

ROSSETTI AND SPARTALI STILLMAN JOIN HANDS IN 1862

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As a docent/guide at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton, New Brunswick, I became interested in a work of art, a chalk painting simply entitled *Young Girl Holding a Spray of White Roses* (fig. 1).¹ It was bought in 1958 from Sotheby's "as by Dante Gabriel Rossetti." In 1977, the authorship was reconsidered, ascribing the richly coloured painting to Marie Spartali Stillman. It continues to hang at the Beaverbrook identified as a self-portrait by an eighteen-year-old Spartali Stillman. This change of attribution from Rossetti to Stillman relied on the opinion of Virginia Surtees, author of Rossetti's authoritative *Catalogue Raisonné*. In her correspondence with the staff of the Beaverbrook, Surtees concluded with confidence: "I suspect that it will not surprise you to learn that your drawing is not by Rossetti...; at a guess I would say that the sitter is Marie Stillman and that it is a self-portrait" (Surtees Letter). The "1862" date Surtees thought was added later with the monogram. Others, including Jan Marsh and Christopher Newall, share her opinion that it does not look like a Rossetti, though providing no tangible evidence. However, the coloured chalk painting is accomplished in its execution and appears to belie the judgement that it is a self-portrait, as the pose would be difficult to portray even for an experienced artist. The young woman subject is generally accepted to be Marie Spartali (later Mrs. Marie Stillman), an important Pre-Raphaelite artist in her own right, in many ways a colleague rather than a model or muse for Rossetti.

I believe that some or all this work was completed by Rossetti himself, while not dismissing the likelihood that Spartali Stillman or others may have made some contribution. On examining the chalk painting, it is clearly signed with a Rossetti monogram with the date 1862 (fig. 2; compare fig. 3), details which guided my research.² The portrait is of a young woman whose age and demeanor are consistent with Spartali's age of eighteen in 1862. For her to create such a skillfully rendered portrait at this early age without assistance seems highly unlikely, especially when we compare it with a self-portrait she completed five years later in 1867 (fig. 4). This later portrait demonstrates an