

## Rossetti drawing found in second hand book shop for £75 goes on show in *'Collecting and Giving: Highlights from the Sir Ivor and Lady Batchelor Bequest'*

A drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) for one of his greatest paintings, that was discovered in a second hand book shop for £75, is amongst an eclectic collection of art gifted to the Fitzwilliam Museum and on display in *'Collecting and Giving: Highlights from the Sir Ivor and Lady Batchelor Bequest'* (4 December 2018 - 3 March 2019).

The drawing dates from Rossetti's late career, between 1868 and his death in 1882 when he produced his largest and most powerful paintings. The woman is readily identifiable as one of Rossetti's favourite models, Alexa (Alice) Wilding (c.1847-84), a dressmaker. Rossetti discovered her while walking in the Strand, was struck by her auburn hair, and declared that she had the type of face he had been seeking for so long. Rossetti's assistant described her as having 'a lovely face, beautifully moulded in every feature, full of quiescent, soft mystical repose'. Rossetti paid her a retainer to model for him alone, and she posed for some of his finest late works including *The Bower Meadow* (1872) and *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-78).

The final painting, now in the Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Rossetti started in 1868 but did not complete until 1881. In the preparatory drawing using Alexa Wilding Rossetti came close to the final composition, although by the time he completed the painting he had fallen in love and replaced Alexa with Jane Morris, (née Burden, 1839-1914), the wife of William Morris. Rossetti drew Jane repeatedly from this point on. In the painted version, Jane's head hangs forward in a brooding, melancholy pose.

The drawing is still in its original frame and has a label on the back from Rossetti warning those that might want to de-frame the work of the fragile nature of the pastel. It was discovered in 1956 in the second-hand bookshop of Robert Aitken Edinburgh, by Sir Ivor and Lady Batchelor. He later wrote 'It was in the tiny second-hand bookshop in Bruntsfield, Edinburgh in the years immediately after World War II that I found drawings and prints which were within our miniscule budget and which were often of real quality. It was a red letter day in 1956 when off the floor in Aitken's shop, with a windfall of royalties from a book, we bought for £75 Rossetti's very fine and very large drawing for 'La Pia'.'



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) Ricorditi di me che son la Pia, 1868  
© Fitzwilliam Museum



Dante Gabriel Rossetti 'Pia de' Tolomei' c. 1881  
© Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas

The subject is inspired by Dante's 'Purgatorio'. The woman, La Pia, is one of the souls that Dante encounters on his journey through Purgatory. She is a Sieneese woman who had died after being wrongfully imprisoned by her husband in the unhealthy marshland of the Maremma, and she asks Dante to memorialise her fate. Rossetti uses the lines in the poem where La Pia mentions the wedding ring that binds her to her cruel husband, and portrays her leaning back against a curtain, with her hands on her knee, her right hand playing with her wedding ring; her head is upturned and mouth slightly parted in a state of private reverie.

In 2015, the Museum received the exceptional collection of drawings, ceramics, glass and bronzes from Sir Ivor and Lady Batchelor through the Art Fund. Sir Ivor, Professor of Psychiatry at Dundee University, and his wife Honor, spent decades collecting a wide array of fine and decorative arts, advocating that 'One had to learn by looking, which is the best education'. Highlights from the collection will be on display for the first time, including drawings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Ruskin, William Orpen, Walter Sickert and Gwen John, alongside fine examples of 18th century salt-glazed stoneware, rare 17th and 18th century Spanish glass, and 19th century French animal bronzes. In the highlights exhibition there are 28 drawings and watercolours, 8 bronzes, 28 pieces of English pottery, 22 pieces of Continental European and English glass.

The exhibition will illustrate the richness and diversity of the Batchelor Bequest and highlight The Fitzwilliam as a 'collection of collections' defined by connoisseurship.

## **Collecting and Giving: Highlights from the Sir Ivor and Lady Batchelor bequest**

**4 December 2018 – 3 March 2019 (Gallery 10)**

**-Ends-**

### **Notes to editors:**

For all enquires please contact Fitzwilliam Museum Press Office:

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### **About the Fitzwilliam Museum**

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam Museum is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge and lead partner for the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) Major Partner Museum programme, funded by The Arts Council. The Fitzwilliam's collections explore world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century, world class prints and drawings, and outstanding collections of coins, Asian arts, ceramics and other applied arts. The Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.

[www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB | Free admission

OPEN: Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 – 17.00;

CLOSED: 24-26 & 31 December, 1 January, Good Friday

**Business Partners** The Museum is supported by our Business Partners during 2018; TTP Group plc, and Brewin Dolphin