

## REVIEWS

*The American Pre-Raphaelites: Radical Realists* by Linda S. Ferber et al. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2019. 312 pp. + 210 colour plates. ISBN: 9780300242522.\$65. *The American Pre-Raphaelites: Radical Realists* exhibition. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 14 April–21 July 2019.

*The American Pre-Raphaelites: Radical Realists* exhibition and the accompanying catalogue revisit and update the foundational scholarship put forth in the 1985 exhibition and text, *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites* (Brooklyn Museum and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), co-curated and edited by Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerdt. The current exhibition is again curated by Ferber, museum director emerita and senior art historian at the New York Historical Society, with Nancy K. Anderson, curator and head of the department of American and British paintings at the National Gallery of Art. It is composed of 90 paintings, drawings, and photographs including recent discoveries. The associated catalogue – with much improved colour reproductions – includes seven essays, an exhibition checklist, timeline, and artists’ biographies.

The American version of Pre-Raphaelitism was an artistic movement with a literary component and pedagogical intent staunchly grounded in the critical writings and artistic practice of John Ruskin (the bicentenary of whose birth is being widely celebrated this year). Like their British Pre-Raphaelite predecessors, the men and women of the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art were intent on shaking American art from its pastoral stasis, advocating instead for attentive visual scrutiny of the national landscape. Visually and theoretically more “Ruskinian than Pre-Raphaelite” (Foster 82), the Association felt Ruskin had been divinely sent to “open their eyes” to the realities of the modern age, resulting in what is described in the exhibition text as “quasi-scientific precision ... charged with spiritual significance.”

Formed at a gathering in January 1863 in the New York studio of British ex-patriot painter Thomas Charles Farrer, the Association was aesthetically focused on the landscape genre, and made use of the sermonizing pulpit of *The New Path* – the journal they produced beginning in March of the same year. Artists of the group, including Farrer, Charles Herbert Moore, John William Hill and his son John Henry Hill, William Trost Richards, and Henry Roderick Newman, adhered to Ruskin’s dictum to paint and observe the natural world in all its minutiae. Architect members, including Peter Bonnett Wight and Russell Sturgis, Jr., similarly took up Ruskin’s enthusiasm for the Gothic.