



For immediate release

J. W. WATERHOUSE GARDEN OF ENCHANTMENT

THE FIRST MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE ON THE ARTIST

**THREE VERSIONS OF THE FAMOUS *LADY OF SHALOTT*
PRESENTED TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME**

Montreal, September 29, 2009 – After the Royal Academy of Arts, London, and the Groninger Museum, the Netherlands, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts will host, from October 2, 2009, to February 7, 2010, the largest-ever retrospective of the British painter John William Waterhouse (1849-1917). Thanks to generous loans from the Tate Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Leeds Art Gallery, the Museum will present all three versions of *The Lady of Shalott*, the artist's most celebrated and popular work. This is the first time these three works have been presented together. Bringing together some eighty works, paintings and works on paper, *J. W. Waterhouse: Garden of Enchantment* is the first international exhibition on Waterhouse since 1978 and the first to feature the entire artistic career of this modern Pre-Raphaelite, a compelling artist with a fertile imagination and a fascination with the *femme fatale* of literature, both as enchantress of ancient times and romantic heroine. Several of these works have not been exhibited since Waterhouse's death. Gravitating increasingly to a baneful or bewitching symbolism, between spiritualism and occultism, Waterhouse's aesthetics have also stood the test of time to inspire contemporary artists, whose works will be included in this exhibition. The exhibition is produced by the Groninger Museum in the Netherlands, in collaboration with the Royal Academy of Arts, London, and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

WHY WATERHOUSE IN MONTREAL?

“Why bring Waterhouse to Montreal? A quintessentially English product of the Royal Academy in London, where he would spend his entire career, J. W. Waterhouse was nevertheless stylistically the most French of the Pre-Raphaelites. He also had close ties with many of the artists whose works were collected by the Art Association of Montreal, the precursor to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. At the same time, he scandalized his peers

and critics of his time with his more modern paint handling, borrowed from Naturalist and Impressionist schools across the Channel. This is why I wanted to invite Waterhouse to Montreal,” said Nathalie Bondil, Director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

This retrospective features about fifty paintings that are among the finest and most spectacular of the artist’s production, on loan from public and private collections in Australia, England, Ireland, Taiwan, the United States and Canada. In addition to the iconic *Lady of Shalott*, other major works appearing in this presentation include *Ariadne*, inspired by Ovid’s *Heroides*, dated 1898 and exhibited the same year at the Royal Academy, his *Saint Cecilia* from the collection of the Andrew Lloyd Webber Art Foundation, produced when he was at the apogee of his career. *A Naiad* and *Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus* come from the collection of Sir Tim Rice. Among loans from the Tate is *Saint Eulalia*, the first in a long series of heroines who suffered an unjust fate. The canvas of Shakespeare’s *Miranda*, which had disappeared without trace, was rediscovered in Scotland in 2006. *The Favourites of the Emperor Honorius*, the painting inspired by ancient mythology that definitively established Waterhouse’s reputation, was the first of his works to enter a public collection, that of the Art Gallery of South Australia. The Underworld – a place he often alluded to in his mythological paintings – appears in *Ulysses and the Sirens* and in *Psyche Opening the Golden Box*. *The Danaïdes*, carrying heavy copper jugs, were eternally condemned to fill a perpetually leaking vessel to atone for their crime.

The exhibition also includes some thirty exquisite studies in oil, chalk and pencil, and a book of poems by Alfred, Lord Tennyson belonging to the artist. Waterhouse, who greatly admired the poet, drew a pencil sketch on the cover. Tennyson’s poem “The Palace of Art” provided the inspiration for the painter’s *Saint Cecilia*, and his “Lady of Shalott” is the subject of three of Waterhouse’s most famous paintings.

J. W. WATERHOUSE’S SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Often associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, who aimed to recapture the beauty and simplicity of the medieval world, Waterhouse was also a classical painter. The exhibition will show how his paintings reflect his engagement with the themes of the day – medievalism, classical heritage, spiritualism and the *femme fatale*. Born the year the Pre-Raphaelites first exhibited at the Royal Academy, he inherited their enthusiasm for Tennyson, Keats and Shakespeare. He was captivated by legends of enchantresses, the underworld and beauty, and his paintings reveal a romantic fascination with intense female passion: among his subjects are the Lady of Shalott, Cleopatra, Circe, Lamia, the Sirens tormenting Ulysses, and Mariamne condemned to death. He found inspiration in Romantic literature and also in Greek mythology as interpreted by Homer and Ovid.

Although Waterhouse’s work is admired by millions worldwide, the general public actually knows relatively little about the man himself and his artistic production. Waterhouse is often described as a modern Pre-Raphaelite, but the style he developed distinguishes him from his truly Pre-Raphaelite forerunners. In 1886, he discovered the *Ophelia* (1851-1852) by the Pre-Raphaelite John Everett Millais and simultaneously became influenced by the spontaneity of Impressionism through the work of English artists like William Logsdail, Frank Bramley and

the Newlyn and Primrose Hill schools. The twentieth-century scholars who rediscovered the Pre-Raphaelites often marginalized Waterhouse for such seemingly contradictory tendencies, yet it is these which have endeared him to art lovers today. The exhibition will place his best-known works in the context of his whole career to illustrate why Waterhouse can be regarded as one of the major interpreters of the classical and romantic tradition.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The artist was born in Rome in 1849 to a family of British artists who returned to London when he was five. Even at a very young age, Waterhouse helped in his father's studio, where he learned about art and developed an interest in painting, sculpture and classical antiquity. In 1870, he was admitted to the Royal Academy School and gradually developed his own style in original and melancholy pictures inspired by ancient Greece and Rome. In 1895, he became a member of the Academy, which established his reputation. His dramatic, richly coloured paintings featuring beautiful women brought him renown throughout the British Empire and at the World Exhibitions of 1890 and 1900.

CURATORS

Patty Wageman (director of the Groninger Museum), Peter Trippi (author of the monograph *J. W. Waterhouse* [2002] and editor in chief of *Fine Art Connoisseur*, New York), Elizabeth Prettejohn (Professor of History of Art, University of Bristol) and Robert Upstone (Curator of Modern British Art at the Tate Britain, London) are the four curators of the exhibition.

The exhibition's presentation at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is under the direction of Nathalie Bondil, Director and Chief Curator, with the assistance of Anne Grace, Curator of Modern Art.

EXHIBITION DESIGN

The exhibition's original design with its keynote of sorcery was created by two Montrealers. Nathalie Claude is an actor, director, dancer, avant-garde choreographer and writer, a member of the Momentum collective. Raymond Marius Boucher is a designer who has worked for Montreal's leading theatre companies as well as in film, television, the visual arts, entertainment and dance.

KENT NAGANO'S MUSICAL SELECTION

The visual arts and music have always influenced each other in many ways. Carte blanche was given to Kent Nagano, Music Director of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, to choose the works for a musical audioguide. Visitors will be invited to take a musical stroll through the exhibition, stopping at designated locations where they where they can sit down to listen to pieces of music in connection with selected works of art in the exhibition

Melissa Auf der Maur, a Montreal musician and photographer, rose to prominence in the 1990s as a member of Courtney Love's band, Hole, before joining the Smashing Pumpkins for their latest tour. She recorded a solo album in 2004. Inspired by Waterhouse's works, she wrote and produced *Out of Our Minds (OOOM)*, a film brought to life by New York director Tony Stone, in which the main character is based on the witch in the English artist's *Magic Circle*, on display in the exhibition. Interest in Celtic mythology, its ceremonies and rituals, was widespread in Great Britain in the 1880s. The film will have its Canadian premiere at the Museum after being screened at the Sundance Festival.

THE CATALOGUE

The extensively illustrated 241-page exhibition catalogue was published jointly by the Groninger Museum, the Royal Academy of Arts and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in English and French. It presents essays by the four curators – Peter Trippi, Elizabeth Prettejohn, Robert Upstone and Patty Wageman – as well as detailed catalogue entries for each work. The catalogue was published by Éditions BAi in separate Dutch, English and French editions.

SPONSORS

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' International Exhibition Programme receives financial support from the Exhibition Fund of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Foundation and the Paul G. Desmarais Fund.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts wishes to thank its media partners *La Presse* and *The Gazette*. Its gratitude also goes to the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec for its ongoing support.

The Museum would like to thank the Volunteer Association of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts for its loyal support. It would also like to thank all its members and the many individuals, companies and foundations who support its mission.

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200915

Images of works are available on the Museum's Web site at mmfa.qc.ca/media and all the texts are available in the [media kit](#).

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