint and write poetry. She was employed in a hat shop near Leicester Square when she encountered the Pre-Raphaelite circle, soon after their formation. Her boyish looks made her a suitable model for Viola, in Walter Deverell's (1827–1854) Shakespearean painting *Twelfth Night*. She sat for several Pre-Raphaelite works, most famously *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais. Later she became close to Gabriel, as a model, lover and collaborator.

Z76728

Self-Portrait

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was a distinctive and charismatic figure. He advertised his radicalism through his unusual dress, wearing dark, shabby evening wear in the day.

X83801

3: PRE-RAPHAELITE REVOLUTIONARIES

Christina and Maria explored social justice through their writing and involvement with the Anglican Church. Gabriel and William championed revolution through art. Their father, Gabriele, was an Italian revolutionary forced to flee his homeland. As a result, the London household was often full of visiting activists. In 1848, as the children came of age, popular rebellions against political regimes spread across Europe. With the support of their family and inspired by this spirit of reform, Gabriel, William and five fellow art students founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1848–53). This first British movement of modern art challenged the ‘soulless self-reflections’ of the state-sponsored Royal Academy and its reliance on ‘old master’ styles and subjects from the past, particularly Renaissance painter Raphael.

The men and women in the Pre-Raphaelites’ circle wanted to express themselves authentically, with art and poetry based on lived experience and nature. Their paintings and writings explored stories from the Bible and medieval books that resonated with their modern lives. The group modelled for each other in roles that reflected these interests and ideals. Gabriel drew Elizabeth Siddal, who was studying with him, as a medieval artist painting her self-portrait. She is overseen by a lover modelled by one of the Pre-Raphaelite brothers, Thomas Woolner.

[Image credit]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti Love's Mirror Or A Parable of Love
1850-52, pen and ink over pencil, Birmingham Museum and
Art Gallery

William Michael Rosetti

X33138

[Central vitrine captions]

Several editions of The Germ

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and associates published a manifesto across four issues of their journal called *The Germ: Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art*. Edited by William, it contained poetry, stories, criticism and pictures. Christina contributed under the name Ellen Allayne. William re-published it in 1901 and it has been in print ever since.

Two subjects for the Pre-Raphaelite journal 'The Germ'

Hunt's illustration for the Pre-Raphaelite journal *The Germ* depicts a poem by his fellow Pre-Raphaelite, the sculptor Thomas Woolner, called 'My Beautiful Lady'. It has a familiar theme of mourning. Above, the lover holds a lady as she recklessly reaches for flowers in a stream. Below, he grieves her death as nuns line the background.

Z76722, Z76816, Z76817, Z76820, Z76625, Z76723

ROOM 3B

CLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

Study for "Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante"

This study for an oil painting that was never realised shows how the Pre-Raphaelite artists were inspired by their medieval heroes. Gabriel imagines the early Italian painter Giotto (1267–1337) closely observing the poet Dante Alighieri. Giotto was famous for his realism. We also see Giotto's master Cimabue and Dante's master Cavalcanti reading verses by his master Guinizelli. Art and poetry inspire each other and subsequent generations. Gabriel saw himself as part of this lineage.

N04283

OLD AND NEW ART

The young Pre-Raphaelite artists were pre-occupied with romance and searched out unusual love stories. The Rossettis found special inspiration in medieval Italy and the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321). Their father had devoted his career to teaching, translating and interpreting Dante's work, which his children continued.

Dante Alighieri provided Gabriel with a model of an artist searching for beauty, love and truth in a materialistic world. His critiques of the class and political divides of medieval Florence chimed with modern Victorian London. Gabriel translated the Italian poet's work and even adopted his hero's name, moving it from his middle name to first name.

Dante Alighieri's poems and prose were partly autobiographical. In *The New Life* 1294 he traced his distant adoration of Beatrice Portinari from their childhood, through their dynastic marriages to other people, to her early death. In the *Divine Comedy* 1320 he critiqued Italian society in the form of a journey through the afterlife – Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven – where he eventually meets Beatrice once again. This tragic love story inspired Gabriel's poems, drawings and paintings for the rest of his career.

CLOCKWISE FROM WALL TEXT

Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice

Dante Alighieri's partly autobiographical account of an emotional and spiritual journey *The New Life* describes his love for Beatrice. They saw each other three times before her death and she greeted him only once. Dante's devotion was a private and creative act of imagination in which Beatrice was his muse. He experienced Beatrice's death as a dream in which an angel led him to the deathbed and kissed her. Rossetti often cast Elizabeth as Beatrice in his compositions.

N05229

Dante Drawing an Angel

For Dante, the perfection of his love for Beatrice depended on secrecy and separation from the material world. Here, Gabriel draws the moment her memory inspires Dante to see and draw an angel. Elizabeth sat for the young woman and William for Dante.

The artist-scholar dreaming in his study was a familiar motif in Gabriel's art. The shadows cluttered with paintings, musical instruments and a mirror contrast with the bright garden and cityscape outside. Sunlight illuminates jars of yellow, blue and red paint. The critic John Ruskin admired Gabriel's beautifully detailed creation of another world and became his patron.

X83122

Elizabeth Siddal

X83802

[Vitrine caption]

The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Part 1, The Hell

Z76626

A Shadow of Dante

Z76627, Z76821

Hesterna Rosa

Hesterna Rosa translates to 'yesterday's rose'. The scene illustrates Henry Taylor's (1800–1886) 1834 drama about the medieval reformer, Philip van Artevelde, reflecting on the costs of decadence. It shows the aftermath of a party where the revellers admit they 'feel like flowers that fade'.

Rossetti gave this drawing to fellow Pre-Raphaelite Brother, Frederic Stephens.

N04626

Taurello's First Sight of Fortune

This early design interpreted a scene from a poem about youth, responsibility and power by Rossetti's contemporary Robert Browning (1812–1889). On the ramparts of a medieval castle, the king playfully hands over his rule to Taurello, in the form of his wife's glove. She is in the centre, removing her glove.

The design expresses Rossetti's concept of 'double work of art' in which a picture and a poem provide two different angles on the same idea.

N04627

THE KISSED MOUTH

I care not for my Lady's soul
Though I worship before her smile;
I care not where be my Lady's goal
When her beauty shall lose its wile.
Elizabeth Siddal The Lust of the Eyes c.1850s

The Rossettis explored the ambiguities of love in a materialistic age. Relationships were distorted by wealth, class and status and women's youth and beauty were often a fleeting currency. Christina and Elizabeth wrote poems in the

voices of young women coerced into marriage or seduced and left as outcasts.

The Rossettis questioned Victorian attitudes towards women dismissed by society as 'fallen' or 'ruined'. The most conspicuous drama of this kind was sex bought and sold in streets and places of entertainment. Christina worked in a refuge for women from this world and her allegory of feminist salvation, *Goblin Market* 1862, became her most successful poem.

Sexual fall and redemption was the subject of Gabriel's last and most ambitious Pre-Raphaelite painting, *Found*. His friendship with the model, Fanny Cornforth, a working-class woman, helped change his ideas and it remained unfinished. Instead, Gabriel painted Fanny in *Bocca Baciata* (*The Kissed Mouth*), which marked a new phase of his art.

ANTICLOCKWISE FROM WALL TEXT

Jenny

At 19, Gabriel penned a poem called 'Jenny'. It is an unusual account told through the thoughts, or 'inner standing point', of a man who has bought sex. He has met a woman at a dance, gone to her room and she has fallen asleep on his lap. He wonders about his motivations as well as hers. The poem draws no moral conclusion.

The Gate of Memory

This drawing is a modern-life scene inspired by William Bell Scott's 1838 poem 'Rosabell'. Scott's narrative traced the popular Victorian myth of the 'fallen woman': a poor and naive country girl is tempted from her life as a seamstress into a fake marriage, selling sex, addiction, destitution and eventually death. Gabriel changed the story to consider the possibility of redemption. The Gate of Memory depicts the end of the poem when Rosabell watches children, 'As she were dead while still they sang', but Gabriel's title suggests her memories of innocence are awakened by their song.

X83822

A sketch for Found Found

A woman on the streets of the city unexpectedly meets her former sweetheart. He is a farmer, coming to the city with his calf, netted and trapped behind him. Will she continue with her life, or

choose salvation at the hands of her childhood sweetheart? Found was based on William Bell Scott's tragic poem, 'Rosabell', but Gabriel's title and text suggest redemption. The biblical quote on a gravestone alludes to 'joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth' (Luke 15:7). Underneath the drawing: 'I remember thee: the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy betrothal' (Jeremiah 2:2).

X83824, X24046

Unfinished Found

Gabriel painted various versions of Found, working from nature and with models making slow progress. In 1856, three years after starting the work, he met Sarah Cox, known as Fanny Cornforth. Born into poverty, in domestic work from 14, one of the only surviving members of her family, and visiting London from the country, Gabriel thought she was a good model for the woman. We don't know Fanny's view. She recalled how, on her first sitting at Gabriel's studio, he immediately 'put my head against the wall', like the woman's pose in Found.

X83823

Dunn and Rossetti Found

Dunn Blackfriars Bridge

Gabriel still hoped to finish Found in his 40s. His assistant, the artist Henry Treffry Dunn (1838–1899), roughed out the composition on a new slightly larger canvas, ready for him to start again. Although Gabriel began to paint the calf and the woman's head, this second version remained unfinished like the original a decade before.

Found is set by Blackfriars Bridge, near the studio Gabriel shared with Elizabeth. The area was well known as a location for buying and selling sex. Dunn made a detailed oil study of the bridge, warehouses and river commerce.

X83834, X866837

Found

Gabriel moved on from Pre-Raphaelite style and subjects, and Found was never finished. He had struggled to resolve the work's meaning. The texts and the streetlamps either side of the man's head allude to hope and redemption, but this sits uncomfortably with the realism of the scene: the grim setting, the distress of the woman, and the netted calf. The man's hands grapple with the woman's, and she turns away from him. For Gabriel, the choice between death and redemption may have felt too moralising, especially after he became friends with Fanny Cornforth.

X33202

Bocca Baciata (The Kissed Mouth)

Here, Fanny Cornforth is dressed in jewellery and a loose robe of West Asian style. She is cast as Alatiel, a Babylonian princess in the Decameron, a sensual medieval Italian poem by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375). Misfortunes and adventures lead Alatiel to sexual experiences with men in

several parts of the world. Alatiel overcomes her trials, symbolised by marigolds, and eventually returns to her betrothed and marries him. The title comes from a quote on the back of the painting: 'the kissed mouth loses not its favour, but renews itself like the moon.' The picture is an early example of Gabriel's mature style and the ideas of the aesthetic movement.

X33188

Downie DGR photograph

X86483

Downie Fanny Cornforth photograph

Z76724

Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee

The biblical figure Mary Magdalene was popularly understood in Victorian Britain as a woman who had sold sex to men and found redemption through love of a different kind, for Jesus. The refuge in which Christina worked was called St Mary Magdalene House. Gabriel analysed the relationship between these two kinds of love in this, his most elaborate drawing.

X83183

Fanny and Boyce in the Studio

Gabriel's drawing of Fanny Cornforth watching their friend George Boyce painting in his studio contrasts with her appearance in *Found*. There is an easy acceptance and appreciation of affectionate physicality, unlike the dynamic between the man and woman in *Found*.

George Boyce commissioned the painting *Bocca Baciata*, also displayed in this room.

X83831

Fanny Cornforth (study for 'Fair Rosamund')

X27760

Goblin Market

Christina worked for 10 years at the St Mary Magdalene Penitentiary, Highgate, a religious refuge caring for women who had sold sex. 'Goblin Market' translates their world into a rich allegory of redemption, through the love of two sisters. Goblin merchants tempt Laura to pay for their dangerous fruits with a tear and a golden curl. Unable to feed her addiction, she falls ill and her sister Lizzie visits the goblins. They violently force the fruit on her but she escapes covered in juice without having eaten. When Laura kisses Lizzie she is cured. Gabriel's frontispiece depicts Fanny Cornforth as Laura and Lizzie.

Z76191

CENTRAL WALL

Pippa Passes

Elizabeth addresses working women's often difficult experiences of walking through the city in this early drawing. It was based on Robert Browning's poem, also titled 'Pippa Passes', written 'to speak for the masses ... cuffed and huffed from morn to midnight'. Pippa, a silkwormer, walks through the medieval Italian town of Asolo, singing and inspiring good.

As a working woman, Elizabeth walked through London and took part in its commerce – in her shop near Leicester Square and later as a paid model and artist. Some Victorians considered such worldliness in a woman to be morally dangerous. Pippa counters this idea. Elizabeth underlines the point by choosing to illustrate Pippa's gracious encounter with 'loose women'.

ROOM 4

ROOM 4

CLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

4: MEDIEVAL MODERNS

During their mid-20s, Gabriel and Elizabeth worked together in his studio and had a great influence on each other's work. Their richly patterned drawings and watercolours conjure complex, imaginative worlds. Using themselves as models, they created medieval fantasies in which dramas of love and temptation, loyalty and betrayal are played out. Complicated relationships are expressed in intricate gestures, poses and spaces.

Dialogues between Gabriel and Elizabeth's works in this room make clear the effect they had on each other's art. Private collectors vied to purchase the inventive scenes of both artists. John Ruskin, the leading art critic of the time, made an agreement to buy work. In 1857, Gabriel and Elizabeth showed work together in an exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite art, held in London and New York. By this date however the couple were spending time apart. Elizabeth moved north to Matlock and Sheffield, attending Sheffield School of Art.

After her death in 1862, Gabriel preserved Elizabeth's drawings in a photographic album, which he continued to use for inspiration.

Image credit:

Elizabeth Siddal Two men in a boat and a woman punting
undated, pen and ink on paper, Ashmolean WA1977.103

Writing on the Sand

This couple walking on a breezy beach was posed by Elizabeth and Sir Richard Rivington Holmes, a friend of the Rossettis who worked at the British Museum. The young man sketches a woman's head with his walking-stick, implying love is as fleeting as writing in the sand.

In the year in which this was painted, Elizabeth and Gabriel were reunited at the seaside resort of Hastings, where she was recovering her health. The head in the sand resembles Fanny Cornforth, with whom Gabriel had been spending time during his estrangement from Elizabeth.

X83132

Elizabeth Siddal Reading Paolo and Francesca da Rimini

In his poem, *Inferno*, Dante Alighieri is guided by the Roman poet Virgil through hell. He tells the story of a kiss between Francesca and Paolo, her husband's brother,

...he, who ne'er

From me shall separate, at once my lips

All trembling kiss'd.

The open book depicts Lancelot, who had an affair with King Arthur's wife, Guinevere in British legend. Both couples echo Gabriel and Elizabeth's relationship before their marriage. In the right panel the lovers share a final embrace in death. In the centre, Dante faints with pity.

N04628, N03056

Lady Affixing Pennant to a Knight's Spear

Elizabeth's intimate couple explores the emotional and sexual tension between a lady and a knight who is about to risk his life in battle. Outside, a servant waits with his horse in a dawn landscape. The work coincided with the Crimean War, the first to be widely reported in Britain.

The compositional division of diagonal spears foretells the lovers' oncoming separation. The technique also appears in images of imminent parting by Gabriel, such as *The Tune of the Seven Towers*.

N03202

Tune of the Seven Towers

N03059

Woeful Victory

William summed up *Woeful Victory*: 'Two knights fight for a princess – the one she loves is vanquished'. Elizabeth's chivalric drama drew on the jousting scene in Tennyson's tragic poem 'Elaine'. It might have inspired Gabriel's poem the 'Bride's Prelude', begun on their honeymoon in Paris.

X83804

Siddal Sir Galahad

Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Percival receiving the Sanc Grael
Tennyson's poem 'Sir Galahad' describes the knight's visions of the Holy Grail as he quests through forest, lake and hill. Elizabeth's highly original work shows the vision in all three settings at once: the 'secret shrine', the boat on the 'mountain mere' and the 'branchy thicket' above. Galahad kneels warily to angels who recall the maidens he evades at the beginning of the poem to keep himself pure.

Gabriel's design adapts Elizabeth's trio of figures and the striking detail of the effigy with praying hands.

X83318, X83852

How Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Percival Were Fed with the Sanct Grael

N05234

Siddal, Last Farewell before Crucifixion (new title, written on back)

St John comforting the Virgin at the Foot of the Cross
Gabriel and Elizabeth's scenes from the life of Mary show the artistic conversations that took place in their studio. Elizabeth's Last Farewell before Crucifixion borrows Gabriel's spontaneous, inky graphic style, very different from her first careful designs. Gabriel's take, St John comforting the Virgin, renders Mary at the feet of Christ in a contrastingly simple style. Elizabeth's open-armed Jesus, also used in her Nativities (nearby vitrine), only alludes to the coming crucifixion, focussing instead on the mother and son's embrace.

X83263, X83855

The Haunted Wood
Annunciation
Mary Nazarene

Elizabeth and Gabriel reconsidered his earlier designs for the story of the Virgin Mary. Elizabeth reimagined The Annunciation with Mary standing on the left meeting the Angel on the right. She relocated the scene to a wooded landscape. A tiny watercolour renders the angel as a space between trees. Mary embraces a contrastingly solid trunk and reaches to touch him.

Gabriel adapted these designs in finished watercolours and a reworking of his early image of Mary planting a lily and a rose, Mary Nazarene.

X83259, Z76822, N02860

Siddal La Belle Dame Sans Merci

Siddal Sister Helen 1854

DGRossetti Sister Helen

Elizabeth's drawing Sister Helen illustrates Gabriel's poem of the same name: a conversation between Helen and her little brother. He acts as look-out at a window, while she melts a wax effigy to kill her false lover. Gabriel made his own drawing when he published the poem 16 years later. He adapted Elizabeth's fireside setting and placement of the boy. In Elizabeth's version the effigy lies at Helen's knees, and in Gabriel's it is propped on a stick in front of a bigger fire. His Helen is adapted from another design by Elizabeth, La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

Z76243, X83859, X83850

The Gay Goshawk

Elizabeth's poems and pictures were often inspired by folk songs. She planned to illustrate a book of Scottish ballads. 'The Gay Goshawk' was a ballad about a bird who carries messages between young lovers. The woman eventually feigns death to escape her parents. Elizabeth chooses a shocking episode, in which molten lead is dropped on the heroine's breast to check whether she is dead.

X86482

Sir Patrick Spens

'Sir Patrick Spens' is a ballad which describes a shipwreck from the points of view of those drowning and those waiting on the land.

The ladies wrang their fingers white,

The maidens tore their hair,

All for the sake of their true loves,

For them they'll see nae mair.

Elizabeth devised individual gestures to express the women's grief. A mother encloses her son's face in her hands.

The standing figure is a self-portrait. Disasters at sea were common in Victorian times.

N03471

The Macbeths

These three Scottish subjects show Elizabeth and Gabriel exploring emotional relationships through interlaced figures. Elizabeth's only Shakespearean subject shows the moment when Lady Macbeth takes control. She grabs the bloody daggers that her distressed husband has brought from the chamber in which he has murdered the king, to return them and smear the guards with incriminating blood. Violence and tension are communicated by the angular poses. Elizabeth explores Gabriel's ink technique, adding to the agitation with diagonal hatching and scratching.

X83312

Clerk Saunders

The knight Clerk Saunders is discovered in bed with his betrothed, May Margaret, by her brothers. They kill him and she wakes in his arms to find him dead. His ghost returns asking to be released from their engagement. Margaret begs to kiss him but he explains it would kill her too.

Clerk Saunders was exhibited in London and New York and sold to a collector. Gabriel later asked for its return, 'to add to those of hers which are now mine, and which every year teaches me to value more & more as works of genius'.

X40279

Carlisle Wall

In several works, Gabriel explores the kiss as a moment of love, inspiration and transcendence. He painted Carlisle Wall after visiting the Scottish Borders with his friend William Bell Scott. The image was based on the ballad *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* by Walter Scott (1771–1832). Reunited lovers kiss at dawn, on the brink of overcoming the feud between their families that has kept them apart. The windswept couple are united in colour and enclosed in each other's arms. She buries her head in his shoulder as he kisses their clasped hands.

N05921

Siddal St Cecilia

Tennyson Poems

'Or in a clear-wall'd c'ty on the sea,
Near gilded organ-pipes, her hair
Wound with white roses, slept St. Cecily;
An angel look'd a' her.'

Elizabeth drew on Gabriel's Design for an Unknown Subject for her series representing a tapestry described in Tennyson's 'The Palace of Art'. It depicts St Cecilia asleep at her organ, watched by angel.

Gabriel, in turn, drew on her design for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems. St Cecilia's sleep becomes a union with the angel, modelled by Elizabeth.

X83857, Z76207

Siddal St Agnes' Ev'

Princes Progress

Elizabeth was one of the first artists to illustrate Tennyson's poems. Her studies of St Agnes Eve were drawn within a rectangle and planned as a woodblock illustration to an edition of his poems. Elizabeth was not, however, among the Pre-Raphaelite artists selected to contribute to the final book published by Moxon.

A decade later, Elizabeth's design inspired Gabriel's frontispiece for Christina's third published collection, *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*. Both scenes represent women waiting for a bridegroom. *St Agnes Eve* was Christina's favourite work by Elizabeth, and Gabriel gave his sister the watercolour.

X83260, Z76244

Lady Clare

The Rossettis often told stories of love across social divides. Elizabeth's *Lady Clare* shows the most emotional moment in Tennyson's poem of the name. About to marry her childhood sweetheart, Lord Ronald, the noblewoman discovers she is the daughter of her childhood nurse. Her mother pleads with Clare not to tell Ronald. The simultaneous reunion and betrayal of mother and daughter is expressed through their interlocked bodies and Clare's gesture as she opens the door, pushing her hand in her mother's face.

X34090

Arthur's Tomb

This scene from Thomas Malory's 15th-century poem '*Le Morte d'Arthur*' (The Death of Arthur) follows the affair

between Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere. She becomes a nun after Arthur's death and the revelation of her adultery, but Lancelot interrupts her mourning. Conflict is dramatised by Guinevere's hand in Lancelot's face as he callously leans over the effigy. The composition is claustrophobic, divided by blue shadows. The tree recalls the biblical Garden of Eden, but instead here the man tempts the woman.

N03283

[Central Vitrine Captions]

Studies for 'The Nativity'

Three Studies for La Belle Dame sand Merci

Three Studies for 'Sister Helen'

X88269, X88299, X84543

Portfolio pages x 3

After Elizabeth's death, Gabriel collected and photographed 67 of her drawings. 52 of the photographs also survive as glass negatives. Four sets were pasted into four albums. These three boards are from the set retained by Gabriel, titled in his hand 'LIZZIE ROSSETTI Photos of Drawings DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S Copy'.

The portfolios helped Gabriel and others take inspiration from what Gabriel called Elizabeth's 'inventive genius'. Now, the fragile reproductions allow us to glimpse some of Elizabeth's lost works. This is the first time they have been exhibited.

ROOM 5

ROOM 55: THE HOUSE OF LIFE

ANTICLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

5: THE HOUSE OF LIFE

I was a child beneath her touch,—a man
When breast to breast we clung, even I and she,—
A spirit when her spirit looked through me,—
A god when all our life-breath met to fan
Our life-blood, till love's emulous ardours ran,
Fire within fire, desire in deity.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti 'The Kiss', *The House of Life* c.1860

The Rossettis invented new ways to love and live, which they reflected in their home environments. Although they shared many prejudices of the Victorian age, they aligned themselves with progressive ideas such as women's rights and social reform.

By 1860, Maria and Christina had each chosen a single life. They lived together and worked in the community through an Anglican order of nuns. William would remain single until his late 40s, when he married the artist and writer Lucy Maddox Brown. Meanwhile, Gabriel and Elizabeth, and others in the circle, wed and set up home together.

Like several other couples in their group they came from different social classes, which was unusual for the times. These unconventional households inspired new art, dress and designs for living.

Gabriel and Elizabeth's marriage lasted two years until she died in 1862. He traced their emotional and artistic journey in a series of poems that modernised Dante's *The New Life*, which he called *The House of Life*.

Wallpaper:

Dante Gabriel Rossetti Design for Wallpaper 1861, original drawing untraced. After Elizabeth and Gabriel married, he made a wallpaper design which they planned for their new drawing room. It wasn't completed, but has been created here for the first time from Gabriel's drawing and notes on colour. His design explores the idea of a 'wood of love', a medieval motif seen in Elizabeth's *Lovers Listening to Music* (hanging nearby) and revived by artists in the later 19th century. Among the trees, apples and stars glow against a dusk sky.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti Portraits of Elizabeth Siddal

X83863, X83864

Lovers Listening to Music

Elizabeth and Gabriel began to make images which suggested feelings rather than stories, exploring all the senses.

Elizabeth transformed a favourite cliff walk to 'Lover's Seat' near Hastings into a timeless vision. Lovers, based on Gabriel and herself, sit in an expansive landscape. They are singing to music performed by two women who Gabriel described as 'Egyptian girls', playing on an Indian santoor. The young woman and the foreground musician are in a trance and the musician swishes her loose hair. They are perhaps lost in a sensual world while an angel-like cupid waits at the entrance to the 'wood of love' – a medieval motif.

X88277

The Blue Closet

Gabriel took up the subject of four musicians in one of his most famous designs, The Blue Closet. The work reflects his and Elizabeth's idea of their home as a palace of art. It was bought by the designer William Morris and helped inspire the British Arts and Crafts and aesthetic movements.

Like Elizabeth's Lovers Listening to Music (hanging nearby) The Blue Closet imagines timeless beauty by combining medieval European designs with West Asian motifs, notably the blue tiles. The circle increasingly admired aesthetic fantasy worlds, borrowing from other cultures interchangeably. Gabriel made studies of Elizabeth kneeling to play similar instruments.

N03057

[Intermediate text]

Orientalism

The art of the Rossettis blended the symbolic and decorative aspects of European medieval craft with other styles and subjects borrowed from cultures around the world. Motifs from modern Asia, North Africa and South America played an important role in their search for beauty and the development of aesthetic art and design. Transport, trade and conflict circulated ideas and objects around the globe. Gabriel and his friends competed to collect fabrics, jewellery, porcelain, musical instruments and other artefacts which they associated with an imagined idea of the 'orient'. British audiences enjoyed imagining distant cultures as deeply different from their own, alluringly 'exotic' and connected to an archaic past. Their part in the modern world was played down. While false 'orientalist' fantasies inspired literature and art, they also expressed imperial ideas of British superiority that justified British invasion and interventions in other nations.

Dantis Amor

When newly-weds Jane and William Morris moved into their home, the Red House, Gabriel made them three medieval style panels to decorate a seat, illustrating Dante Alighieri's poem *The New Life*. The central panel, *Dantis Amor*, depicts Beatrice's death, with Dante's love for her represented as a marriage between the sun and the moon. In the centre, a winged figure of Love holds a sundial symbolising time, loss and eternity. Christ looks down from a radiating sun, meeting Beatrice's gaze from a crescent moon and field of stars. Gabriel modelled Christ on himself, and Beatrice on Elizabeth.

N03532

Sofa Chair

The conspicuous consumption that characterised fashionable Victorian interior design did not suit Elizabeth and Gabriel's ideal of a more authentic life. They sought out and adapted furniture that was basic and true to its materials and methods of making. They found beauty in handcraft rather than elaborate ornamentation, and liked open, gracefully turned wood. Gabriel collaborated with William Morris's design firm to create rush-seated chairs and this early-19th-century style sofa for his and Elizabeth's home. On the back are insets representing Love, the Loving or Lover, and the Beloved, painted by Gabriel.

X83187, X88082

Chest

Stained glass

From 1861, Gabriel was a founding partner in Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co which made and marketed designs such as the Rossetti Chair (nearby). He contributed 'Music' and 'Gardening' panels for the King René's Honeymoon Cabinet, exhibited at London's International Exhibition in 1862. The cabinet celebrated the 15th-century patron, King René of Anjou, who created a palace of art for his new wife, Jeanne de Laval. 'Music' shows the couple inspired to kiss, echoing Love's Greeting (hanging nearby). The design reappeared in a stained-glass panel made for the library of artist Miles Birkett Foster. It is typical of the way the Arts and Crafts and aesthetic movements adapted religious art for decorative purposes.

X38513, X38867

Early Italian Poets

Roman de la Rose

Gabriel published his translations of Dante Alighieri's *The New Life* and other medieval poems in *Early Italian Poets*. The frontispiece explores a motif from the medieval tradition of courtly love, 'love's greeting'. A kiss takes place in a garden of love, symbolised by roses and accompanied by angelic song and music. It came from the poem *Roman de la Rose*, by French 13th-century poet Guillaume de Lorris, which Gabriel translated in his 20s. He used the image in several watercolours, becoming increasingly concerned with an equivalence between music, pattern and colour, characteristics of the aesthetic movement.

N04089

Rossetti's hair

Siddal's hair

In Victorian times it was common to snip off a lock of hair to remember a person who had died. In life, Elizabeth's hair played a special, sensual role in Gabriel's paintings and poems. This lock has accumulated further significance since her death, informed by stories of Gabriel leaving books of poetry among her tresses when she was buried, and myths that the hair still filled the coffin when the poems were

retrieved seven years later.

Z76362, Z76503

[Vitrine captions]

Manuscript

Poems

Poems

Gabriel buried his unfinished sequence 'House of Life' with Elizabeth. It was perhaps a message from their life together to take into the next. Gabriel continued to write and in 1869 agreed to the retrieval of the manuscript from the coffin. The damaged early version of 'The Portrait' is one of several pages that may have been buried.

Gabriel published Poems the following year. Christina's collection had been met with acclaim, but the sensuality of Gabriel's works such as 'The Kiss' and 'Nuptial Sleep' led to criticism .

Z76206, Z76721

Watch

Gabriel returned to the motif of the marriage of sun and moon which he had depicted in *Dantis Amor* (hanging opposite) in a design for a watch. Again, he gives the sun his features, and the moon Elizabeth's, but the figure of Love with a sundial is replaced by the watch itself. The theme of love, time and eternity is poignant after the death of Elizabeth the same year. The crested bird on the case of the watch echoes the 'messenger of death' in *Beata Beatrix* (hanging nearby), symbolising change and transition.

X86487

Beata Beatrix

Gabriel paralleled Dante Alighieri's despair at the death of his beloved Beatrice and his own feelings after Elizabeth died. *Beata Beatrix* portrays Elizabeth as Beatrice. Gabriel imagines her death as 'spiritual transfiguration', in a dream-like Florentine setting. A bird brings her an opium poppy as a 'messenger of death' and the sundial behind symbolises time. In the background, Dante looks across at Love, an angel holding the flame of Beatrice's life. The Ponte Vecchio bridge over the River Arno recalls the transition to the underworld across the River Styx from Greek mythology and Dante's *Inferno*. The hazy light, colour and symbols look forward to

the Aestheticism and the international Symbolist movement later in the century.

N01279

[Intermediate text]

The Death of Elizabeth Siddall

Few people's deaths have been so mythologised as Elizabeth Siddal's. She was one of many Victorians who lived with a dependency on Laudanum (a mix of opium and alcohol). Opiates were used as painkillers are today. They were cheap and freely available due to lucrative poppy cultivation and trade encouraged in the British Empire. Addiction was poorly understood and Laudanum drops were overprescribed to women and children.

On 11 February 1862, Elizabeth and Gabriel dined out before he went to teach at the Working Men's College. On his return, he found her unconscious with an empty bottle of Laudanum beside her. A doctor treated Elizabeth, but she died the following morning.

Elizabeth's life and death became part of Gabriel's art. She was remembered in his story as a tragic muse rather than an artist and poet. It would be 130 years before an exhibition was devoted to her work alone.

2 x Nativities

Elizabeth and Gabriel made several variations of the biblical nativity before their marriage. Hers focused on the physical and emotional bond between Mary and Jesus in a setting which recalls a medieval garden of love. The baby's outstretched arms are at once eager and a reminder of his fate in the future, the crucifixion. Gabriel commended the compositions as 'most lovely and original'.

In Victorian times, parents had fewer choices around birth. In delaying their marriage, Elizabeth and Gabriel postponed parenthood. Birth held danger for the mother and the baby. Gabriel and Elizabeth's first child was stillborn.

X83262, X83258

St Catherine

A medieval artist in his studio paints a woman posing as St Catherine. She holds a palm branch, which symbolises her martyrdom, and a wheel, the instrument of torture on which she was killed. Elizabeth was the model for the painting.

N04603

In an Artist's Studio

2 x Rossetti Siddal

Christina Rossetti wrote 'In an Artist's Studio' during a period when Gabriel and Elizabeth argued more than usual and separated. The sonnet questions the relationship between dream and reality, muse and maker, looking and being looked at. The artist obsessively feeds, vampire like, on 'One face' but fails to capture her reality and her sadness: 'Not as she is, but as she fills his dream'. Christina did not publish this poem during her lifetime.

X85877, X83865

Elizabeth Siddal, Paris

Elizabeth Siddal and Dante Gabriel Rossetti explored Paris together to Paris in their 20s and returned for their honeymoon. She also travelled independently and visited France several times.

X88039

Bodichon, Howitt and Rossetti portraits of Siddal

Elizabeth and Gabriel were friends of the artists Barbara Bodichon (1827–1891) and Anna Howitt (1824–1884). The couple saw themselves as 'sisters in love and unity'. They pursued an independent lifestyle and were leading campaigners for women's equality and suffrage. Bodichon's home and farm on the South Coast was a place of refuge for artists, campaigners and women who were active in demanding more equality, known as 'New Women'. Elizabeth and Gabriel visited and Elizabeth sat with irises in her hair for these portraits by the other artists.

X83861, X83860, Z76247

ROOM 6

ROOM 6

CLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

6: VENUS SURROUNDED BY MIRRORS

Gabriel's late paintings cast working-class models in fantasies, far from their modern world. This room presents studies of the people who posed for *The Beloved*. The lives of working-class models were rarely recorded, but recent research reveals something of their experiences.

Gabriel's composition for *The Beloved* was inspired by Renaissance artist Titian's painting *Woman with a Mirror* 1515, conceived as a Venus figure surrounded by many mirrors.

He adapted this into an image inspired by the biblical 'Song of Solomon', about a young woman meeting her bridegroom, surrounded by attendants. In his eyes, the seven figures represented a more universal vision of female beauty'.

Created at a time when Britain was more connected to the globe through travel and colonial expansion, *The Beloved* is Gabriel's only oil painting to include models of colour. The work was conceived during the American Civil War (1861–5) when newspapers debated universal freedom and the liberation of Black people enslaved in the Southern US states. The figures, flowers and accessories in the painting are appropriated from cultures around the world, particularly

those from Asia and North Africa. They represent an 'orientalist' fantasy which mis-imagined these areas as archaic, exotic and interchangeable.

Fanny Eaton, study for *The Beloved*

Fanny Eaton (born Entwistle, 1835–1924) was a well-known model in the Rossettis' circle, known for her talent in expressing profound thought or emotion. Her contemplative look in this drawing contrasts with her lively gaze in *The Beloved* (she is at the top-right). Other artists in the circle depicted her in similar dramatic or thoughtful poses.

Fanny was born in Jamaica just after slavery was formally abolished in British colonial territories in 1833, and came to London with her mother. She worked from her teens to her 70s as a cleaner, laundress, seamstress and cook. The lives of working class Victorians were rarely recorded in detail.

In her 20s Fanny was an artist's model at the Royal Academy Schools, as well as sitting privately. Modelling paid at least twice as much as the tiny amount women could earn in laborious service roles. Careers were reliant on appearance, however, and tended to be limited to about 10 years. There were many people of colour living in Victorian Britain in all walks of life, but artists tended to employ them for a narrow range of Old Testament and 'oriental' roles, like *The Beloved*.

X83873

2 Studies of Girl's Heads for The Beloved

Two girls and a boy sat for the foreground child in *The Beloved*. Their names are not recorded. At first, Gabriel based the child on a sketch of one of the girls, but then painted over her with a likeness of the boy (hanging nearby).

The older girl in these studies is probably Fanny Matilda Eaton (1858–1939), the eldest daughter of Fanny Eaton. She was about seven years old when her mother sat for *The Beloved*. Fanny and her husband James, a cab-driver, had 10 children, who Fanny raised alone after James' death.

Z76674, Z76671

2 Studies for the young boy in the Beloved

Little is known of this boy, a visitor to London. Gabriel met him outside a hotel. Children had few rights in Victorian times. In this case, Gabriel negotiated the boy's modelling work with an American described as his 'master', suggesting he was a student, servant or born into slavery.

His gaze engages the viewer strongly, but Gabriel's main intention was aesthetic. He wanted a model with what he described as 'pure' African heritage to add a different skin tone to the composition. This decorative and dehumanising role is clear from a letter he wrote to the painting's buyer: 'I mean the colour of my picture to be like jewels, and the jet would be invaluable.'

Z76698, Z76672

The Beloved

The Beloved illustrates Old Testament lines:

My Beloved is mine and I am his.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of the mouth: for thy love is better than wine

She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. The bride in the centre moves her veil to meet her groom, the 'King'. As viewers, we take his place. She is surrounded by her attendants and a boy who offers her the King's gift, a vase of roses. The picture was created for a wealthy banker, George Rae.

Gabriel, imagined 'universal beauty' as an array of racialised appearances and cultural accessories, styled as an 'oriental' fantasy. The bride wears a Japanese kimono and Chinese-style headdress. The boy's headdress is made from a Danish necklace and his pendant is North African. The attendants have medieval-style brocades and the woman at the top right wears a spiral seed pearl brooch, designed by the artist. However, the picture departs from the West Asian and North African biblical setting to portray the bride, the central object of affection, as a white European. Viewed today, the work is sometimes seen as idealising whiteness.

N03053

Keome Gray Bonnet, Study for the Beloved

Keomi Gray Bonnet (1841– 1914) was a musician from a Roma family who lived in East Anglia. She is the figure on the right. During her 20s her partner was the painter Edward Sandys, also a member of the Rossettis' circle. They had four children together. She worked as a model in London before returning to East Anglia. British artists were fascinated by Keomi's heritage, manner and appearance. Like Fanny Eaton, she was often painted in archaic roles, as spirited figures from myth, tossing her head as she is in *The Beloved*.

X83896

Study for the Bride

Of all the sitters for *The Beloved*, least is known about the woman in the centre, Mary Ford (dates unknown). According to Gabriel, her 'bright', 'irresistible' face inspired him to cast her as the bride. He also described her in a poem:

'What were my prize, could I enter thy bower ...?

Large lovely arms and a neck

like a tower ... My hand around thy neck and thy hand on my shoulder,

My mouth to thy

mouth as the world melts away.'

'The Song of the Bower' 1859

N04284

Ellen Smith study for The Beloved

Ellen Smith (dates not known) was a laundress who worked as a successful Pre-Raphaelite model. Her likeness was probably used for both figures on the left-hand-side of the painting. Smith's career ended early and tragically when a soldier cut and disfigured her face in a public house. Smith married a cabman and returned to unreliable work as a laundress.

Z76673

[Vitrine captions]

Bracelet

Gabriel collected, borrowed and adapted jewellery from cultures around the world to ornament his later portraits. In *The Beloved* the bride wears this plaited-gold bracelet set with rubies. It takes the form of a makara, a legendary sea-creature, and was probably made in Myanmar.

Such objects were used in art to construct a British fantasy of an oriental 'other' seen as timeless whatever their real origins or dates. In fact, old and new objects came from all parts of the British Empire and this bracelet was made for the modern, global market. Gabriel gave it to Jane Morris.

X83871

[Intermediate text]

In the Studio

Gabriel's working process can be traced through this photograph of the partially complete *The Beloved* in his studio. It marks another moment in the making of the work and gives a glimpse of the models' experiences while sitting. The jewellery, drapery and flowers are unfinished, and the painting is not as big as the final version (Gabriel went on to extend the edges of the canvas). The girl's likeness has been scraped away and replaced with the boy's, but the outline of her hair can still be seen behind his head.

Little is known of the boy's experience of sitting. Gabriel is believed to have said he was both playful and tearful, and wondered whether he missed his mother. Where the girl models were drawn clothed, the boy was required to pose partly undressed. This may have contributed to his discomfort, expressed, perhaps, in the serious gaze. For the artist, the nudity objectified his appearance, displayed his dark skin and removed him from the present to the archaic fantasy space.

The boy's jewelled headdress and unfinished pendant do not appear in the drawing (hanging nearby). He may have worn them only when sitting for the painting, or they may have been added afterwards. The cup he offers is empty in the

drawing and photograph, without the roses. While the girl would have played the role of one of the bride's attendants, Gabriel seems to have cast the boy as the representative of the king.

The Beloved, photographer unknown

Z76725

ROOM 7

ROOM 7

CLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

7: POETIC PORTRAITS

By the time they reached their 30s and 40s, the Rossettis' work had won them financial security and growing fame. Christina became a celebrity after publishing *Goblin Market and Other Poems* in 1862, and William worked as a leading critic and editor alongside his civil service career. Gabriel found success away from the mainstream, displaying his work in alternative exhibition spaces and selling to private enthusiasts. He went on to lead a new avant-garde group even more influential than the Pre-Raphaelites: the aesthetic movement. This would change ideas, art and design around the world.

Gabriel's portraits reflected the aesthetic movement's ideals of 'art for art's sake' and a new modern beauty. He adapted the likenesses of working-class women of unconventional appearance, notably model Alexa Wilding, into fantasies of enchanting femininity. Inspired by Renaissance portraiture and mythological texts, these sensual portraits suggested touch, sound and scent as well as vision. They emphasised the pleasure of form and colour, looking ahead to the abstract art of the following century.

The portraits were paired with poems, 'double works of art' where words question images and images question words. They reflected Gabriel's complex thoughts around 'Body's Beauty' and 'Soul's Beauty'.

Christina Rossetti

Gabriel's grand portrait of his sister draws on the rounded, monumental forms of Renaissance religious art. She is simply dressed and the single book advertises her learning and profession as a poet. Christina had enjoyed success with *Goblin Market and Other Poems* and had just published her third collection, *The Princes Progress and Other Poems*. She would go on to publish 16 further volumes of poetry, fiction and religious writing. Christina died of breast cancer at the age of 64

X87097

Elizabeth Siddal Plaiting Her Hair

Study for Tibullus

Gabriel's drawings of Elizabeth were some of his first to explore self-sufficient, mysterious women. He depicts her absorbed in dressing her hair or absently running it between her lips. Free tresses of hair indicated a private space. The self-contained activities of brushing, handling or biting depicted in these drawings exclude the viewer from her sensual world. In Gabriel's writing, however, hair was often a means of contact. It is described as touching or falling across a lover's face in *The Blessed Damozel and Other Poems*.

X83926, N04629

Lady having her hair combed out

X83905

Fanny Cornforth

Cassandra

For Gabriel, hair was an expression of women's power. His sonnet 'Cassandra' begins: 'Rend, rend your hair, Cassandra: he will go'. The prophet Cassandra foretells the destruction of Troy. She pulls her hair in frustration at not being heeded. Gabriel's preparatory drawings of Fanny Cornforth show her holding out her hair dramatically.

X83184, X84025

Aurelia (Fazio's mistress)

Aurelia depicts Fanny Cornforth as Angiola of Verona, described in a medieval poem by the Italian Fazio degli Uberti (1301–1367) that Gabriel translated. As the poem suggests, we are physically close to Angiola, in her private room.

'I look at the crisp golden-threaded hair
Whereof, to thrall my heart, Love twists
a net ...'

But psychologically Aurelia is inaccessible, gazing beyond the picture.

The pose was inspired by Titian's Renaissance painting, *Woman with a Mirror* 1515, also the inspiration for *The Beloved* (previous room)¹¹²

N03055

Lucrezia Borgia

Gabriel engaged with the idea of the dangerous, sexualised 'fatal woman' or the 'femme fatale'. This usually negative figure of feminine power responded to Victorian anxieties about social change. It became a popular fantasy figure towards the end of the century, and persists in literature and art today.

Gabriel painted Fanny Cornforth as the Renaissance noblewoman Lucrezia Borgia (1480–1519), washing her hands after poisoning her husband. In the mirror, we see her father Pope Alexander VI (1431–1503) helping the Duke walk to make sure the poison circulates through his body.

N03063

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

'I set her on my pacing steed
And nothing else saw all day long
For sideways would she lean & sing
A fairies' song'

Elizabeth and Gabriel planned watercolours of John Keats' (1795–1821) poem about a supernatural, fairy enchantress, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (The Beautiful Lady Without Mercy). Both artists showed the knight enchanted by the Lady's long hair. In Gabriel's drawing of the same subject,

his most extreme variation, he kisses her hand as it pulls a strand around his neck like a rope.

X83925

Lady Lilith (drawing)

Gabriel's drawing of Fanny Cornforth, Lady Lilith, relates to his poem 'Eden's Bower'. Gabriel conceived this as an origin story of the 'femme fatale'. Lilith was Adam's independent-minded first wife who he replaced with Eve. In revenge, Lilith seduced and persuaded the serpent to tempt Eve. This led to expulsion from Eden's bower and the fall of mankind.

Lilith says to the snake:

'Would'st thou know the heart's hope of Lilith?

(Sing Eden Bower!)

Then bring thou close thine head till it glisten

Along my breast, and lip me and listen.'

X83902

Lilith (painting)

Gabriel described this painting as a 'modern' version of Lilith (hanging nearby). It is a 'double work of art'. His sonnet 'Lilith (Body's Beauty)' explores sensual love and 'the perilous principle in the world being female from the first'. Gabriel relates the figure of Lilith to feminine power. He connected her to 'New Women' of the time, who were campaigning for more equal rights. The composition echoes Aurelia and the first version of this work was based on Fanny Cornforth. Later, the painting was modified to a likeness of the model Alexa Wilding (1847–1884).

X33203

Sibylla Palmifera

'Behind this figure of the ideal and inaccessible beauty, an inlaid wall of alternate alabaster and black marble bears inwrought on its upper part the rival twin emblems of love and death.'

Algernon Charles Swinburne

This double work of art was made in response to Lilith (hanging nearby), which was instead paired with Veronica Veronese (hanging on the opposite wall). The accompanying sonnet 'Sybilla Palmifera, Soul's Beauty' describes a classical prophetess of spiritual love. The palm lends her authority and butterflies symbolise the soul.

X83189

Head of Andromeda

Gabriel cast Alexa Wilding as the mythic princess Andromeda for a planned 'double work of art', *Aspecta Medusa*. The title invites us to imagine an invisible presence, the reflection of the beheaded Medusa looking back at Andromeda from the water below. Perseus had used the Medusa's deathly gaze to rescue the princess from a sea monster. The Medusa could only be viewed safely in a mirror.

The painting would have shown Perseus holding the head over a pool while Andromeda leaned in to look. The Renaissance-style portrait studies in chalk that Gabriel made in this period were sought after by collectors.

X83899

Veronica Veronese

This likeness of Alexa Wilding was conceived as a variation of La Ghirlandata (hanging opposite) and companion to Lilith (hanging nearby) for the merchant and collector Frederick Leyland (1831–1892). Veronica Veronese alludes to the art of Venice and exhibits the opulence of High Renaissance paintings. 'Soul's beauty' is represented as the creation of a song. The music of an uncaged bird inspires Veronica to invent a melody for a poem she has just written. The sumptuous dress was made by Jane Morris.

X83929

Mnemosyne

The Blessed Damozel

Proserpine

These works were hung in the drawing room of Gabriel's patron Frederick Leyland and are shown here together for the first time since. Painted in the last decade of Gabriel's life, they explore the beauty of pattern, shape, and a narrow colour palette, predominantly in shades of green. The paintings present three likenesses of Jane Morris, which study the relationship between memory and loss. The Blessed Damozel in heaven and her lover on earth think of each other. They are flanked by the mythic women Mnemosyne, goddess of memory, and Proserpine, remembering life from the underworld.

X83904, X83190, N05064

[Intermediate text]

Worldly Pictures for Worldly Patrons

Gabriel's poetry was sometimes rejected as obscene and 'fleshly', but his sumptuous paintings were prized by wealthy collectors. This new generation of bankers, merchants and industrialists was enriched by the commerce of empire. Gabriel's search for universal beauty and use of orientalist fantasies appealed to an imperial tendency to see the world as a treasure trove.

Collector Frederick Leyland displayed five of the paintings hanging nearby in his drawing room. Leyland was from a modest background and built a large company running steamships between Britain and North America. Much of his trade was based on the cotton that fed textile manufacturing in northern British towns. It came from the American South, where exploitative labour continued after the abolition of slavery. Leyland was a key figure in the aesthetic movement and used his wealth to transform his Liverpool and London homes into palaces of modern art.

La Ghirlandata

The garlanded lady plays a harp. It is carved, inlaid and decorated with flowers, blending the beauty of art and nature. The work is a likeness of Alexa Wilding and the angels were modelled by Jane and William Morris's young daughter May. The picture is a song of colour, dominated by green, linking painting to the abstract beauty of the other arts in the style of the aesthetic movement. It inspired the subject and Venetian style of Veronica Veronese (hanging opposite).

X83928

Monna Pomona

Rossetti painted the professional model Ada Vernon as a Renaissance beauty. 'Pomona' refers to the Roman goddess of orchards and fruit. She is shown in a private space, her hair loose, dressing or undressing. The work explores 'body's beauty' and appeals to all the senses: the taste, texture and aroma of the apple, the scent and softness of flowers, the coolness of the metal beads against warm skin and the heaviness of the drapery and hair.

N02685

Venus Verticordia

Many of Gabriel's aesthetic portraits, such as *Monna Vanna*, *Aurelia* and *The Beloved*, began as images of Venus, the Roman goddess of love. *Venus Verticordia* alludes to Venus's ability to change 'bodily' love, symbolised by the apple, to 'soul's' love, shown by the butterflies and echoed in the transition from honeysuckle to roses. The agent of change, symbolised by the arrow, is both Venus's beauty, and that of the painting. Gabriel's idea of two kinds of beauty is reflected in the two models: Venus's face is a likeness of Alexa Wilding, but the model for the body is only recorded as a 'cook'.

X85617

Monna Vanna

One of Gabriel's most celebrated 'double works', *Monna Vanna* investigates the sensual, 'bodily beauty' of the model Alexa Wilding. It reflects Gabriel's enthusiasm for the opulent fabrics, rhythmic curves and soft lighting of High Renaissance art. *Monna Vanna* began as an imaginary portrait of Monna, who appears in the poems of Dante and Boccaccio, but was later named *Belcolore* (Beautiful Colour).

The work reflects the ideals of the aesthetic movement; the picture appeals to all the senses and evokes feeling through beauty of colour, contour and texture. Touch is suggested by

the feather caressing Monna's throat, the satin robe, chilly glassware and coral beads.

Monna Vanna is a good example of the many changes that took place while making these experimental canvases. Recent X-rays show Gabriel changed the model mid-painting, as he did for Lilith. Completion was delayed by many adjustments of composition, to the background and Gabriel added canvas strips to adjust the proportions of the canvas.

N03054

Ligeia Siren

Gabriel was interested in giving poetry and painting the qualities of music. He wrote a verse to be set to music called 'The Doom of the Sirens'. Sirens are femmes fatales of legend, women-like beings whose song lures sailors to their death. The lead siren was doomed to fall in love and suffer the fate she had brought others. This image of her singing and playing an Indian sarinda aligns the enchanting power of bodily and musical beauty.

X00609

[Vitrine captions]

Speaking Likenesses

Shelley

Mary Shelley

Whitman Poems

In their 40s and 50s the Rossettis' books and poems continued to break new ground. Christina produced illustrated volumes of nursery rhymes and the fantasy tale, *Speaking Likenesses*. William remained the most radical in his political and social ideas and promotion of original artists. His edition of the poems of Walt Whitman introduced the controversial American poet to Britain. William and his wife Lucy Madox Brown Rossetti also wrote biographies of the poets Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) and Mary Shelley (1797–1851, the writer of *Frankenstein*).

Z76727, Z76811, Z76810, Z76812

ROOM 8

ROOM 8

CLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

8: OBSESSION

Gabriel's final years were dominated by his love and friendship with Jane Morris (born Jane Burden) (1839–1914). Jane was 18 years old and a domestic worker in Oxford when Gabriel met her outside a theatre and asked her to pose as Queen Guinevere. His team, including artist and designer William Morris (1834–1896), were painting murals based on the legends of King Arthur in the Oxford University Union. Shortly afterwards, Jane and William Morris married. Their home (the Red House, in Bexleyheath) became a creative hub where men and women in the circle experimented with designs for living. William Morris founded a cooperative design company, with Gabriel and others, which would become the family firm Morris & Co. The international Arts and Crafts movement was soon to follow.

Gabriel and William Morris shared the tenancy of Kelmscott Manor, a country house in Oxfordshire. The trio were open with their relationships, and in the early 1870s Jane and Gabriel became lovers. Even when they were apart, her presence haunts his work. Her role in his last major paintings was little known during Gabriel's increasingly reclusive lifetime.

[intermediate text]

Death and the Rossettis

Death was part of Victorian life. Before modern medical science and the founding of the National Health Service, childbirth was dangerous. Elizabeth and Gabriel experienced stillbirth, and Lucy and William's youngest son died when he was two years old. Life expectancy was half what it is today. William was the only one of the six Rossettis to live into old age.

Death was present in the home. Christina and Maria were child carers for their father. When they contracted cancer in later life, their doctor carried out surgery in the family kitchen. Gabriel, Christina and Elizabeth experienced mental illness. Opiates were commonplace. In 1868, a newly manufactured drug, Chloral was introduced for insomnia, aimed at middle-class professionals affected by obsessive work. Gabriel was a typical early adopter and addicted by the time its side-effects were understood two years later. He lived with dependency for 10 years, until his death aged 53.

The Rossettis' art explored entanglements between life and death. Dante Alighieri's adventures in the afterlife and Edgar Allen Poe's tales of the supernatural inspired their teenage poems and pictures. Gabriel's last obsession, Proserpine, speaks directly from the afterlife.

Honeysuckle wallpaper

This wallpaper pattern, made for this exhibition, is based on Honeysuckle an embroidered hanging designed by William Morris and sewn by Jane Morris. Jane, her sister Bessie and her daughters May and Jenny played a key creative role in the making of textiles and embroideries for the family firm Morris & Co. This collective approach makes it difficult to identify individuals' work. We know Jane was embroidering Honeysuckle around the end of Gabriel's life. It was exhibited at the first Arts and Crafts exhibition in 1888.

Jane Burden

Gabriel made this careful drawing of Jane in Oxford, on the anniversary of their first meeting. It was her 19th birthday and she would marry William Morris the following year. Gabriel gave the picture to Jane and she kept it all her life.

X86449

Jane Morris, 1868

Gabriel and Jane became closer after the Morris family moved to London in 1865 to be near their growing design firm. Gabriel was 36, emerging from his period experimenting with aesthetic portraits. Jane was 26, busy

with studies, needlework, the firm and her family – her daughters Jenny and May were seven and six. Nonetheless, she began to spend time in Gabriel’s studio. This early chalk work recalls the poses of the photographs (hanging nearby). The plain collarless dress, minimal decoration and informal flowers, suggest an everyday scene.

X85878

[Vitrine captions]

The Anatomy of Melancholy

Gabriel’s portrait of Jane in this rare, 17th century edition of writer Robert Burton’s (1577–1640) *Anatomy of Melancholy* was a private image, just for her. The two were spending more time together, and the gift reflects their relationship in several ways. Burton’s early book on depression and mental illness held a personal significance for Gabriel. Jane became his personification of melancholy in poems and paintings. It also alludes to their conversations together and shared intellectual interests.

X83938

Sonnets and Ballads

Unlike his sister Christina, Gabriel published only two collections of poems in his lifetime. Like his painting, Gabriel's poetry required constant revision and experiment. This last collection *Sonnets and Ballads* appeared just a few months before he died. The title brings together both scholarly and popular forms of poetry and lived and living folk traditions, summing up one of the achievements of his career.

Z76813

'Rossetti's studio' Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Gabriel's death prompted a large retrospective exhibition at the Royal Academy the following year, as well as biographies by his brother William and others. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* was the first book by Henry Marillier (1865–1951), a scholar of the arts and friend of playwright Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). Such books brought illustrations of Gabriel's work to an international audience and widened its influence on artists and photographers. Henry Treffry Dunn's lost watercolour of Gabriel's studio, reproduced here, is a haunting image of the artist's obsession with perfecting his images of Jane during his final years.

Z76249

Joan of Arc

Gabriel's last painting of Jane echoes their shared interest in the theme of powerful women from medieval poems. Jane embroiders a series of imaginary portraits. Gabriel makes a 'double' work of Joan of Arc kissing the legendary Sword of Victory. He returned to it in the last months of his life, but wrote to a friend, 'I don't see my way with her. No critical situation is intimate enough, and the burning is too horrible'. Gabriel worked at it up to a few days before his death.

X83180

Proserpine

The myth of Proserpine inspired Gabriel's most famous 'double work'. According to Roman legend the God of Hades abducted Proserpine to the underworld where she was tempted to eat six pomegranate seeds. This cursed her to remain in the realm of death for six months each year. She pauses in a gloomy corridor of her palace, reminded of life by a gleam of light from the world above. Gabriel depicted Jane as Proserpine eight times before his death.

X88013, X87096

The Day Dream

Gabriel's final paintings transfigure the 'bodily beauty' of the natural world into 'soul's beauty' of the spirit through a sense of change and loss. Jane is Monna Primavera, or Spring, but she sits in a sycamore tree which is already in summer foliage. The honeysuckle in her hand is both in bud and wilting. The scent of the flower was believed to stimulate dreams.

The painting and sonnet of the same name was Rossetti's last 'double work of art'. He sent it to Jane.

X83942

La Donna della Finestra, 1870

Dante Alighieri's 1294 poem *The New Life* describes a woman at a window. She looks at the poet kindly and her 'gaze full of pity' consoles his feelings of loss after the death of his love Beatrice. It is difficult not to connect Gabriel's beautiful realisation of this subject with his gratitude for Jane's affections after the death of Elizabeth.

X88010

Jane Morris (Study for Dante's Dream)

Gabriel's love for Jane renewed his obsession with the work of Dante Alighieri and his own poems in *The House of Life*. Here, Gabriel casts Jane as Dante's beloved Beatrice. At a time when Gabriel was haunted by the retrieval of his poetry manuscript from Elizabeth's grave, he made studies for a large oil painting *Dante's Dream of Beatrice's Death*. In his new sensual style, Gabriel drew Jane laying back to receive the kiss of love in a pose also used by Elizabeth in his original 1856 watercolour, and in *Beata Beatrix* (shown in previous rooms).

X83940

Jane Morris, 1870

Gabriel made many informal drawings of Jane while they were together. He stayed at the home he shared with the Morris family, Kelmscott Manor, while William Morris was in Iceland. They also spent time with the feminist campaigners and artists Barbara Bodichon and Anna Howitt. He often sketched her reading or asleep.

X88038

The Wedding of St George and Princess Sabra

Gabriel's first likenesses of Jane Burden were two small Arthurian scenes made while she was modelling for Guinevere for the Oxford Union library. She models for Sabra here. St George has saved her from a dragon. She ties a lock of her hair to his armour as he kisses her. The interlocking composition also suggests division – from Sabra's scissors in the centre to the dragon's severed head at the edge. This contradiction between union and separation reflects Rossetti's complicated friendship with Jane. He left Oxford to travel with Elizabeth Siddal.

N03058

13 John Parsons photos of Jane Morris

In the summer of 1865, Jane, Gabriel and the photographer John Parsons (1826–1909) made 26 photographs in the garden of Gabriel's home, Tudor House in Chelsea. Like in a modern shoot, Jane posed in a range of positions. She began outside and moved to more diffuse light under a canopy, experimenting with a range of gestures. She is dressed in the loose style of the aesthetic movement and changes half-way from a waisted dress with an embroidered belt to a looser gown with pleated back. Her gathered hair gradually comes loose. These are source photographs to be drawn from, rather than portraits. The rattan chair and other background elements are casually present or out of focus.

In Victorian times, taking photographs required the sitter to stay still to avoid blur. This produced a misleadingly dreamy and serious appearance. There would have been people and conversation in the garden, as well as Gabriel's collection of unusual animals. In the later, less formal shots, Jane occasionally looks back at the people with the camera.

X86468, X86481

ROOM 9

9: RADICAL LEGACIES

CLOCKWISE FROM DOORWAY

The Pre-Raphaelite and aesthetic movements profoundly influenced 19th and 20th-century art and culture. The Rossettis' legacy touches our lives through romantic fiction, TV drama, fashion, advertising, interior design, fantasy, cartoons and many more aspects of our culture. Their individuality and social defiance inspire radical writers and artists to this day.

[Vitrine captions]

Helen Rossetti at 17

Z76826

The Torch

Lucy and William brought up their children in a similar collaborative atmosphere to that experienced by their generation of Rossettis. The anarchist journal *The Torch* was founded by their three eldest children, when they were aged between 13 and 16. It included contributions from prominent artists and writers, and developed strong links with the movement in continental Europe. The Dutch anarchist Alexander Cohen's defence of Oscar Wilde was one of few public statements in Wilde's favour following the writer's trial and imprisonment in 1895, in the context of social and legal discrimination against gay relationships.

Z76720, Z76823

Dante's Inferno

In Britain during the 1960s, the Rossetti's experienced a new popularity as counter-cultural artists. The fiery love affair between the passionate and individual figures of Gabriel and Elizabeth appealed to the radical film-maker Ken Russell (1927–2011). Russell dramatised the story for the BBC. Oliver Reed (1938–1999) plays Gabriel. The film begins by mirroring Gabriel's Joan of Arc imagery (seen in the previous room). The film also features rebellious artists of Russell's own time, like pop artists Caroline Coon (b.1945) who played Annie Miller and Derek Boshier (b.1937) who played Millais.

Z76855

Sunil Gupta

Untitled 2

This is one of 10 photographs in the series *The New Pre-Raphaelites* made in 2008. They were exhibited in New Delhi, India, at a time when the individuals and families in the photographs were affected by Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalised gay relationships (the law was repealed in 2018). Gupta was inspired by the Pre-Raphaelites' use of each other's likenesses and lived experience to critique social inequalities. *Untitled 2* draws on the intensity of Gabriel's colour palette, as well as his use of expressive hands and interlocking figures.

Z76726

Windsor Smith, Barry

'The Beguiling' from *Epic Illustrated*, vol. 1, no. 16

Z76844, Z76856

