

Release Date: February 13, 2019

Major Exhibition Explores American Pre-Raphaelite Art Influenced by John Ruskin at National Gallery of Art, April 14 through July 21, 2019



Thomas Charles Farrer, *Mount Tom*, 1865, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, John Wilmerding Collection, Promised Gift

Washington, DC—In celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of John Ruskin (1819–1900), the most influential art critic of the Victorian era, the National Gallery of Art will present more than 80 paintings, watercolors, drawings, and photographs created by American artists who were profoundly influenced by the renowned critic. Ruskin's call for a revolutionary change in the practice of art found a sympathetic audience in America among a group of like-minded artists, architects, scientists, critics, and collectors who organized the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art. New research reveals that the members of the Association sought reform not only in the practice of art, but also in the broader political arena during the Civil War era. ***The American Pre-Raphaelites: Radical Realists***, including several recently discovered works never exhibited publicly, will be on view at the National Gallery of Art from April 14 through July 21, 2019.

## Exhibition Organization

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. Made possible through support from the Terra Foundation for American Art. Major support provided by the Henry Luce Foundation.

Additional funding is provided by The Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz Foundation for the Arts.

## About the Exhibition

John Ruskin's (1819–1900) influence was most profound through the 1860s, when his ideas and opinions inspired an organized reform of American art and architecture. Although he never traveled to the United States, Ruskin's ideas reached America through his many publications, most notably in *Modern Painters*, which had inspired the British Pre-Raphaelite artists.

The Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art was founded in January 1863 to promote Ruskin's teachings. Member artists not only recorded the natural world with strict fidelity, as Ruskin advocated, but also created a number of works that included rich political subtexts referencing the ongoing war.

The Association existed for less than a decade. Its members included artists who produced a remarkable number of stunningly beautiful works during the period when they were active members and paying strict attention to Ruskin's admonition that they leave tradition behind, exit the studio, work outdoors, and reproduce nature's "truth" with exacting detail.

Thomas Charles Farrer (1839–1891), a young British expatriate who had studied in London with Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), became the leader of this eclectic group. Among the several works in the exhibition by Farrer is his stunning landscape *Mount Tom* (1865).

Other "radical realists" hailed by the Association's journal, *The New Path*, as America's modern painters are included in the exhibition: John Henry Hill (1839–1922); John William Hill (1812–1879); Charles Herbert Moore (1840–1930); Henry Roderick Newman (1843–1917); Robert J. Pattison (1838–1903); and William Trost Richards (1833–1905). Nonmember artists who were attracted by Ruskin's ideas and felt the Association's influence are also represented in the exhibition including Fidelia Bridges (1834–1923), the best known among Ruskinian women artists; Robert B. Brandegee (1849–1922); Henry Farrer (1844–1903), Thomas's brother; William John Hennessy (1839–1917); Aaron Draper Shattuck (1832–1928); and William James Stillman (1828–1901). Several works by John Ruskin himself introduce the exhibition.

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New research reveals that the members of the Association sought reform not only in the practice of art, but also in the broader political arena, particularly in the debate about slavery. They were united by a patriotic commitment to the preservation of the Union and the abolition of slavery. The founding meeting of the Association took place at the height of the Civil War—just days after Abraham Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

Coded references to the war are present in several detailed landscape paintings that do not appear—at first glance—to carry symbolic meaning, including William Trost Richards's *A Neglected Corner of the Wheatfield* (1865) and Charles Herbert Moore's *Hudson River, Above Catskill* (1865). Both works resonate with a range of explicit and hidden messages related to the war.

During the heyday of the movement in the mid-1860s, the realists' hyper-detailed and vividly colored oil paintings and watercolors were interpreted by the partisan critical voices of *The New Path* as vibrant agents promoting reform when displayed among conventional works.

### **Exhibition Curators**

The exhibition is curated by Linda S. Ferber, museum director emerita and senior art historian at the New-York Historical Society, with Nancy K. Anderson, curator and head of the department of American and British paintings at the National Gallery of Art.

### **Related Activities**

#### **Lectures**

*Introduction to the Exhibition—The American Pre-Raphaelites: Radical Realists*

April 14, noon

East Building Auditorium

Linda S. Ferber, museum director emerita and senior art historian, New York Historical Society;

Barbara Dayer Gallati, curator emerita, Brooklyn Museum

A signing of the exhibition catalog follows

*American Pre-Raphaelitism through the Lens and on the Canvas*

June 16, 2:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Diane Waggoner, curator of 19th-century photographs, National Gallery of Art; Sophie Lynford, doctoral candidate in the history of art, Yale University

#### **Concert**

Poulenc Trio

*From Nature, Truth: Whitman, Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites*

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May 5, 3:30 p.m.

West Building, West Garden Court

John Ruskin's writings inspired the American Pre-Raphaelites, a group of artists who created landscapes and still-life paintings that celebrated nature in exquisite detail. Ruskin, who wrote about music as well as the glories of the natural world, admired the poetry of Walt Whitman who was born in the same year as Ruskin. In *From Nature, Truth*, the Poulenc Trio explores the circles of inspiration that drove both writers, as well as the composers that influenced and were influenced by their work. The concert features composers who inspired Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites, Whitman's favorite work by Beethoven, and Andrew List's world premiere in celebration of Whitman's (and Ruskin's) 200th birth anniversaries.

### **Exhibition Catalog**

Made possible through support from the Terra Foundation for American Art, the Henry Luce Foundation, and the Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz Foundation for the Arts, the fully illustrated 300-page exhibition catalog is published by Yale University Press. It includes revealing and wide-ranging essays by Linda S. Ferber, Tim Barringer, Barbara Dayer Gallati, Sophie Lynford, Mark D. Mitchell, Janice Simon, and Diane Waggoner. Featuring the work of artists such as Fidelity Bridges, Henry and Thomas Charles Farrer, John William Hill, John Henry Hill, Charles Herbert Moore, Henry Roderick Newman, Robert J. Pattison, William Trost Richards, William J. Stillman, and John Ruskin, this generously illustrated volume explores the influence of Ruskin on the American artists, the role of watercolor and photography in their work, symbolism and veiled references to the Civil War, and much more.

The catalog is available for purchase in the West Building and East Building Shops; [shop.nga.gov](http://shop.nga.gov); (800) 697-9350 (phone); (202) 789-3047 (fax); or [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

### **Press Contact:**

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### **General Information**

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt), Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ngadc](http://www.twitter.com/ngadc), and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

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Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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**Exhibition Press Release**

[Exhibition Checklist](#) (PDF 316 kb)

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Audio: [Press Event: The American Pre-Raphaelites: Radical Realists](#)

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The public may call (202) 737-4215 or visit [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov) for more information about the **National Gallery of Art**.

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