

## **The Pre-Raphaelite Movement**

In the mid 19th century, at the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria, English painting had become bogged down in academic conventions and was at a creative impasse. Reacting against this, three young students from the Royal Academy, Hunt, Millais and Rossetti, founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Their aim was to create a new style of painting, no longer taking the Renaissance as their reference, but turning to medieval art before Raphael, which they considered to be genuine and free. In this respect, they were following the precepts of the influential Victorian theoretician, John Ruskin.

Their paintings were very colourful, with numerous symbols and literary references, and sensitive to nature and social issues.

*Lady Lilith* (1868)

by

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti**



Fascinated by women's physical charm, Rossetti here imagines a legendary femme fatale as a self-absorbed nineteenth-century beauty who combs her hair and seductively exposes her shoulders. Nearby flowers symbolize different kinds of love. In Jewish literature, the enchantress Lilith is described as Adam's first wife.

Her character is underscored by lines from Goethe's *Faust* attached by Rossetti to the original frame, "Beware . . . for she excels all women in the magic of her locks, and when she twines them round a young man's neck, she will not ever set him free again." The sitter in this watercolor is Fanny Cornforth, the artist's mistress.