

EXHIBITION REVIEW THE PRE-RAPHAELITES IN JAPAN

There appeared in the 1980s a series of exhibitions on Japan and the Pre-Raphaelites that culminated in the exhibition *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1950*, held at the Barbican Art Gallery in London from October 1991 to January 1992. This exhibition, with its catalogue by Tomoko Sato and Toshio Watanabe (London: Lund Humphries, 1991), forms an appropriate basis for contextualizing Anglo-Japanese artistic relations. However, this exhibition was preceded by five exhibitions of nineteenth-century British painting held in Japan during the 1980s, all of which were significant in forming a conception of nineteenth-century English painting for Japanese scholars of this period. In four of these exhibitions, the Burne-Jones scholar John Christian played a major role in formulating a conception of the Pre-Raphaelites and of other Victorian artists that is itself revolutionary. The uniqueness of his views can be demonstrated by comparison with those that informed the famous Tate Gallery Pre-Raphaelite retrospective in 1984.

Christian's involvement was in four significant exhibitions which included splendid catalogues: *Shigeru Aoki and the [sic] Late Victorian Art* (Tokyo: The Tokyo Shimbun, 1983); *The Pre-Raphaelites and their Times* (Tokyo: The Tokyo Shimbun, 1985); *Burne-Jones and his Followers* (Tokyo: The Tokyo Shimbun, 1987); and *Victorian Dreamers: Masterpieces of Neo-Classical and Aesthetic Movements in Britain* (Tokyo: The Tokyo Shimbun, 1989). The last three of these exhibitions were generated by the British Council with Japanese collaboration and support from The Tokyo Shimbun. The latter undertook the printing of the catalogues, which are marked by sumptuous plates and high quality production resources. The fifth important exhibition of the 1980s was *The Pre-Raphaelites in Oxford* (Tokyo: The Asahi Shimbun, 1987), also with an excellent catalogue, including an introductory essay and catalogue entries by David Blayney Brown. It is appropriate to discuss the 1991 exhibition *Japan and Britain*, therefore, as a summation of Anglo-Japanese artistic relations that had been explored during the 1980s in these five preceding exhibitions.

The 1983 exhibition concentrating on Aoki Shigeru (1882-1911) was a formidable enterprise. Its purpose was to align the work of this supreme master of Meiji Romanticism with that of nineteenth-century English

painters, whose work he knew from reproductions and engravings. Aoki first studied with Mori Miyoshi in Kurume, where he encountered English art in the English art books employed by his teacher. Beginning in 1900, Aoki studied in the Western Art Program of the Tokyo Art School. In his catalogue essay "Shigeru Aoki and Meiji Romanticism," Hiroki Hashitomi noted that Meiji Romanticism was marked by the same qualities as that inspiring a similar literary movement: "self-reverberation, introspection, strong emotions, and subjectivity," in the words of Yuichi Sasabuchi (15). Through reproductions, Aoki was strongly influenced by Rossetti, Watts, Moore, and Burne-Jones, as well as by Puvis de Chavannes and Gustave Moreau. Nobuo Abe traced the influence of these artists on Aoki in his essay "Shigeru Aoki and Victorian Art," citing Aoki's own testimony about his famous canvas *Paradise under the Sea* of 1907 (included in the 1991 exhibition): "There may be some similarities to the decorative compositions of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, as well as some influence of the flat planes of Puvis de Chavannes. . . . In fact, those resemblances are exactly what I was trying to achieve" (24). Nobuo noted that other Aoki paintings demonstrate a range of affiliations with Victorian painters: *The Tempyo Era* with Burne-Jones's *The Feast of Peleus*; *Pleasure* with Leighton's *Flaming June*; and *Onamuchi-no-Mikoto* with Ford Madox Brown's *The Finding of Don Juan by Haidee*.

In his essay "Shigeru Aoki and the Pre-Raphaelites," Christian notes that this 1983 exhibition is "the Pre-Raphaelites' Japanese debut," which makes the show a crucial moment in contemporary Anglo-Japanese artistic relations: it "marks the first occasion when a group of Pre-Raphaelite paintings has been shown under official auspices in Japan" (33). Christian's essay surveys the development of the PRB in England, but after noting a "second wave" (34) of PRB influence on Burne-Jones, Christian incorporates into the range of Pre-Raphaelite influence such artists as Watts, Waterhouse, and Moore. Christian notes a number of books about English art available to Aoki during his study in Tokyo, where he also knew illustrated collections of articles from *The Art Journal*. Christian includes (179-82) a record of books on English painting during the 1880s and 1890s with accompanying