

# I PRERAFFAELLITI

Heather Birchall



TASCHEN

Taschen  
PRERAFFAELLITI (I) #BASICART

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BA

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### **“Idee genuine da esprimere”**

#### **I segreti di un movimento radicale**

Talvolta considerati esponenti del primo movimento d'avanguardia, i Preraffaelliti rifiutavano le teorie artistiche dominanti all'epoca per un approccio che ai loro occhi appariva più spirituale, naturalistico e intensamente personale. Affascinati dagli aspetti romantici della cultura medievale e dai colori vividi e splendidi come gioielli dell'arte del Quattrocento, il movimento aborriva le pose e la composizione classiche di Raffaello e dei suoi seguaci – da qui il nome del gruppo – e l'influenza di Joshua Reynolds.

Fondato nel 1848 da William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais e Dante Gabriel Rossetti, al gruppo originale si unirono in seguito anche William Michael Rossetti, James Collinson, Frederic George Stephens e Thomas Woolner a formare una “confraternita” di sette membri. Il gruppo ebbe un'ampia influenza su molti artisti britannici successivi e Rossetti viene oggi considerato come un precursore del più ampio movimento simbolista europeo. Questo libro esamina la nascita del gruppo, il suo sviluppo, la sua influenza e la sua fine.

#### **La collana:**

Ciascun volume della collana Basic Genre di TASCHEN comprende:

- un'introduzione dettagliata e una cronologia dei più importanti eventi politici, culturali e sociali che si sono verificati durante il periodo
- una selezione delle opere più importanti dell'epoca, ognuna presentata tramite un'immagine a tutta pagina e un testo esplicativo, oltre a un ritratto e a una breve biografia dell'autore
- circa 100 illustrazioni a colori con didascalie esplicative

#### **L'autrice:**

**Heather Birchall** è curatrice d'arte antica presso la Whitworth Art Gallery, dell'Università di Manchester. In precedenza ha lavorato presso il Victoria and Albert Museum e la Tate Britain, dove era assistente all'organizzazione delle esposizioni più importanti, inclusa *Millais e How We Are: Photographing Britain* (2008). Specialista dell'arte Vittoriana, ha scritto saggi e articoli su John Ruskin, la relazione tra pittura e fotografia e gli acquerelli britannici.

#BasicArt

**Edward Coley Burne-Jones**  
*The Tree of Forgiveness, 1882*



*Phyllis and Demophoon, 1870*  
 gouache on paper  
 12 cm (4 3/4 x 3 1/2 in.)  
 Tate Museums and Art Gallery

Surrounded by a profusion of almond blossoms and set in an imaginary landscape, Burne-Jones depicts Phyllis being transformed from an almond tree after the return of her lover, Demophoon. The tale, described in Geoffrey Chaucer's (c. 1343-1400) *Legend of Good Women* (1386) and in Ovid's *Heroides*, centres on Phyllis, the daughter of the King of Thrace, who became infatuated with Demophoon when he stopped at her court on his way home from Athens after the Trojan War. He does not fulfil his promise that he will return to her within the month and, in her fear that she will not see him again, she hangs herself. Athena takes pity on Phyllis and turns her into an almond tree. Demophoon, hearing of the disastrous series of events since his departure, decides to return. Burne-Jones depicts the moment just after he has embraced the tree when his lover, forgiving him for deserting her, springs back to life and encircles her arms around him. Phyllis's hair, still entwined in the branches of the tree, trails behind her.

Burne-Jones had attempted this same subject twelve years before to a storm of controversy: *Phyllis and Demophoon*, which he executed in gouache, depicts the same moment but the male figure is fully nude (a thin piece of scarf hides his genitalia in this version) and a transparent veil is wound around Phyllis. The President of the Old Watercolour Society, Frederick Taylor, stated that he had received a letter of complaint from one viewer who considered the watercolour obscene. Burne-Jones, however, refused to compromise. He subsequently withdrew the picture from exhibition and resigned from the Society. Further offence was caused by *Phyllis and Demophoon* as there was a clear resemblance between Phyllis and the Greek sculptress, Maria Zambaco, whom Burne-Jones was known to be having an illicit relationship with. (A few exhibition-goers would have been aware of Burne-Jones's lapse in faithfulness towards his wife, Georgiana.) In 1868 Maria attempted suicide by jumping into the Regent's Canal after he had attempted to break off the relationship. Desperate to prevent such an act, the affair continued for a few more years until Maria realised that Burne-Jones would never commit himself to her.

In *The Tree of Forgiveness* the resemblance of Phyllis to Maria is less obvious, and the male appears less vulnerable compared with his predecessor. Burne-Jones paid several visits to Italy during the 1870s and the portrayal of Demophoon in this version reveals Burne-Jones's debt to Michelangelo, whose work he admired. The critics however were rarely satisfied and considered the musculature of the bodies grossly exaggerated. *The Times* critic took a dislike to the effect and described Phyllis and Demophoon as "repellent in the extreme".

*The Tree of Forgiveness, 1882*  
 oil on canvas  
 106.7 cm (41 1/2 x 41 3/8 in.)  
 Tate Museums Liverpool,  
 Tate Art Gallery

