

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood Art Movement: History, Characteristics, Artists  
[Art Movements](#) / By Caroline Haller, M.A.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was an art movement founded in **1848** by a group of English artists, poets, critics, and playwrights. The artistic movement sought to **emulate early Italian art and was opposed to the classical compositions that Raphael made popular.**

The founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were **William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), and John Everett Millais (1829-1896).** Other members of the Pre-Raphaelite movement include: William Michael Rossetti, Frederic George Stephens, James Collinson and Thomas Woolner. The Pre-Raphaelite Movement was founded in 1848 when the three founders Hunt, Rossetti, and Millais met at John Millais's parents' house in London, England.

Pre-Raphaelite art admired the detail, color, and composition of quattrocento art. The Pre-Raphaelites did not like the art of Raphael and sought to emulate earlier Italian art. They were opposed to the classical compositions and poses that Raphael made popular. The former leader of London's Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), had promoted classical art. The Pre-Raphaelites, however, painted biblical subjects, the natural world around them, and everyday life. This group of young artists formed a secret society known to them as the PRB. In fact, artists like Dante Gabriel Rossetti often signed PRB on his paintings. Pre-Raphaelite work was similar to medieval art in a number of ways, including the reliance on medieval literature, fourteenth century composition and pose, and the faithful study of nature.

Pre-Raphaelitism suggested artists study nature attentively. The Pre-Raphaelite art circle sought to imitate nature. Mimesis and history painting were central tenets of their art. **The Pre-Raphaelites produced a periodical, first called *The Germ* and later *Art and Poetry*.** Publication of The Pre-Raphaelite's journal, *The Germ*, began in 1850 and was intended to advance their ideas across the artistic community. The group disbanded in 1853, but their influence lived on in artists that followed such as Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), and William Morris (1834-1896).

Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood Artwork includes many stunning works, including: **"Ophelia" by John Everett Millais**, "Bocca Baciata" by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "The Awakening Conscience" by William Holman Hunt, "Dante's Dream" by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and "Christ in the House with his Parents"

by John Millais. Female Models of the Pre-Raphaelite works include Elizabeth Siddal and Jane Morris, as well as others.

Pre-Raphaelitism was influenced by early Renaissance art and Italian artists of **the Quattrocento**. The Quattrocento referred to a period of art in Italy between 1400-1499 and encompassed art prior to Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Raphael (1483-1620). These artists and the mannerists of the mid-late Renaissance had a mechanical approach to figuration. The Pre-Raphaelites were influenced by the writings of English Romantic poets **Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and John Keats (1795-1821)**.

Pre-Raphaelite works influenced many artists of the late nineteenth century, including: William Morris, Edward Burne Jones, Henry Wallis (1830 -1916) and Walter Howell Deverell (1827–1854). John Collier (1850-1934), Arthur Hughes (1832-1915), James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) and Frank Bernard Dicksee (1853-1928). Pre-Raphaelite circle artworks can be found in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, the Delaware Art Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Manchester Art Gallery, the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and Tate Britain.

### **Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) History**

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded in 1848 by the three original members: William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and John Millais. The Pre-Raphaelites expanded to include other members. These three artists, who first met at the Royal Academy, came together in September 1848 at John Millais's parents' house. At what would be the first meeting of the Brotherhood, in September 1848, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's brother, William Michael Rossetti, wrote down the four key components to Pre-Raphaelitism. The brotherhood's early doctrines were as follows:

- 1. To have genuine ideas to express;**
- 2. To study Nature attentively, so as to know how to express them;**
- 3. To sympathize with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote; and**
- 4. Most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.**

After the three, several other young painters and poets joined the group. Other members of the Pre-Raphaelites include: William Michael Rossetti, Frederic George Stephens, James Collinson and Thomas Woolner. The Pre-Raphaelites operated like a secret society. Members wrote PRB as a mystery or coded

message on to their paintings. The Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood believed in the intersection of fine art, literature, religion, poetry, modern and social problems.

The brotherhood created a Pre-Raphaelite journal called *The Germ*, so named because it was intended to be a seed or blossom that would reproduce and further their influence across art. *The Germ* was a publication featuring book reviews, poetry, and art banter. It only ran for four issues in 1850.

Unlike the Academy, where women had yet to be accepted, the Pre-Raphaelite circle happily accepted and promoted the art of women artists. The Pre-Raphaelites allowed women into their circle including: Emma Sandys (1843-1877), Joanna Mary Wells (1831-1861), Evelyn de Morgan (1855-1919) and Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927). Pre-Raphaelite women artists created art that shared characteristics with their male counterparts. A good example is Stillman's work "Madonna Pietra degli Scrovegni" (1884), because while it clearly takes influence from art of the male Pre-Raphaelites, it also deviates in the finish of the canvas and the darker tones. This shows that women artists were encouraged to develop their own styles.



Madonna Pietra – Dante Gabriel Rossetti

The Pre-Raphaelites did not like formulaic academic art and amassed supporters like art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900). John Ruskin became their most supportive critic, while Charles Dickens pushed back against them. Ruskin liked the earnest and sincere nature of the art and realism that the Pre-Raphaelites supported. The public did not respond well to Pre-Raphaelite paintings because they thought the characters were ugly, such as in Millais, "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin." In the image, Millais created a sickly-looking flame-haired Mary, who the devout Victorians saw as blasphemous as it altered the "perfect" image of the Virgin Mary.

Eventually, the group split into two loosely associated groups. The first, the realists followed Millais and Hunt. The second loosely associated group were those artists that responded to the more medieval qualities that Rossetti eschewed. For instance, Rossetti's later portrait of his wife Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862), "Beata Beatrix," features a golden halo of light around the sitter as if her portrait took place in the medieval age.



Beata Beatrix – Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Though the Brotherhood officially disbanded in 1853, the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites lived on in many artists and artistic movements. Some members,

like John Collinson, left the group early because of the worry of religious backlash. Others continued to utilize the Pre-Raphaelite style in their art and works well past 1853.