ALMA-TADEMA AND VICTORIAN PAINTING IN THE PÉREZ SIMÓN COLLECTION

25 June to 5 October 2014
Curator: Véronique Gerard-Powell
EXTENDED UNTIL 12 OCTOBER 2014

This summer, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza is presenting *Alma-Tadema and Victorian Painting in the Pérez Simón Collection*, an exhibition that will include paintings by some of the leading names in 19th-century English painting. The works of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Frederic Leighton, Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Albert J. Moore and John William Waterhouse express the values that these painters had partly inherited from the Pre-Raphaelites, presenting a strong contrast with the predominantly moralising attitude of the day. Instead, they focused on classical antiquity, the cult of female beauty and a quest for visual harmony, all located in sumptuous settings and with a frequent use of medieval, Greek and Roman themes. Commissioned by Véronique Gerard-Powell, honorary professor at the Université Paris-Sorbonne, the exhibition comprises fifty works from the private Pérez Simón Collection, one of the most important holdings of Victorian painting in the world, and has been shown in Paris and Rome before reaching Madrid, after which it will travel to London.

Over the past thirty years Juan Antonio Pérez Simón has revealed a particular interest in British painting created during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) and her son Edward VII (1901-1910), a period in art that despite its popularity at the time has been largely ignored by museums and collectors for almost a century. However, this period forms one of the principal focus points of Juan Antonio Pérez Simón’s wide-ranging collection and includes works of the importance of *Greek Girls picking up Pebbles by the Sea* by Leighton, *A Quartet. A Painter’s Tribute to the Art of Music* by Moore, *Andromeda* by Poynter, *The Crystal Ball* by Waterhouse and *The Roses of Heliogabalus* by Alma-Tadema. The latter is extensively represented in both the collection and in this exhibition, which includes thirteen works by the artist.

The exhibition spans a chronological period that begins in 1860 with the break-up of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and concludes fifty years later with the outbreak of World War I, which would


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radically modify British taste. The display of the works in the exhibition is organised into six thematic sections: The Eclecticism of an Era; Ideal Beauty, Classical Beauty; Alma-Tadema: Between Historical Reconstruction and Fantasy; The Face, Mirror of Beauty; From the Pre-Raphaelites to Symbolism; and Between Tradition and Modernity.

By the 1860s the Pre-Raphaelite movement had declined while a wide-ranging cultural and artistic trend known as the Aesthetic Movement emerged in Britain. Painters turned their gaze to the masters of the painters, gaining inspiration from Greco-Roman classical culture and the medieval Arthurian legends that had been rethought and updated in contemporary poetry. All these artists shared a celebration of female beauty, depicting it according to classical canons.

Women became the preeminent figures in these paintings. Depicted as contemplative, amorous, day-dreaming, bountiful, lascivious or wicked, they are transformed into heroines of antiquity or the Middle Ages. This cult of the woman moved towards the dreamlike nature and magic of the Symbolist movement that was currently emerging in Europe. Natural settings or grandiose palaces became the backdrops for scenes that largely evoke imaginary settings and in which the female body is presented as evoking sensual pleasure, desire and mystery.

**The Royal Academy, new galleries, dealers and collectors**

The selection of works in the exhibition will allow visitors to discover how 19th-century British art followed a different model to that of the rest of Europe. At this period London was a leading cultural capital in which the increasing activity of collectors and dealers encouraged the growth of the art market. An authentic renaissance took place between 1860 and 1880 when artists began to reflect on their own practice.

The Royal Academy in London enjoyed a high point during the period covered by this exhibition, directed by Frederic Leighton (1878-1896), then briefly by John Everett Millais and finally by Edward John Poynter (1896-1917). It held two exhibitions a year, a summer and a winter one. For the former, a committee chose from works presented by artists who had the opportunity to show their most recent creations and to promote themselves professionally. The winter exhibition consisted of works lent directly by their owners.

In contrast to the hegemony of the Royal Academy and its selection process, which was based on extremely conservative criteria, there were various attempts to broaden the panorama of exhibitions led by the more individualistic artists such as Whistler and Burne-Jones. Unhappy with the Academy’s stance in relation to the new pictorial trends, these new exhibition spaces opening up in London provided them with venues to exhibit their works. This was the case with the Grosvenor Gallery and its...
successor the New Gallery, where artists including Burne-Jones, Strudwick, Poynter and Leighton exhibited.

In addition, there were also painters who presented their works both to the Academy and to the new galleries, including Alma-Tadema, Millais and Moore, made possible by the fact that Leighton facilitated the participation of followers of pure Aestheticism in the Academy’s exhibitions.

The second half of the 19th century was also marked by the arrival of dealers in London who then opened branches of their galleries in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and other provincial cities. These galleries acted as intermediaries between London vendors and clients in the north of England.

While the art market was largely based in London, many of the works now in the Pérez Simón Collection were owned by entrepreneurs and businessmen in Britain’s new industrial and commercial centres, who bought or commissioned works directly from artists. In addition, the artists themselves gave or sold their works to each other or to their friends and patrons without the presence of intermediaries.

Related activities

Lecture: Victorian Painting and the Taste of the Time

On 23 September 2014 the exhibition’s curator, Véronique Gerard-Powell, will give a lecture in the Museum’s Auditorium on Victorian Painting and the Taste of the Time.

An expert in 15th- to 17th-century European art and the history of collections from the 16th to the 20th centuries, Véronique Gerard-Powell is honorary professor at the Université Paris-Sorbonne.
EXHIBITION INFORMATION

Title: Alma-Tadema and Victorian Painting in the Pérez Simón Collection

Organiser: Culturespaces, in collaboration with the Chiostro del Bramante and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, with the support of Fundación JAPS.


Curator: Véronique Gerard-Powell, honorary professor at the Université Paris-Sorbonne

General coordinator: Laura Andrada, Curatorial Department, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Number of works: 50

Publications: Catalogue with texts by Véronique Gerard-Powell and Charlotte Ribeyrol. Digital publication on theQuioscoThyssen app.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Address: Paseo del Prado 8. 28014 Madrid. Moneo galleries, basement level 1

Opening times: Tuesdays to Saturdays, 10am to 10pm; Mondays and Sundays, 10am to 7pm. From 15 September, Tuesdays to Fridays and Sundays, 10am to 7pm and Saturdays, 10am to 9pm. Last entry one hour before closing time.

Ticket prices:

Temporary exhibition:

- Standard ticket: 9 Euros
- Reduced price ticket: 6.50 Euros for visitors aged over 65, pensioners, students with proof of status and Large Families
- Free entry: children aged under 12 and officially unemployed Spanish citizens

Temporary exhibition + Permanent Collection:

- Standard ticket: 13.50 Euros
- Reduced price ticket: 8.50 Euros
- Free entry: children aged under 12 and officially unemployed Spanish citizens

Advance ticket sales at the Museum’s ticket desks, on its website and on tel: 902 760 511

More information: www.museothyssen.org

Audioguide: available in various languages

PRESS INFORMATION

http://www.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2014/pintura_victoriana/index.html