

*The Pre-Raphaelites and Italy* by Colin Harrison and Christopher Newall, with essays by Marizio Isabella and Martin McLaughlin. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, in association with Lund Humphries, 2010. 217 pp. + 194 colour plates. ISBN 978-1-84822-075-1. £25.

*The Pre-Raphaelites and Italy* was published to accompany the eponymous temporary exhibition that inaugurated newly renovated galleries at the Ashmolean in 2010. Artists associated with Pre-Raphaelitism in both its early and later stages were visually, textually, and politically engaged with Italian culture, whether they travelled to Italy or not. The authors are quick to point out that, of the major Pre-Raphaelite figures, only John Ruskin, William Holman Hunt, and Edward Burne-Jones spent time in Italy. This paradox is at the heart of *The Pre-Raphaelites and Italy*. The book's essays and catalogue entries clarify how Pre-Raphaelite artists, in this volume a loosely defined group, experienced Italy and its culture empirically and imaginatively, and dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding the subject. The Ashmolean's important collection of Pre-Raphaelite material, especially the work of Ruskin, is prominently featured in the book, together with pieces by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Burne-Jones and other lesser known and, perhaps, unexpected artists. For example, the authors have included work made by artists – such as Frank Randal – who were commissioned by Ruskin to produce architectural studies for the Guild of St. George, and have expanded the boundaries of “Pre-Raphaelitism” to include work by Frederic Leighton, who was inspired by Ruskin's writing early in his career and had artistic and personal ties to Giovanni Costa, an Italian artist who promoted Pre-Raphaelite art in Italy.

The text is organized in two halves, beginning with three thematic essays, followed by catalogue entries arranged in sections that, one presumes, echo the organization of the exhibition. The three essays provide the reader with an overview of the topic at hand from different perspectives: Italian art, Italian literature, and Italian politics. In his essay “The Pre-Raphaelites and Italian Art before and after Raphael,” Colin Harrison grapples with and overturns many preconceptions about his subject, asserting that the Pre-Raphaelites were not nearly as directly influenced by art before Raphael as their name suggests. He offers, instead, a brief history of the Arundel Society, founded in 1848, which devoted itself to the publication of art criticism and reproductions, and did emphasize the study of early Italian art. He then traces an alternative artistic lineage for Pre-Raphaelitism that includes Northern Renaissance painting on view at the National Gallery of Art during the mid-nineteenth century and the Italian paintings that Rossetti and Hunt