

In Pursuit of Beauty Late Victorian Art And Design

Improving the quality of British art and design had been a particular concern since the 1850s. The British Empire had expanded into new continents but it was the classical idea of beauty, based on Ancient Greek and Roman culture that was still considered the model for serious art.

The pursuit of beauty was a form of escapism from the mass-production of industrial Britain. As well as looking to the ancient world, artists and designers were delighted and inspired by the art of Renaissance Italy, the Middle and Far East.

Many of the paintings here feature a beautiful woman. Sometimes she is a passive decorative form, but often she is a dark and brooding *femme fatale*: a symbol of seduction, deception and destruction. The 'fatal woman' may reflect late Victorian male fears as women campaigned for equal rights and new roles.

The emphasis on colour, harmony and rhythm and simplifying the form of an object would become major concerns in the 20th century. They can be seen emerging here in the work of late Victorian artists and designers.

MAG Interpretation/Gallery 8/panel