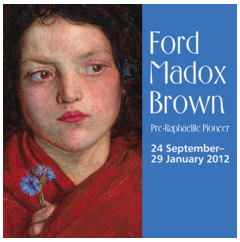

Ford Madox Brown: Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer

Manchester Art Gallery

Reviewed by Dr Charlotte Starkey September 2011

It is always an illuminating experience to have the opportunity to see in one collection the major output of a significant artist, and the exhibition showing the work of Ford Madox Brown (1821 – 1893) at Manchester Art Gallery provides such an encounter. It is a reminder of the important links that cities such as Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham have with Pre-Raphaelite art in their permanent collections; and it is a fortunate legacy of Victorian entrepreneurs, that they helped to fund the museums, art galleries and other cultural institutions of the industrial cities and towns, seeking out the works of the Pre-Raphaelites in particular so enthusiastically. Ford Madox Brown was born in Calais in 1821. He was educated in Belgium, then lived in Paris and settled in London. Manchester became his home later in life when he was commissioned by Manchester Corporation to paint murals of the history of Manchester for Waterhouse's Town Hall. He lived first in Crumpsall and then in the Victoria Park area of Manchester between 1881 and 1887.

Brown's life is chequered. He was one of the most gifted of Victorian artists, with a strict training in Europe as an artist. He did not join the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He taught Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He was known by a wide circle of prominent Victorians either personally or through his art. In his personal life, however, he knew great loss and suffering: his first wife, Elisabeth, died in 1846 just five years after their marriage. He married his second wife Emma Hill in secret in 1853: she had been his model and he made it one of his tasks to help her to learn to read. The marriage was a surprise to his circle and both suffered because of prejudice against the marriage: money was hard to obtain. Two of their children died in infancy. Yet, with all these sorrows in life, Brown still managed to become one of the most significant of Victorian artists.

Ford Madox Brown's
Work

Work [redacted] Ford Madox Brown: a Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer [redacted]