Pre-Raphaelites

by Sophia

☰	WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers the Pre-Raphaelites. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the motivation behind the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and identify examples of Pre-Raphaelite painting. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:
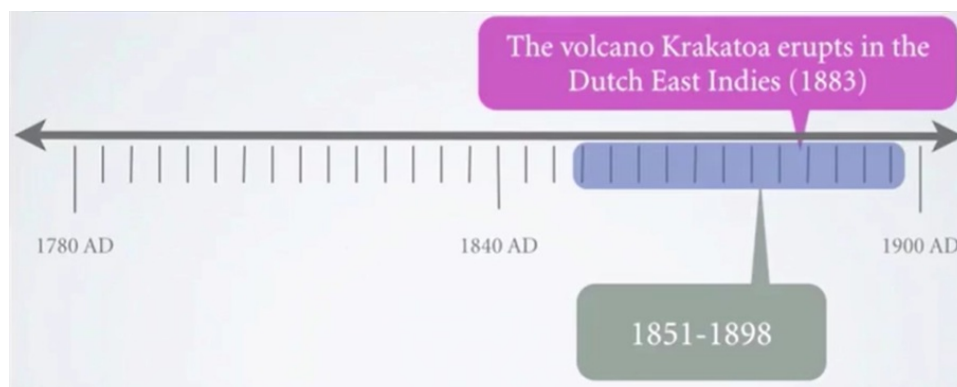
☆	BIG IDEA

Philosophically, the Pre-Raphaelites were against the academy and the classicizing tendencies of Raphael and Michelangelo, and longed for the Quattrocento, the 15th century and medieval periods.

1. Period and Location: Pre-Raphaelites

The artwork that you will be looking at today covers the period from 1851 to 1898 and focuses geographically on three locations: London, England; Paris, France; and Oslo, Norway.

2. The Pre-Raphaelites

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as it was known, distilled down to its basic philosophy, was essentially anti-Academy. Specifically, the Brotherhood was against the classicizing tendencies of Raphael and Michelangelo, who were supported by the Royal Academy of Art and its founder, Joshua Reynolds.

Artistically, the **Pre-Raphaelites** emphasized bright colors, detail bordering on photo-realism, and the accurate depiction of nature. Philosophically, they felt that contemporary art had lost the moral integrity of past art. They longed to return to the **Quattrocento**, or better yet, back to medieval times.

Now, this reverence of the past was also due in part to a perceived honesty or perhaps genuineness in the work produced during that time. The Industrial Revolution was replacing traditional craftsmen, and this longing for tradition and view of art as a way of life were ideas at the heart of movements such as Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau.

The painting shown below, "Ophelia" by John Everett Millais, is a prime example of Pre-Raphaelite stylistic conventions. Its bright colors, photo-realistic detail, and accurate depiction of nature are used to portray the scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which Ophelia sings in a river before drowning.

Ophelia by John Everett Millais

1851

Oil on canvas

⚙ THINK ABOUT IT

> Although expertly painted and a fine example of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, some people find something unsettling about this image. How does it make you feel? Do you feel like you know something is about to happen without being able to do anything about it?

Another example from the Pre-Raphaelite movement filled with sobering imagery is the painting below, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, called "Pia de Tolomei." It depicts a scene from the medieval author Dante and his book *Purgatory*, in which La Pia, which means "the pious one," is wrongly accused of being unfaithful to her husband. Instead of seeking counseling, her husband locks her up. She's shown on the verge of death, touching her wedding ring, next to a prayer book and love letters to her husband, which are symbolic of her innocence, and nestled within fig leaves, which are symbolic of her shame.

Pia de Tolomei by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

1868

Oil on canvas

⊘ **DID YOU KNOW**

The model for this painting was actually the artist's lover and the wife of his good friend. Is it possible that this piece also represents some sort of confession or catharsis?

📄 **TERMS TO KNOW**

Pre-Raphaelites
> A group of late 19th-century British painters united by their rejection of academic painting and the legacy of Raphael in art.

Quattrocento
> Of or referring to 14th-century art, especially in Italy.

📋 **SUMMARY**

In today's lesson about the **Pre-Raphaelites**, you learned how to identify and define today's key terms and describe the motivation behind the Pre-Raphaelite movement. You also learned how to identify examples of Pre-Raphaelite painting.

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