

Oxford DNB: November 2022

Welcome to the ninety-second update of the Oxford DNB, which adds eight articles on women associated with the Pre-Raphaelite artistic movement. Seven of the lives were formerly 'co-subjects' and have now been expanded and updated as subjects of articles in their own right. Four of the articles are accompanied by portrait likenesses.

From November 2022, the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford DNB) offers biographies of 64,537 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 62,138 articles. 11,926 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

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November 2022: introduction to the update by Jan Marsh

Pre-Raphaelite Women

Artists' models, female and male, were historically anonymous. Drawn and painted to suit the pictorial figures portrayed, their real-life identities were seldom recorded. By the nineteenth century, twin concepts - the Romantic genius and his female muse - roused curiosity into the love lives of artists and hence into their studio companions. Or rather, into assumed relationships between art and life.

Around 1900, the image of the willowy, loose-haired, seductive Pre-Raphaelite woman became familiar in visual culture. She enjoyed a soulful hippie revival in the 1970s. Then came the simultaneous reevaluation of Victorian art and the rise of feminist history, which together fed scholarly and popular interest in the women of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Primarily as artist's model, mistress, or unattainable beloved. Sometimes also as a fantasy figure in fiction and film.

Digitization of records and images now provides sounder visual and factual information about more and more women who hitherto were known only by their names. Interest has widened, to include wives, sisters, and other family members and, most emphatically, female artists associated with Pre-Raphaelitism, whose works amplify its history.

Recent criticism recognizes that, as with actors on stage or screen, artists' models inspire and enact roles, so contributing actively to the production of artworks. Those 'behind the scenes' also participate in the creative process, researching subjects, stitching costumes, managing accounts, running household and studio.

In recent years, books, exhibitions, blogs, and podcasts have proliferated. The exhibition Pre-Raphaelite Sisters at the National Portrait Gallery in 2019-20 brought together all aspects of the subjects. A dozen women featured – some are now famous like Elizabeth Siddal, Effie Millais, Christina Rossetti, Jane Morris, and Evelyn de Morgan, some hardly known like Joanna Boyce, Annie Miller, and Fanny Eaton, and some familiar but shadowy like Georgiana Burne-Jones, Fanny Cornforth, Marie Spartali, and Maria Zambaco.

The new articles in this Oxford DNB update bring in more - notably artists Rebecca Solomon, Jane Benham Hay, Emma Sandys, Marianne Stokes, and Catherine Madox Brown. The last of these featured in a joint exhibition with her sister Lucy Madox Brown at the Watts Gallery in 2021.

Importantly, female artists and subjects are now being integrated in other accounts of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. This is significant because to a greater degree than previously recognized, even if male-dominated, it was

an inclusive movement. Women participated in many and varied ways. There is more to be revealed and more individuals to be named.

Biographer and art historian, Jan Marsh is author of the pioneering group biography Pre-Raphaelite Sisters (1985), as well as biographies of Jane & May Morris, Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti. With Frank Sharp, she edited the Collected Letters of Jane Morris. Exhibition credits include Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists, Black Victorians: Black Figures in British Art 1800-1900, The Poetry of Beauty: the art of Marie Spartali Stillman, and most recently Pre-Raphaelite Sisters at the National Portrait Gallery in 2019. Her latest book, Elizabeth Siddal: Her Story is published in spring 2023.

November 2022: summary of new articles

The painter and illustrator, **Jane Eleanor Hay [née Benham] [known as Jane Benham Hay] (1829-1904)**, who was from a Unitarian family, studied art in London and Berlin, where along with Mary Ann Howitt and Barbara Leigh Smith, she planned a 'sisterhood in art' to sustain women artists. She was among the women artists who may be linked through style or theme with early Pre-Raphaelitism. Her most important and successful work, A Florentine Procession

(also known as *The Burning of the Vanities*), was exhibited in London in 1867, and is now at Homerton College Cambridge.

The artist **Rebecca Solomon (1832–1886)**, who was born into an Ashkenazi Jewish family in London, was among the first women to attend the Spitalfields School of Design. In 1859 she was among thirty-seven other women artists who organized a public petition demanding that the Royal Academy School allow women to study there. Her most popular painting, *Peg Woffington's Visit to Triplet*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1860, was shown again at the International Exhibition of 1862 and the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867. From that year she shared studio space with her artist brother Simeon, and she has been identified with the second wave of Pre-Raphaelitism. The artist's model, **Anne [Annie] Miller [married name Thomson], (1834/5–1925)**, was brought up in an impoverished household in the Chelsea area of London, near to the home of the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt. She modelled for his *The Awakening Conscience*, whose theme anticipated their own relationship. She was supported by him for some years, but he broke off the engagement. Her subsequent marriage to a militia officer from a well-connected family represented an ascent from the London slums to court circles. The artist and Pre-Raphaelite chronicler, **Georgiana [Georgie] Burne-Jones [née Macdonald], Lady Burne-Jones (1840–1920)**, was born and brought up in Birmingham, where she met her husband,

Edward Burne-Jones. She studied at the Government School of Design in London, and had a brief spell as a designer for William Morris. Marriage extinguished her artistic ambitions as her husband excluded her from his studio. Her biography of her husband, published in 1904, is considered the best account of the 'second wave' of the Pre-Raphaelite circle from the mid-1850s to the early 1870s. The painter, **(Mary Ann) Emma Negus Sandys [Sands], (1841–1877)** spent all her life in Norwich, where she was probably taught by her brother and father, who were also artists. Her own work shows strong affinities with that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Much of her work comprised depictions of women or girls, often in historic costume inspired by Pre-Raphaelite medievalism. She and her brother frequently shared models, including the Pre-Raphaelite artist Marie Spartali Stillman, which has led to some of her work being attributed to her better-known sibling. The sculptor and Pre-Raphaelite model, **Maria [Mary; Marie] Terpsithea Zambaco [née Cassavetti], (1843–1914)** was born into the London Greek community and was taught by, and modelled for, Edward Burne-Jones, who cast her as a series of mythological sorceresses. She had her own studio in Holland Park, where she produced busts and portrait medallions. The painter, studio assistant, and model, **Catherine Emily Hueffer [née Madox Brown] (1850–1927)**, was born in London the daughter of the Pre-Raphaelite associate Ford Madox Brown, and grew up in a household where leading members of the

Pre-Raphaelite movement were regular visitors. As a child she modelled for her father, and was later trained by him, launching her own professional career as a painter in 1869, but this was abruptly ended in 1875 by family commitments and concerns. Born in Austria, the artist **Marianne Stokes [née Preindlsberger] (1855–1927)**, studied at Graz, Munich, and Paris before marrying the British painter Adrian Stokes, with whom she settled at St Ives, Cornwall. In its religious and medieval themes, as well in style and method, her work has been related to Pre-Raphaelitism. She was also a portraitist, and as a member of the Artists' Suffrage League she designed banners for the women's suffrage procession of 1908. The lives of female contemporaries of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood are linked and assessed in a Reference Group article on **Pre-Raphaelite women artists (act. 1848–1870s)**.