



Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927)

Kelmscott Manor, c. 1905

Pencil and watercolor heightened with bodycolor on Whatman watercolor board
11 by 22 inches (30 by 56 cm.)

Provenance

Private collection, United States

Exhibited

London, The New Gallery, *Summer Exhibition*, 1905

Note

Marie Euphrosyne Spartali Stillman was the youngest daughter of a wealthy Anglo-Greek family and grew up in London where her father, cotton merchant and Greek consul-general Michael Spartali, purchased a stately home at Clapham Common and a country house on the Isle of Wight. The Spartalis socialized with many artists and writers, introducing Marie at a young age to James McNeill Whistler and Algernon Swinburne. Swinburne reportedly said “she is so beautiful that I want to sit down and cry.” In 1864, Whistler introduced Spartali to Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), a key member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

As a favorite model and muse to Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites, Marie was soon immersed in the art world. As a beau idéal for some of the most notable members of the Pre-Raphaelites, Marie rose in influence owed to her ethereal beauty. As she became interested in painting herself, Rossetti introduced her to Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893). Under his tutelage, Marie trained as an artist and adopted the languid mood typical of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic.



Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879)

Mnemosyne (Marie Spartali), 1868

Albumen print, 29.4 x 23 cm.

The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1974.52

At a time when women were discouraged to pursue careers, Marie doubled down by devoting herself to her art while supporting her family. She regularly exhibited both at the Royal Academy of Arts and at the Grosvenor Gallery in London, a radical alternative to the Academy founded in 1877, and in Liverpool, Birmingham, and Manchester. Her works were also shown at important American venues in Washington, DC, Philadelphia, and Boston.

Without her father's permission, Marie married Rossetti's friend, the American journalist and photographer William James Stillman (1828-1901) in 1871. Trained by Hudson River School painter Frederic Edwin Church, Stillman chose a career as a war correspondent in Crete and the Balkans. For a time, he was the American consul in Rome, followed by serving his country in Crete during the insurrections. While living in Athens, his first wife worn out by the excitement of life in Crete, committed suicide, possibly another reason why Marie's father was against this liaison.

The couple lived an itinerant life, spending time in America, Italy and England. Due to their peripatetic existence and William's unsettled career, Marie was often relied upon to supplement his income through the sales of her art to provide for her family and their six children. Her connection to the Pre-Raphaelites encouraged her to paint vivid and dreamlike landscapes, inspired by the Italian artists before Raphael. Almost a centennial after her death, Marie's drawing *The Enchanted Garden* sold for \$1.1 million, breaking her own personal record as well as surpassing any other female Pre-Raphaelite artist.



Marie Spartali Stillman

The Enchanted Garden, 1889

Pencil, watercolor and heightened color on paper

77.9 x 101.2 cm., monogrammed & dated

Present whereabouts unknown

In 1871, Rossetti and William Morris (1834-1896) took out a joint tenancy on Kelmscott Manor, in the Cotswolds in the south of England. When Morris left for Iceland that summer, his wife Jane and Rossetti, entangled in a romantic liaison, enjoyed the happiest summer there. Morris and Jane drew great inspiration from the unspoiled authenticity of the architecture and its garden at Kelmscott and viewed it as their joint work of art and the ultimate setting of Romantic ideals. Jane Morris (1839-1914), like Marie, was a muse and model and an artist in her own right and both are important participants in the Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood. Marie, like Jane, embodied the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of beauty, perfect for modelling, and in Rossetti's eyes she resembled a goddess with her tall figure, elegant gestures, long hair and a gaze that was straightforward and dreamy at the same time. Rather than rivals, the two muses were particularly close and Marie often visited Kelmscott after her husband's death in 1901. Views of Kelmscott were especially popular in America, where Marie had solo shows in Boston in 1903 and in New York in 1908.