

John William Waterhouse (1849-1917)
A Study Day
2 September 2009

John William Waterhouse is among the most visible artists in today's popular culture. His painting, *The Lady of Shalott*, has consistently sold more postcards for Tate than any other work of art; reproductions of his work on posters, prints, and greetings cards are invariably best-sellers, and there are dozens of websites that feature his art. Yet Waterhouse has been ignored in academic art history and museum practice. Although his paintings won medals at world's fairs from the 1880s through to 1900, his role on the international art scene has been forgotten; scholars have yet to explore his complex engagement with the ancient and modern literary traditions, or with the exciting new developments of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in archaeology, anthropology, comparative mythology, occultism, and paganism. Only now is he receiving his first full-scale retrospective exhibition, showing at the Groninger Museum in the Netherlands (14 December 2008-3 May 2009), the Royal Academy of Arts in London (27 June-13 September 2009), and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1 October 2009-7 February 2010).

How can we account for this striking discrepancy between popular celebrity and scholarly oblivion? This study day brings together five scholars from different disciplines and the four co-curators of the exhibition to consider the new perspectives revealed by this first, comprehensive showing of Waterhouse's work. The study day is organised by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art in collaboration with the Institute of Greece, Rome, and the Classical Tradition at the University of Bristol, with a generous gift from the Vice Chancellor, Professor Eric Thomas, and Mrs Narell Thomas. It will conclude with an evening reception and private view of the exhibition at the Royal Academy.

9.30 Coffee and registration

10.00 Welcome and introduction to the day

10.15 **Ronald Hutton** (Professor of History, University of Bristol):
'Languages of Paganism in Victorian Britain'

11.0 **Christina Bradstreet** (Birkbeck College):
'Wicked with Roses: Waterhouse's *The Soul of the Rose*'

11.45 Break

12.15 **Simon Goldhill** (Professor of Greek, Kings College Cambridge):
'Sex in the afternoon: the ancient world and desire in Waterhouse'

1.0 Lunch

2.30 **Nancy Marshall** (University of Wisconsin - Madison):

`Nymphs in the City: Waterhouse in the Context of Late Nineteenth-Century London`

3.15 **Stefano-Maria Evangelista** (Trinity College Oxford):
`Ladies of Shalott: Waterhouse and Victorian Poetry`

4.0 Tea

4.30 Roundtable discussion, led by the co-curators of the exhibition:
Elizabeth Prettejohn (Professor of History of Art, University of Bristol),
Peter Trippi (independent art historian and Editor, *Fine Art Connoisseur*),
Robert Upstone (Curator of Modern British Art, Tate),
Patty Wageman (Deputy Director, Groninger Museum)

6.0 Conclusion of events at Paul Mellon Centre

7.0 Reception and private view of the exhibition, Sackler Galleries, Royal Academy of Arts