

The National Gallery and the English Renaissance of Art

The Paul Mellon Lectures 2011 by Elizabeth Prettejohn,
Professor of History of Art at the University of Bristol

Mondays 17 January – 13 February 2011, 6.30 – 7.30pm
Sainsbury Wing Theatre, The National Gallery, London

On his famous lecture tour of 1882 Oscar Wilde told American audiences about a 'great English Renaissance of Art', which had begun with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and was flourishing in the work of their successors. 'I call it our English Renaissance', he explained, 'because it is indeed a new birth of the spirit of man, like the great Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century'.

Victorian artists have often been castigated for their dependence on prototypes and precedents from the Old Masters. This lecture series takes its cue instead from Wilde, who saw no inconsistency between the idea of a 'new birth' and the inspiration of the past. With the formation of the National Gallery in 1824, and the subsequent proliferation of exhibitions, reproductions, and scholarship on the Old Masters, the art of the past became visible and accessible as never before. Yet the history of art did not come ready-made to the Victorians. Such artists as van Eyck, Bellini, Botticelli, Piero della Francesca, and Velázquez came to the National Gallery with the force of novelty. They were interpreted by the great Victorian critics, curators, and scholars – and importantly, as these lectures will argue, by such artists as Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Whistler, Millais, and Leighton. The lectures will explore how the art of the past and the art of the present came to illuminate one another in the Victorian period.

Lecture Programme

1. The Victorians and the Masters (17 January)
2. Artist and Mirror: Pre-Raphaelites and Others (24 January)
3. 'Buried fire': Finding the Early Renaissance (31ST January)
4. A Taste of Spain (7 February)
5. Postscript: On Beauty and Aesthetic Painting (14 February)

Tickets are £5, or £3 concessions

Tickets will be available from the 1 July

Online: www.nationalgallery.org.uk/what

By post: cheques made payable to the National Gallery and sent to Advance Tickets Sales, The National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 5DN

In person: from the Advance Tickets and Audio Guide desks, Level 2, Sainsbury Wing Entrance.

On the day: any remaining tickets will be on sale half an hour before the start of each event. Payment by cash or cheque only.

For ticketing information only, please telephone 020 7747 2888