



Adult Learning Within Reach

Member Lecture – 27 January 2022

Discover the 'scented visions' of Pre-Raphaelite paintings
Dr Christina Bradstreet, The National Gallery

Questions answered post-lecture

Q1 Do we know who the model was for Rossetti's 'Proserpine'?

The model was Jane Morris, wife of William Morris. Jane was Rossetti's muse and lover for several decades.

Q2 What is the name of the girl in *The Blind Girl*?

The girls aren't given names. *The Blind Girl* is a Victorian 'stock type' and not a portrait. She follows the trope of the innocent, grateful blind girl, rather like Dickens's Little Nell.

However, the models for the girls were Mathilda Proudfoot and Isabella Nicol as her sister. Recruited by Millais's wife, Effie, Matilda Proudfoot was a pupil at the School of Industry in Perth, which supported poor and orphaned children, while Isabella Nicol was the daughter of a local charwoman. Matilda was not blind herself.

Q3 Did any of the artists, perhaps when writing their memoirs in old age, ever reflect on the strange theories of smell they held in their youth?

I've never come across an example of any Victorian saying 'goodness, to think we used to believe that smell caused disease!' The only artist's memoir from old age that I can think of, which comments on smell, is that written by the Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt. In his autobiographical history of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, published in 1905, he claimed to remember Millais saying in 1851, 'Is there any sensation more delicious than that awakened by the odour of burning leaves? To me nothing brings back sweeter memories of the days that are gone; it is the incense offered by departing summer to the sky, and it brings on a happy conviction that Time puts a peaceful seal on all that has gone.' This quote is often cited as context for Millais's painting *Autumn Leaves* (1855) – but its surely highly edited, if not fictional, since who can remember a conversation precisely, word for word, over 50 years on?!

Useful links

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Read her article ['Wicked with roses: Floral femininity and the Erotics of scent'](#) - free online journal, Nineteenth-century art worldwide

If you are interested in knowing when Christina's book: *Scented Visions: Smell in art: 1850-1914* publishes later this year, you can [join her mailing list](#).