

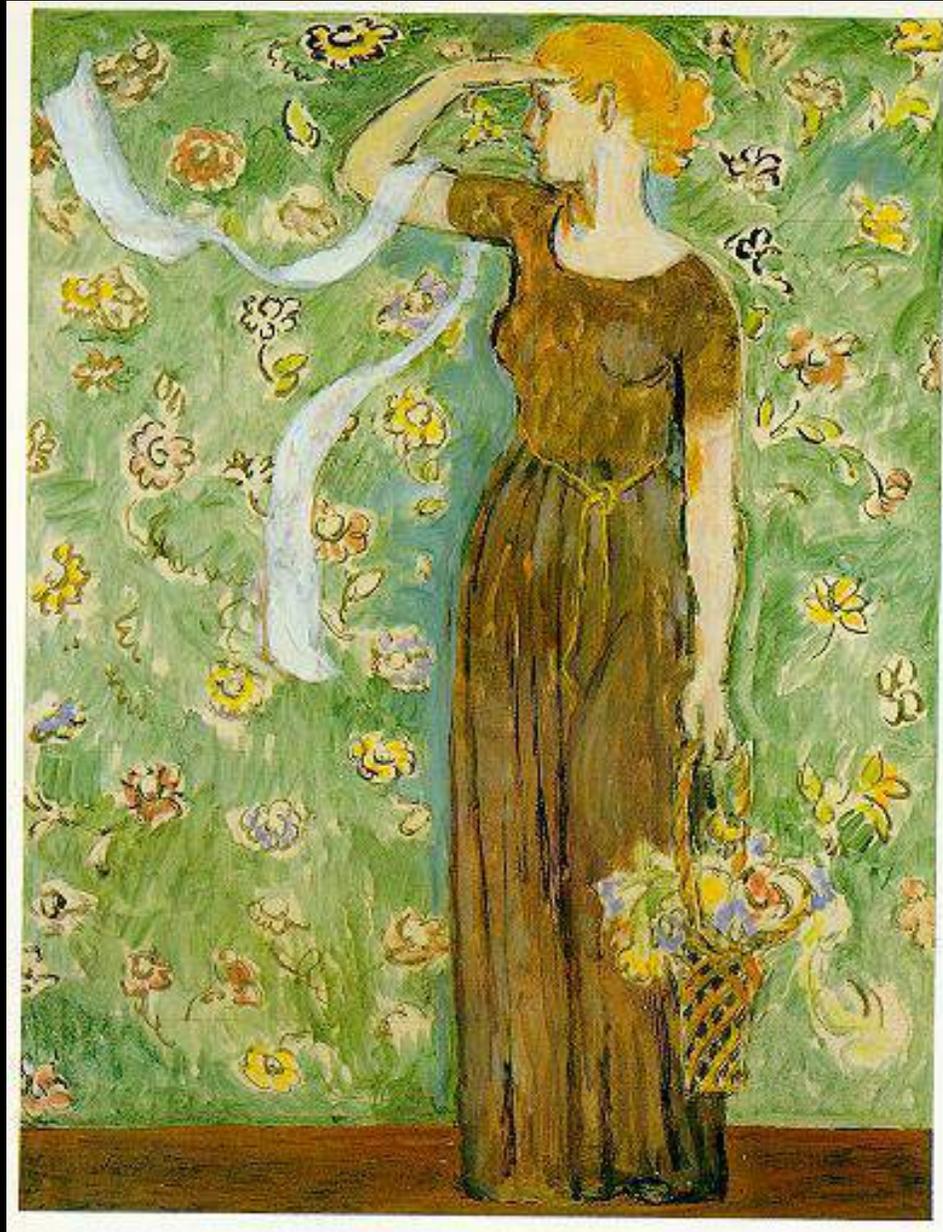
**The Greek body and the formalist quest across the divide: from
Aestheticism to Bloomsbury painting**

Chapter 7, *Beyond the Victorian/ Modernist Divide: Remapping the Turn-of-the-Century Break in Literature, Culture and the Visual Arts*, eds. Anne Besnault-Levita and Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada, New York, Routledge, 2018

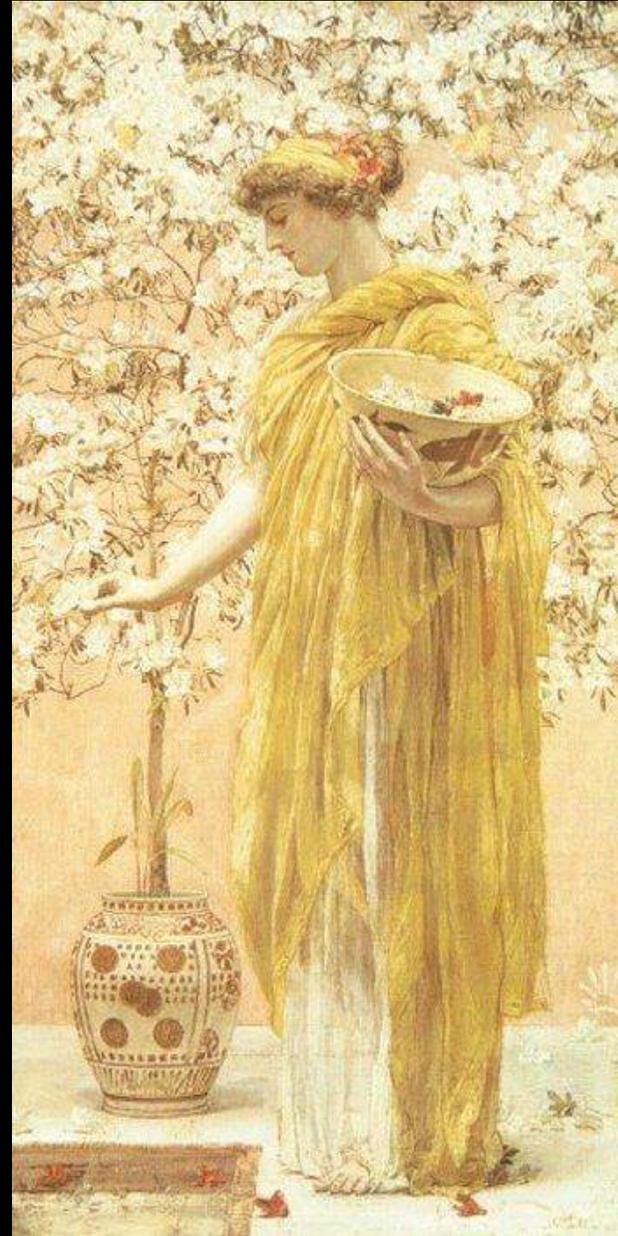
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Atelier A.R.T.S. Congrès SAES 2018

?? Vanessa Bell, *Spring*

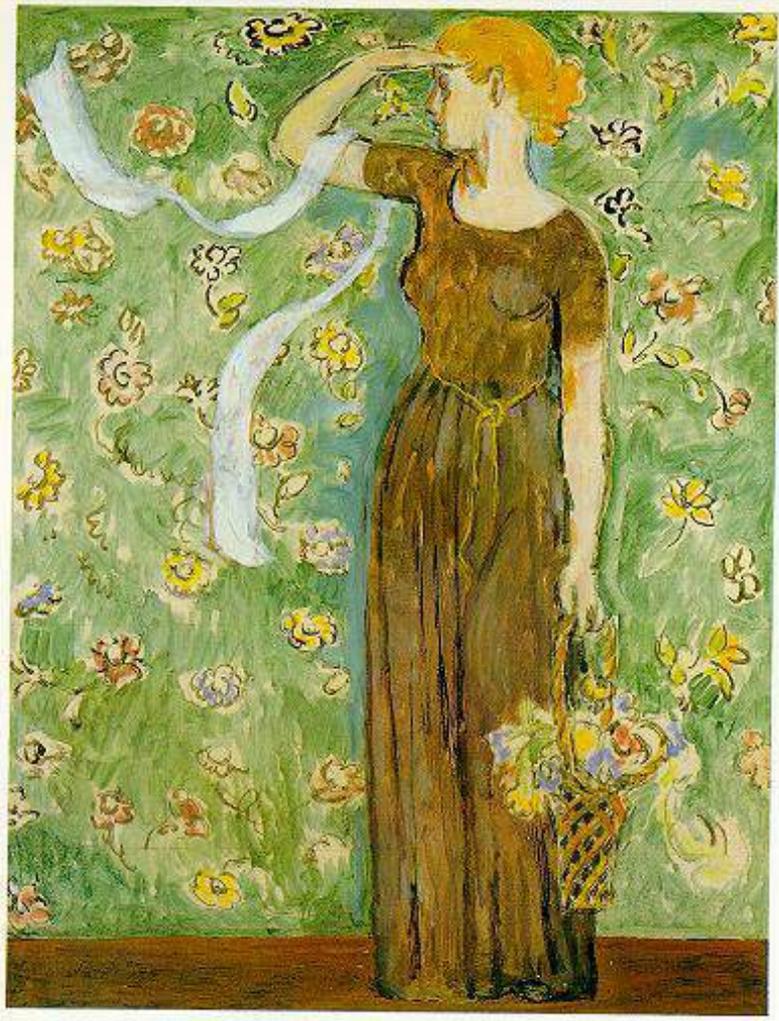


Albert Moore
(1848-1893), *Azaleas*,
1867-68, oil on canvas,
197.9 x 100.2 cm, Hugh
Lane Municipal Gallery
of Modern Art, Dublin



Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898),
Spring, 1869-70,
gouache, private
collection





For either all works of visual art have some common quality, or when we speak of “works of art” we gibber. Everyone speaks of “art,” making a mental classification by which he distinguishes the class “works of art” from all other classes. What is the justification of this classification? What is the quality common and peculiar to all members of this class? Whatever it be, no doubt it is often found in company with other qualities; but they are adventitious—it is essential. There must be some one quality without which a work of art cannot exist; possessing which, in the least degree, no work is altogether worthless. What is this quality? What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, 3 Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto’s frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero della Francesca, and Cezanne? Only one answer seems possible—significant form. In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call “Significant Form”; and “Significant Form” is the one quality common to all works of visual art.

Clive Bell, *Art*, New York, Frederic Stokes, 8.

Let us now see how the artist passes from the stage of merely gratifying our demand for sensuous order and variety to that where he arouses our emotions. I will call the various methods by which this is effected, the emotional elements of design.

The first element is that of the rhythm of the line with which the forms are delineated. Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics,"[1909], *Vision and Design*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1920, 22.

[The Post-Impressionists] do not seek to imitate form, but to create form. [...] The logical extreme of such a method would undoubtedly be the attempt to give up all resemblance to natural form, and to create a purely abstract language of form – a visual music [...] Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics,"[1909], *Vision and Design*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1920, 157.

The formalist terminology to which the ["Manet and the Post-Impressionists" exhibition of 1910] had given wide currency was perceptibly filtering into art criticism, including some commentators who had been first hostile to the exhibition, for example W.B. Richmond, who expressed his confidence about British painters who "strive to express the deeper significance of things rather than produce a make-believe of plastic reality. They will search a new rhythm of line and colour, for a summary statement of the really essential features," a terminology reminiscent of that used in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, where values as "linear design," "abstract linear harmony," and "rhythm" had been emphasized.

Anne-Pascale Bruneau-Rumsey, "Bloomsbury Art Theory: An Assessment," *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens* 62, Oct. 2005, 29-38, p. 31-32.



William Blake Richmond (1842-1921), *Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon*, 1874, oil on canvas, 170.2 x 157.5 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada

Neither form nor colour in the abstract appeals directly to northern sensibilities when they are disengaged from episode; more sensitive to the charms of literature, wherein he finds some natural aptitude for expression, the average Englishman is puzzled, sometimes even irritated, by a work of Art that claims distinction, not on account of the story illustrated so much as by the opportunity it affords for translation into various shapes and colours. W.B. Richmond, "Lord Leighton and his art: a tribute", *The Nineteenth century* vol. 39, March 1896, 465-76, 466; 468-9.



Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), *Greek Girls Picking up Pebbles by the Sea*, 1871, oil on canvas, private collection, 84 x 129.5 cm

By degrees, however, my growing love for Form [...] led me more and more, to a class of subjects, or, more accurately, to a set of conditions, in which the supreme scope is left to pure artistic qualities [...] These conditions classic subjects afford, and as vehicles, therefore, of abstract form which is a thing not of one time but of all time, these subjects can never be obsolete, and though to many they are a dead letter, they can never be an anachronism. Frederic Leighton, letter quoted in J. Comyns Carr, *Some Eminent Victorians: Personal Recollections in the World of Art and Letters*, London Duckworth & Co. 1908, 98.

Albert Moore, *The Marble Seat*, 1864, oil on canvas, 47 x 74.6 cm, private collection

With [Moore] form goes for nearly everything, expression for next to nothing. He does not attempt realism [...], but paints in low keys of colour figure-subjects with little dramatic purpose, that seem prompted by an aesthetic turn radically akin to that of the Greeks. In ["The Marble Seat"], he achieves a perfection of design, a delicacy of decorative colour, a large grace and harmonious repose, that have hardly a parallel in modern art. Sidney Colvin, "English Painters and Painting in 1867". *Fortnightly Review* n.s. 2, 1 October 1867, 464-76, 473.



Albert Moore (1848-1893),
Azaleas, 1867-68, oil on
canvas, 197.9 x 100.2 cm,
Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of
Modern Art, Dublin

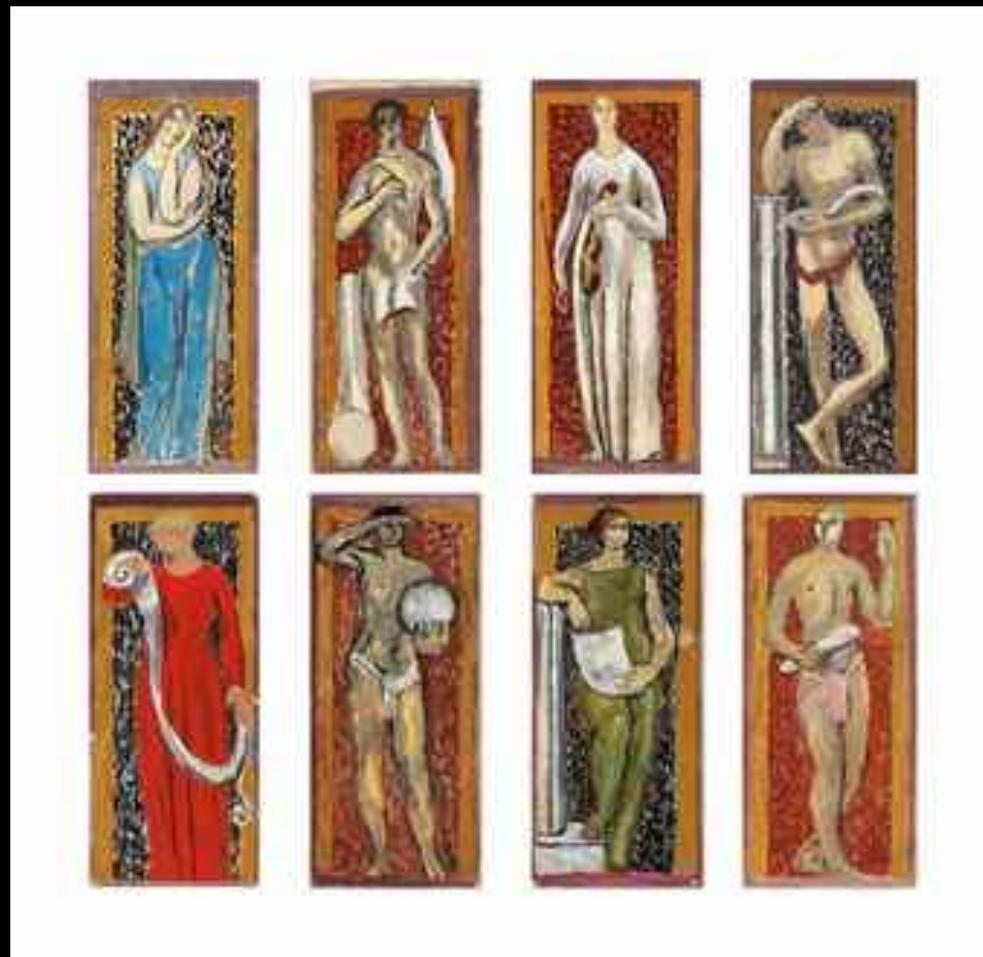
Mr. Moore deliberately excludes from his art all representation of passion or sentiment, and seeks only to realize essential beauty of face or form undisturbed by dramatic feeling. [...] In order that painting thus restricted may not become trivial, the figures introduced into design must be of the severest type of beauty, the attitudes in which they are exhibited must have an abstract significance. There are certain natural movements and gestures which do not involve the expression of emotion, and which nevertheless serve to emphasize beauty of form; such, for instance, are the attitudes often chosen by Greek sculptors. [Anon.], "The Royal Academy (Third Notice)", *The Pall Mall Gazette*, vol. XXII, May 19, 1875, 11-12.



J. M. Keynes' room in King's College decorated by Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Webb's Court, King's College, Cambridge



Duncan Grant & Vanessa Bell, 8 studies for the murals at J. M Keynes' rooms, 1920, oil on canvas, 83.8 x 35.5 cm, private collection



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Hours*, 1882, oil on canvas, 77.5 x 183.4 cm, Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield

[Burne-Jones] was content to suggest certain attributes by more abstract processes than those implied in the naturalistic use of oil-paint. Facial expression of a passing emotion he sought passionately but he sought it chiefly in line. [...] Colour, shape, the inclination of surfaces, relative depths of space or distance, he rendered by abstract patterns, and scarcely at all by the natural method of light and atmosphere. It is difficult to conventionalise even single objects for the purposes of decorative design, and Burne-Jones undertook the treatment of a whole world. R.A.M. Stevenson, "Rembrandt and Burne-Jones", *Art Journal* n.s. 19, 1879, 57-8.

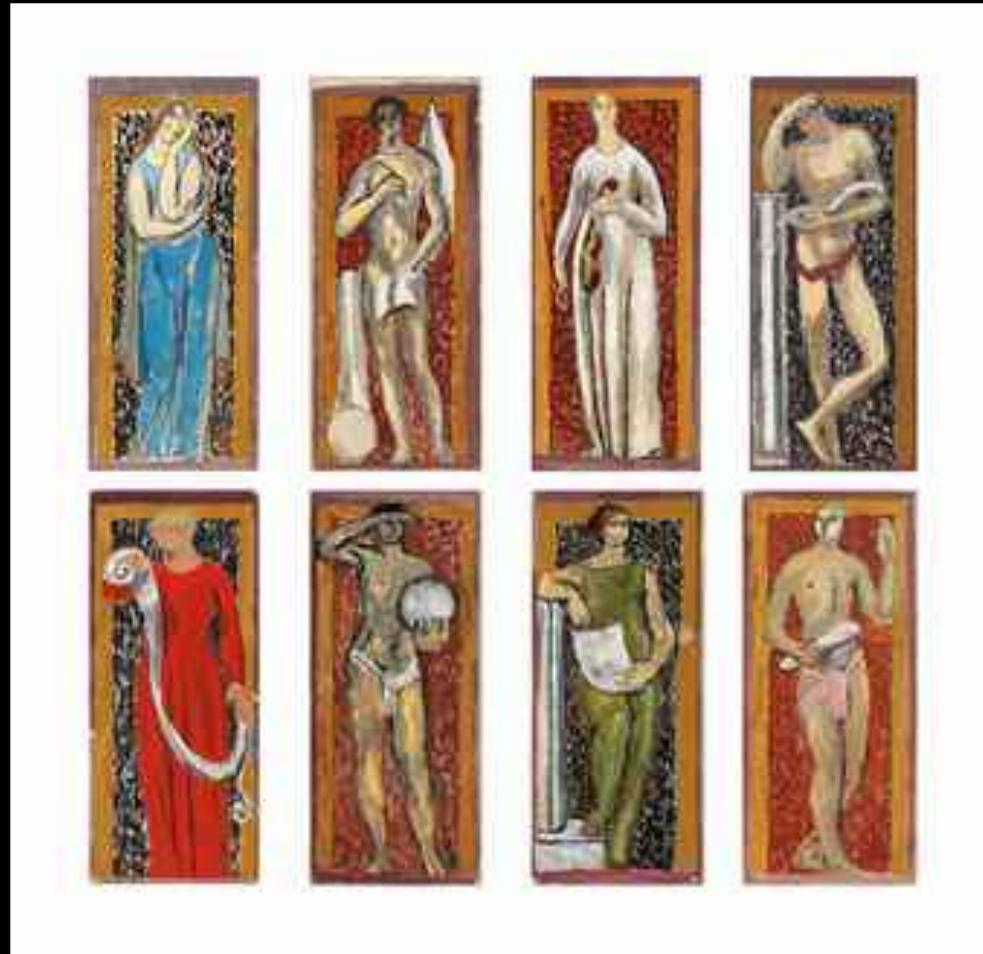


Albert Moore, *Dreamers*, 1879, oil on canvas, 70 x 121 cm, Birmingham Museums & Art Galleries

Moore was “Greek also in his choice of expressing himself greatly if not mainly by form, by accurate and delicate modelling,” adding that he was animated by a “purist’ ideal of art” and “preoccupied . . . with beautiful combinations of form and colour” Cosmo Monkhouse, “Albert Moore.” *Magazine of Art* vol. 8, Nov.-Oct. 1884-5, 191-6, 193-195.



Duncan Grant & Vanessa Bell, 8 studies for the murals at J. M Keynes' rooms, 1920, oil on canvas, 83.8 x 35.5 cm, private collection



Bell, Vanessa (1879-1961) and Grant, Duncan (1885–1978), *Arts and Sciences*, a study made for murals at John Maynard Keynes' rooms, Webb's Court, King's College, Cambridge, 1920, oil on canvas, 83.8 x 35.5 cm

William Blake Richmond (1842-1921), *Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon*, 1874, oil on canvas, 170.2 x 157.5 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada



Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, study for the murals, Keynes's rooms

Burne-Jones, *Autum*, 1869-70, gouache and watercolour



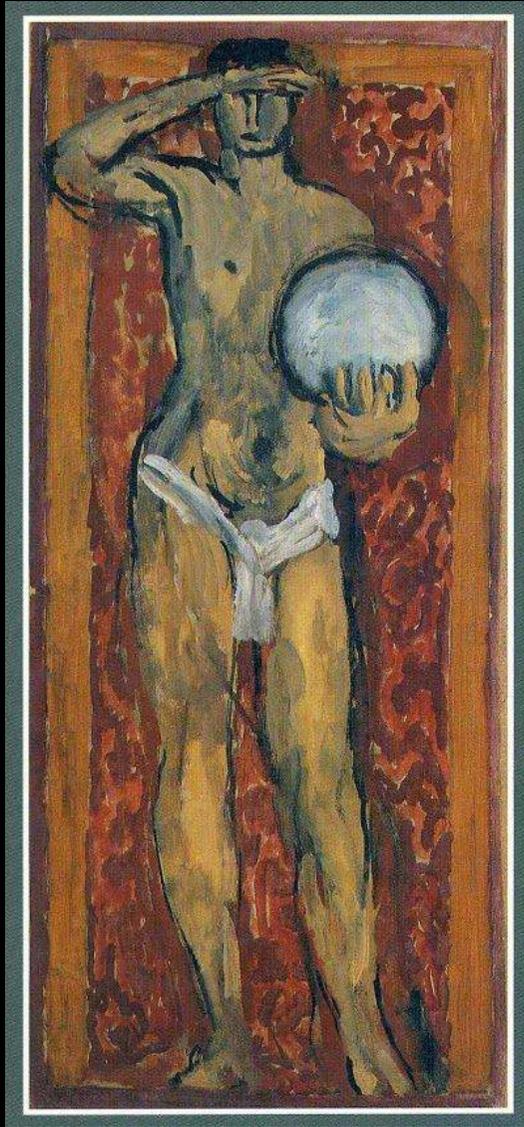
Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, study for the murals, Keynes's rooms

Albert Moore, *A Quartet, a Painter's Tribute to Music*, 1868, oil on canvas, 61.8 x 88.7 cm, private collection (detail)



Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, study for the murals, Keynes's rooms

Edward Burne-Jones, *The Days of Creation*, 1870-1876, detail



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Days of Creation*, 1870-1876, detail

The Days of Creation by this artist, six subjects in a common frame of ornamental design, certainly throws far into the shade most other works produced by English painters in which both the aim and the treatment are alike abstract and symbolic. W.M. Rossetti, "The Grosvenor Gallery", *Academy* vol. 11, May 5, 1877, 396-7.



Edward Burne-Jones, *Day*, 1870, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, study for the murals, Keynes's rooms



Duncan Grant, mural in John Maynard Keynes rooms at Kings College Cambridge, recently uncovered under some wallpaper

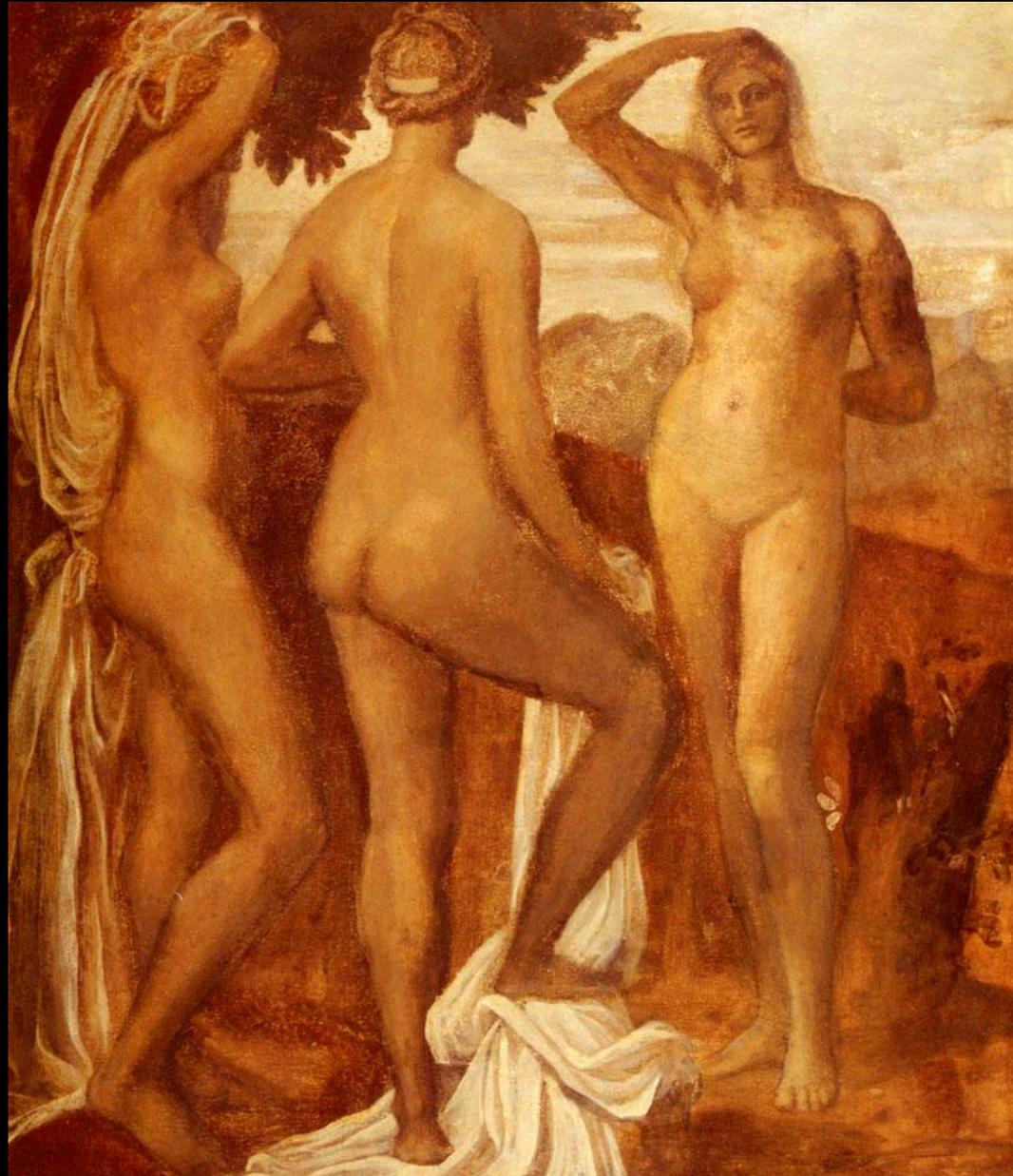


Duncan Grant, *Dancers*, c.1910-11, oil paint on wood, 53.3 x 66 cm, Tate Britain



George Frederic Watts
(1817-1904), *The Judgment
of Paris*, 1872-4, oil on
canvas, the Faringdon
Collection, Buscot Park,
Oxfordshire

The forms and the
compositions of Mr. Watts are
unusually so abstract and
generic as to be removed far
away from actual nature: and
this constitutes their defect as
well as their merit. [Anon.,
“The Royal Academy”, *Art
Journal* n.s. vol. IX, June 1,
1870, 161-72, 164.



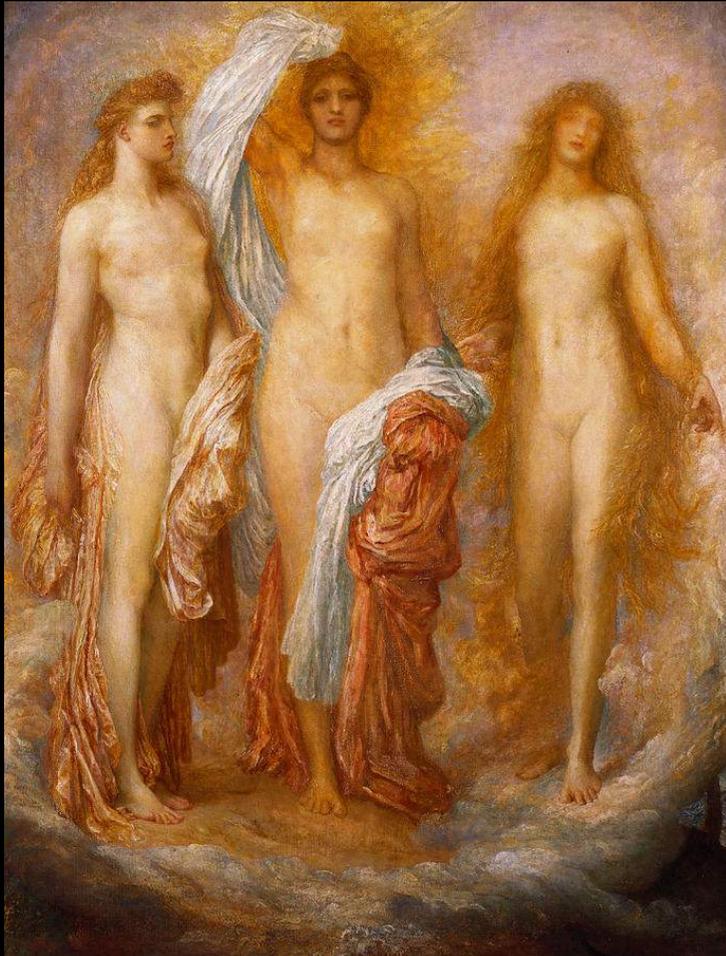
G.F. Watts, *Study for Olympus on Ida*, 1872-79, oil on canvas, 64.77 x 53.34 cm, Watts Gallery

the figure is treated with almost the abstract idealism of sculpture [...] with a difference, for [Watts] imparts to it a warmth and glow of colour to which the classic school of the last generation were total strangers. Heathcote H. Statham, "The Academy and the New Gallery", *Fortnightly Review* 65, 59 ns, June 1896, 958-74, 964.



G.F. Watts, *Olympus on Ida (The Judgment of Paris)*,
1885, oil on canvas, 147 x 102 cm, private collection

Duncan Grant, *Dancers*, c.1910-11, oil paint on
wood, 53.3 x 66 cm, Tate Britain



Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Garden of the Hesperides*, c. 1870, watercolour and gouache on paper, 119 x 98 cm, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



John Roddam Spencer Stanhope (1829-1908), *Love and the Maiden*,
1877, tempera, gold paint and gold leaf on canvas, 86.4 x 50.8 cm,
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco



Spencer Stanhope, *Love and the Maiden*, detail



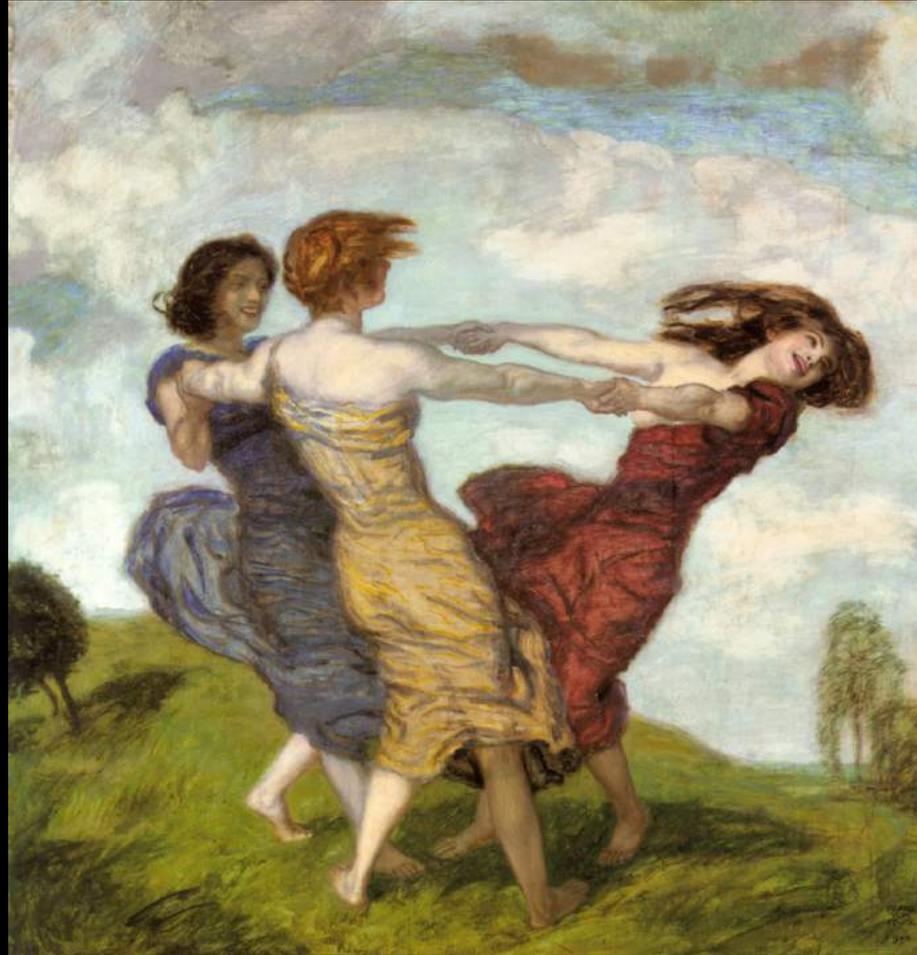
Sir Edward John Poynter (1836-1919), *Horae Serenae*, 1896, oil on canvas, private collection



Edward Poynter, *Horae Serenae*, detail



Franz von Stück (German, 1863-1928), *Ringerlreihen*, 1910, oil on canvas,
71 x 70 cm, private collection



Duncan Grant, *Dancers*, c.1910-11, oil paint on wood, 53.3 x 66 cm, Tate Britain



Vanessa Bell, *Nude with Poppies*, 1916, oil on canvas, 23.5 x 42.5 cm, Swindon Museum and Art Gallery

On one side is a woman asleep, rather like *Flaming June* by Leighton, with poppies and waves (I think) all very symbolical. Vanessa Bell, qtd in Richard Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury, Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, with essays by James Beechey and Richard Morphet*. London, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999, 164.



Frederic Leighton, *Flaming June*, 1895, oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm, Museo de Art de Ponce, Puerto Rico

[T]he drapery acts to transform the body into a carrier of pure colour, thus becoming the content of the image. Paul Barlow, "Transparent Bodies, Opaque Identities: Personification, Narrative and Portraiture," In *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity*, eds. Tim Barringer & Elizabeth Prettejohn, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, 193-220, 196.



Duncan Grant, *Venus and Adonis* (1885-1978), c. 1919, oil on canvas,
63.5 x 94 cm, Tate Britain





Frederic Leighton, *Actaea, the Nymph of the Shore*, 1853-8, oil on canvas, 57.2 x 102.2 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Another picture, 'Actaea, the Nymph of the Shore', ideal in form and romantic in motive, Mr. Leighton has culled from the Greeks. [...] In the picture before us, however, the nymph, in a state of nature, is seen simply at her ease safe upon the shore. The artist has made some effort to paint flesh in its freshness and transparency. [Anon.], "The Royal Academy", *Art Journal* n.s. vol. VII, June 1, 1868, 101-10, 105.

Frederic Leighton, *Actaea, the Nymph of the Shore*, 1853-8, oil on canvas, 57.2 x 102.2 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

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