JOHN WILLIAM WATERHOUSE

INTRODUCTION

ARTIST: John William Waterhouse
MOVEMENT: Post-Renaissance.
IN BRIEF: Waterhouse was born in Italy to English parents who were both painters. He later moved to London where he enrolled in the Royal Academy of Art and began exhibiting works on large canvas depicting scenes from the daily life of ancient Greece.
STYLE: Known for working in the painterly version of the Academic style and later embracing a Pre-Raphaelite-like subject matter.

http://www.johnwilliamwaterhouse.com/
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/john-william-waterhouse-583

Artist Overview:
Nickname: Nino
Birthplace: Rome, Italy
Honours: Royal Academician (RA, elected 1895)
Death: 10th February 1917
Burial: Kensal Green Cemetery, London

Works of Art:
Waterhouse painted figurative / narrative pictures primarily in the medium of oil. He found inspiration in stories and legends from British literature and Classical mythology. His paintings are scattered throughout the world: many are owned by public museums in the United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere; others are in the hands of private collectors in the UK, USA and Russia.

Reputation:
In his lifetime, Waterhouse was well regarded by his fellow artists, art critics and the general public. His work fell out of fashion, along with that of other Victorian painters, with the advent of the First World War, and wouldn't become popular again (with the public at least) until the late 20th century. "Mr. Waterhouse adds to his designs a certain mystic suggestion—a touch of that sad wonderment which troubles the deep thinker." (The Art Journal, 1896)

The Models:
Waterhouse's paintings are famous for the feminine beauty depicted in them. His genre of female beauty became known as 'The Waterhouse Girl'. The identity of Waterhouse's models range from family members and friends, to professional artists' models. Some of the young female models would later become famous in their own right as renowned stage actresses and movie stars.
THE LADY OF SHALOTT, The Painting


The Lady of Shalott was painted by Waterhouse in 1888. It is a representation of the ending of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's 1832 poem of the same name. [1] Waterhouse painted three different versions of this character, in 1888, 1894 and 1915. It is one of his most famous works, which adopted much of the Pre-Raphaelite style popular when he was a child.

The painting has the precisely painted detail and bright colours associated with the Pre-Raphaelites. The Lady of Shalott pictures the Lady, who is the main character in Tennyson's poem, also titled The Lady of Shalott (1842). In the poem, she had been confined to her quarters, not allowed to go outside or even look outdoors. "A curse is on her if she stay", wrote Tennyson. But she defies the rules of the curse to see if she could live outside of her confinement. The Lady has made her way to this small canoe with a few of her belongings. This is the moment that is pictured in Waterhouse's painting, as the Lady is leaving to face her destiny. She is pictured sitting on a tapestry, which showcases Waterhouse’s strong attention to detail.

IMAGERY: Initially it simply appears to be a painting of a woman in a canoe-like boat, but the painting is filled with significant detail that amplifies the meaning. The Lady has a lantern at the front of her boat; in the poem by Tennyson and reflected in Waterhouse’s image it will soon be dark. Also, with a closer look, we can see a crucifix positioned near the front of the bow, and the Lady is gazing right over it. Next to the crucifix are three candles. Candles were a representation of life – two of the candles are already blown out, signifying that her death is soon to come. Aside from the metaphoric details, this painting is valued for Waterhouse's realistic painting abilities. Her dress is stark white against the much darker hues of the background. Waterhouse's close attention to detail and colour, accentuation of the beauty of nature, realist quality, and his interpretation of a vulnerable, yearning woman are further representative of his artistic skill.

The Lady of Shalott was donated to the public by Sir Henry Tate in 1894.[1]

THE LADY OF SHALOTT, The Poem – ALFRED LORD TENNYSON


"The Lady of Shalott" is a ballad by the English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892). The poem is loosely based on the Arthurian legend of Elaine of Astolat, as recounted in a thirteenth-century Italian novella titled Donna di Scalotta. Tennyson focused on the Lady's "isolation in the tower and her decision to participate in the living world, two subjects not even mentioned in Donna di Scalotta."[2]

The first four stanzas of the 1842 poem describe a pastoral setting. The Lady of Shalott lives in an island castle in a river which flows to Camelot, but the local farmers know little about her. Stanzas five to eight describe the lady's life. She suffers from a mysterious curse and must continually weave images on her
loom without ever looking directly out at the world. Instead, she looks into a mirror, which reflects the busy road and the people of Camelot who pass by her island. The reflected images are described as "shadows of the world", a metaphor that makes it clear they are a poor substitute for seeing directly ("I am half-sick of shadows"). Stanzas nine to twelve describe "bold Sir Lancelot" as he rides by and is seen by the lady. The remaining seven stanzas describe the effect on the lady of seeing Lancelot; she stops weaving and looks out of her window toward Camelot, bringing about the curse. She leaves her tower, finds a boat upon which she writes her name, and floats down the river to Camelot. She dies before arriving at the palace. Among the knights and ladies who see her is Lancelot, who thinks she is lovely.