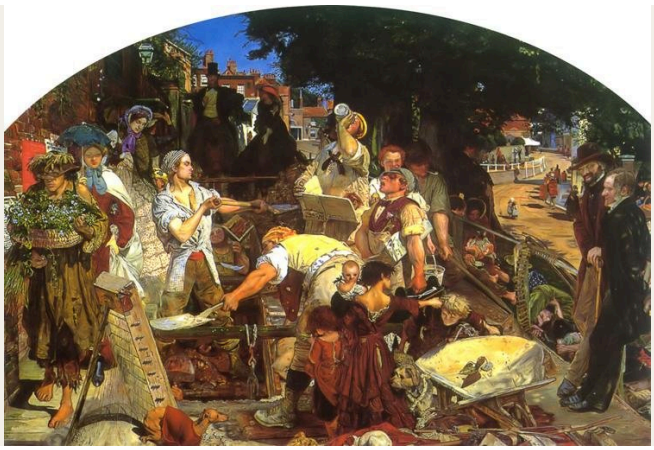
MANCHESTER, UNITED KINGDOM

Manchester Art Gallery: Masterpieces

Twenty paintings from Manchester Art Gallery, mostly British and nineteenth-century.



Manchester Art Gallery's collection is strongest in British painting, particularly of the nineteenth century, and its Pre-Raphaelite pictures are well known. It also holds portraits, scenes of work and daily life, and art from other periods. The gallery is closely tied to the history of the city that collected and displayed these works, and two of the paintings here show Manchester itself, seen from Belle Vue and from Kersal.

This selection follows the collection's strength. Its subjects come from legend, myth, history and modern life: Arthur dying among women, Hylas drawn towards a pool, Berengaria receiving news of Richard I, a London street being dug up. Alongside them are George Stubbs's cheetah with its attendants, still lifes of thistles and of grapes, and a regatta at Chelsea. Work comes up again and again in different forms, and so do people who have stopped in the middle of a task, with a book in the lap or thread in the hand.

Artline chose these works from the museum's documented holdings, independently of the museum. Dates and attributions keep the qualifications given in the linked records.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/manchester-art-gallery

The selection · 20

1. Work
   Ford Madox Brown · 1852-1863
2. The Hireling Shepherd
   William Holman Hunt · 1851
3. Hylas and the Nymphs
   John William Waterhouse · 1896
4. Cheetah with Two Indian Servants and a Stag
   George Stubbs · 1765
5. The Dreamer
   Annie Louisa Swynnerton · 1887
6. Italian Girl with Necklace
   Susan Isabel Dacre · 1874–1880
7. Balaclava
   Elizabeth Thompson · 1876
8. Feeding the Ducks
   Edward Stott · 1885
9. Ophelia
   Arthur Hughes · 1852
10. The Death of Arthur
    James Archer · 1860
11. Girl Reading
    Charles Edward Perugini · 1878
12. Answering the Emigrant's Letter
    James Collinson · 1850
13. A Bunch of Thistles
    Rose Magnus · 1896
14. Gathering Plums
    Henry Herbert La Thangue · 1901
15. Chelsea Regatta
    Walter Greaves · 1863–1868
16. Manchester from Belle Vue
    George Danson · 1861
17. View of Manchester from Kersal
    John Barton Waddington · 1856
18. Sweet Industry
    Laura Theresa Alma-Tadema · 1904
19. Grapes
    William Jabez Muckley · 1875
20. Berengaria's Alarm for the Safety of Richard I
    Charles Allston Collins · 1850

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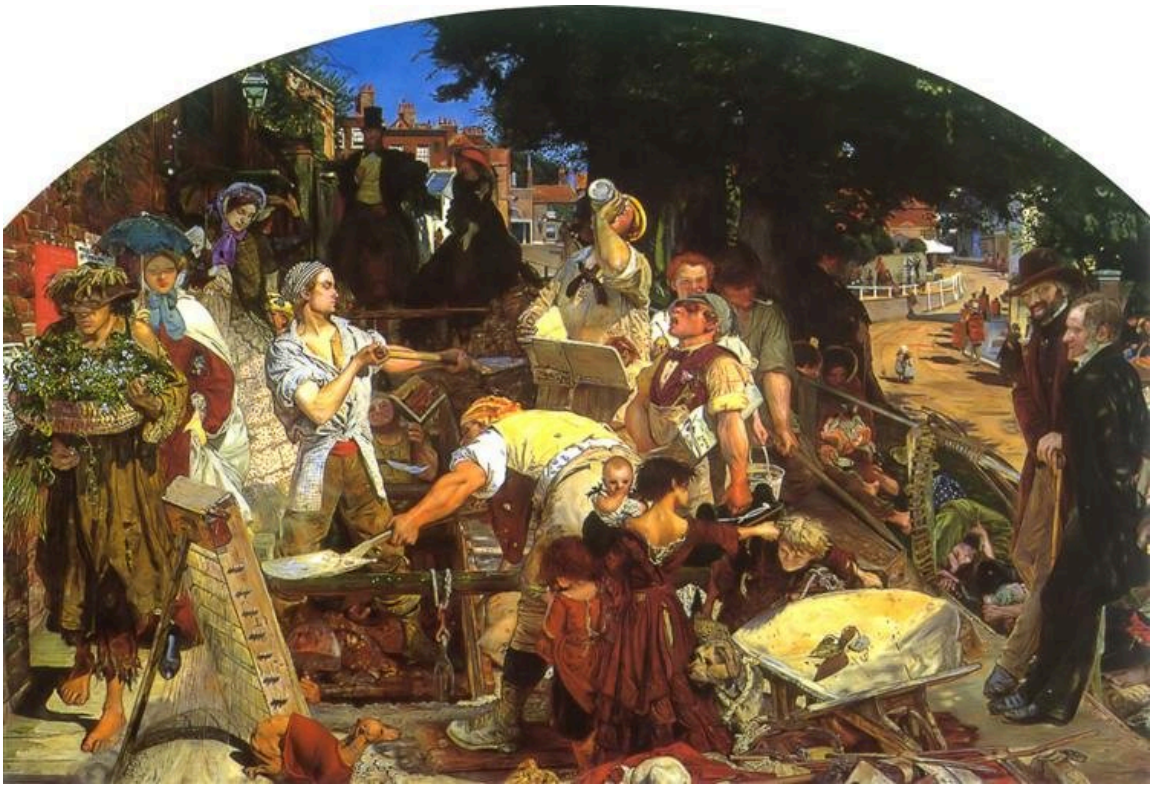
Work

Ford Madox Brown

1852-1863 · Manchester Art Gallery



Ford Madox Brown. Work. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title could hardly be plainer, and neither, at first sight, could the subject: men digging up a London street. Around them Brown arranges people from different parts of Victorian society, some passing by, others stopping to watch. He worked on the picture over many years, giving an everyday street scene the scale and care once reserved for great historical subjects.

Object source · Open artwork

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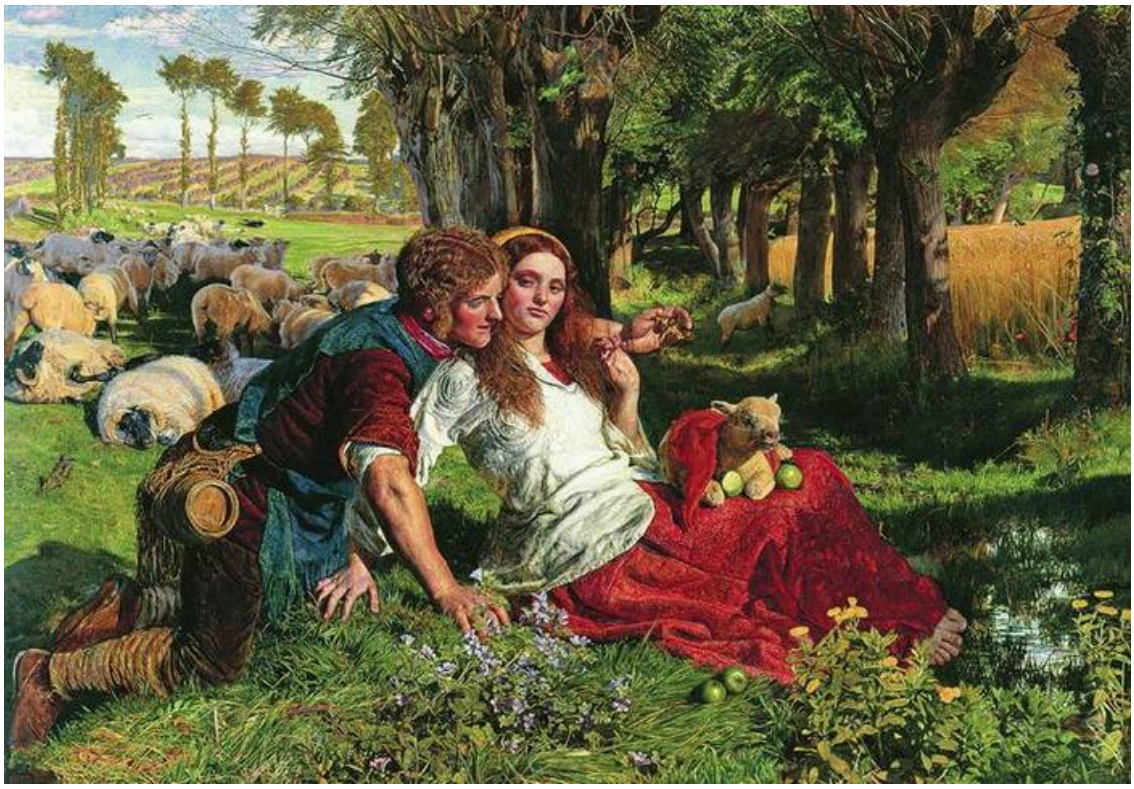
The Hireling Shepherd

William Holman Hunt

1851 · Manchester Art Gallery



William Holman Hunt. The Hireling Shepherd. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

A hireling is a hired worker, so the title hints at neglect before the picture does. This shepherd is minding sheep for someone else, and not minding them well, because his attention is on the woman beside him. Hunt doesn't leave the point to the title alone. Behind the couple, the flock has spread out unwatched.

Object source · Open artwork

03 / 20

Hylas and the Nymphs

John William Waterhouse

1896 · Manchester Art Gallery



John William Waterhouse. Hylas and the Nymphs. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Hylas leans out from the edge of the bank, where the ground no longer gives secure footing, and the nymphs reach out from the pool to draw him in. Their pale faces and shoulders stand out against the dark water, so the invitation is plain. The painting shows that much and no more. The danger comes from the myth.

Object source · Open artwork

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Cheetah with Two Indian Servants and a Stag

George Stubbs

1765 · Manchester Art Gallery



George Stubbs. Cheetah with Two Indian Servants and a Stag. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title puts the cheetah first, and people often come to the picture mainly for Stubbs's animals. Yet the scene depends on the men. Two attendants work together to manage the cat, and one points towards a stag in the distance, as though setting up a hunt. Their handling matters to the encounter as much as the anatomy of the cheetah does.

Object source · Open artwork

05 / 20

The Dreamer

Annie Louisa Swynnerton

1887 · Manchester Art Gallery



Annie Swynnerton. The Dreamer. Image credit: Annie Swynnerton; Source credit: https://manchesterartgallery.org/explore/title/?mag-object-4412. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The woman holds thread and a small object, which suggest a task she has broken off. Swynnerton shows her face plainly and calls her a dreamer, but doesn't say what the dream is about. The things in her hands don't help either: they show what she was doing, not where her thoughts have gone.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1936.267

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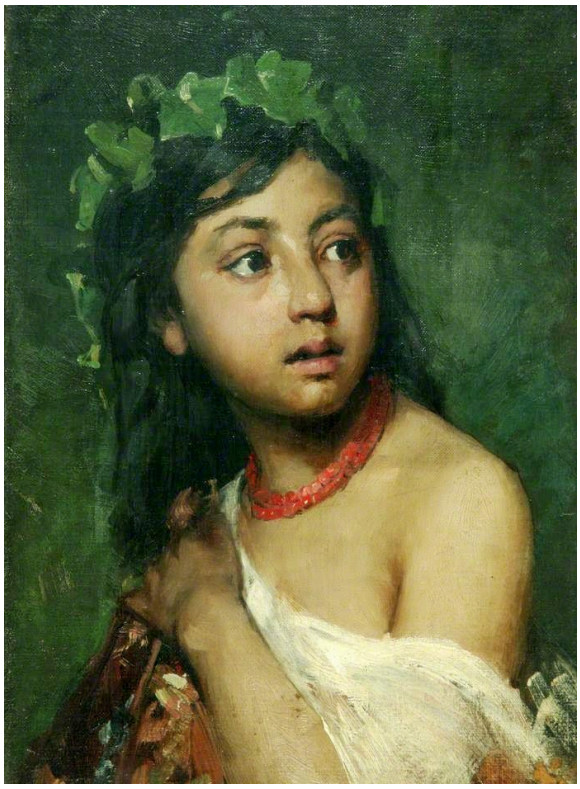
Italian Girl with Necklace

Susan Isabel Dacre

1874–1880 · Manchester Art Gallery



Susan Isabel Dacre. Italian Girl with Necklace. Image credit: Susan Isabel Dacre; Source credit: figurationfeminine. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The title identifies the sitter only by her nationality and her necklace, and the painting is just as economical. The red of the necklace stands out against the green surroundings and the young woman's shoulder. Leaves frame her turned head, but Dacre never develops them into a separate landscape. A face, a few nearby materials and colours strong enough to tell them apart are all she needs.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1884.16

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Balaclava

Elizabeth Thompson

1876 · Manchester Art Gallery



Elizabeth Thompson. Balaclava. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The picture is called Balaclava, but what Thompson paints is the aftermath of a charge. Her men and horses no longer move together. Some stand or sit, some are exhausted, and some are held up by others. The sky above them is comparatively quiet.

Object source · Open artwork

08 / 20

Feeding the Ducks

Edward Stott

1885 · Manchester Art Gallery



Edward Stott. Feeding the Ducks. Image credit: Edward Stott; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

A girl looks down at a bowl as ducks come towards her. Stott arranges the water's edge, a tree and the reflections around this small exchange, and the approaching birds supply whatever action the quiet scene has.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1947.72

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Ophelia

Arthur Hughes

1852 · Manchester Art Gallery



Arthur Hughes. Ophelia. Image credit: Arthur Hughes; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Millais showed the familiar floating corpse. Hughes keeps Ophelia on the bank, still alive, and the drowning lies outside the moment he paints. She sits among the plants at the water's side with one hand raised, and her pale dress draws the eye to her poised position. The arched top edge of the picture closes over her there.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1955.105

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The Death of Arthur

James Archer

1860 · Manchester Art Gallery



James Archer. La mort d'Arthur. Image credit: James Archer; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Archer tells the end of the legend through the women's care for Arthur. He wears his armour, the dress of a fighting king, yet he can no longer act for himself, and the women are grouped around his body. Beyond them a boat waits at the shore for his departure, the part of the story still to come.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1952.252

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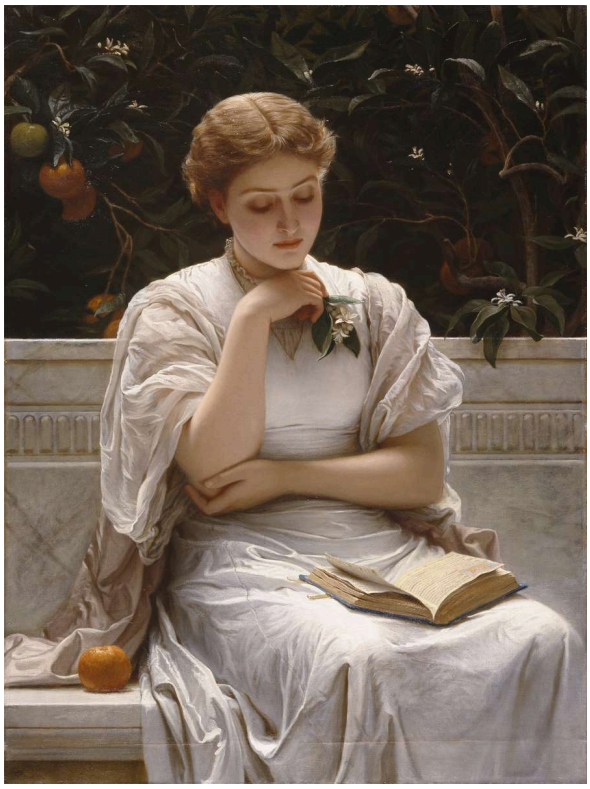
Girl Reading

Charles Edward Perugini

1878 · Manchester Art Gallery



Charles Edward Perugini. Girl Reading. Image credit: Charles Edward Perugini; Source credit: https://manchesterartgallery.org/explore/title/?mag-object-734. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Perugini's title says she is reading. For the moment, she isn't. The book lies open in her lap, she rests her chin on one hand, and the dark foliage sets off the pale figure without giving any clue to her thoughts. Beside Swynnerton's The Dreamer it makes a pair of interrupted occupations, a book here and thread there, though the titles take opposite sides: Swynnerton names the reverie, Perugini the activity that has been put aside.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1917.237

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Answering the Emigrant’s Letter

James Collinson

1850 · Manchester Art Gallery



James Collinson. Answering the Emigrant's Letter. Image credit: James Collinson; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The emigrant doesn't appear. Instead a household gathers at a table around a single sheet of paper to write a reply. Collinson shows distance through its effect on the people left at home, where answering a letter takes the effort of several people.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1966.179

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A Bunch of Thistles

Rose Magnus

1896 · Manchester Art Gallery



Rose Magnus. A Bunch of Thistles. Image credit: Rose Magnus; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Magnus keeps the thistles' pointed leaves and uneven heads instead of smoothing them into an ideal bouquet. A simple vessel and a plain ground give their irregular outlines room. A prickly, common plant receives the kind of sustained attention usually given to more obliging flowers.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1936.241

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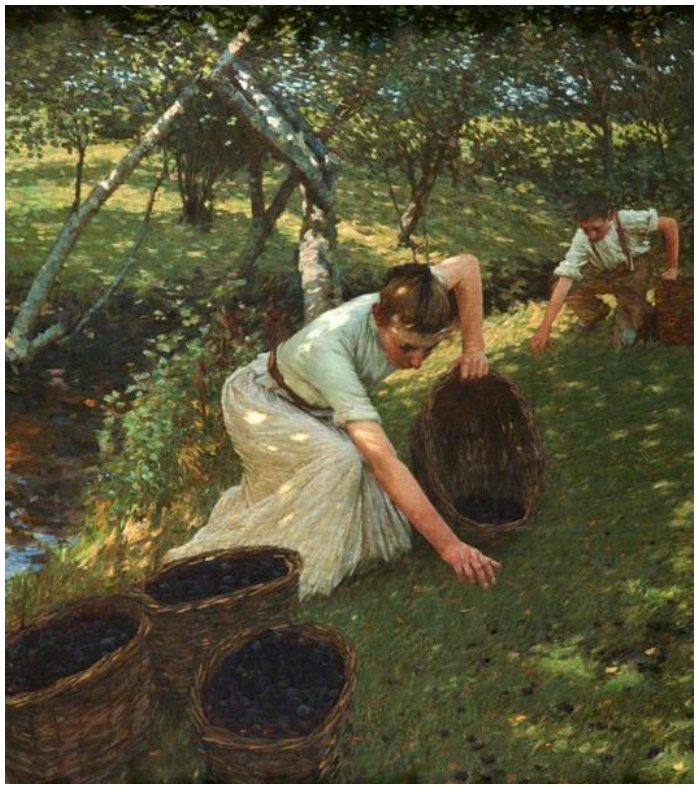
Gathering Plums

Henry Herbert La Thangue

1901 · Manchester Art Gallery



Henry Herbert La Thangue. Gathering Plums. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

In the foreground one figure bends close to the ground, while another carries on with the harvest further back, beneath the trees. A basket gives the work its practical purpose. The orchard is sunlit, but La Thangue stays with the effort of picking and doesn't offer the place as a pleasant retreat.

Object source · Open artwork

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Chelsea Regatta

Walter Greaves

1863–1868 · Manchester Art Gallery



Walter Greaves. Chelsea Regatta. Image credit: Walter Greaves; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

People take part in the regatta from boats, from the shore and from buildings along the river. No single onlooker could take in the whole event, and Greaves doesn't pretend otherwise. He builds the scene from many small incidents around the water, and no one race dominates. Unlike the crowd in Ford Madox Brown's Work, which gathers around a central task, this one has no centre.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1922.8

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Manchester from Belle Vue

George Danson

1861 · Manchester Art Gallery



George Danson. Manchester from Belle Vue. Image credit: George Danson; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

From Belle Vue the full spread of the industrial city becomes visible. Factories and smoke fill the distance, set within a wider landscape, while people and animals occupy greener ground in the foreground.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1947.328

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View of Manchester from Kersal

John Barton Waddington

1856 · Manchester Art Gallery



John Barton Waddington. View of Manchester from Kersal. Image credit: John Barton Waddington; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

From high ground at Kersal, Waddington shows Manchester spreading along the river, its chimneys and large buildings rising through haze. The fairly open land in front makes the extent of the city easier to judge. Danson's view from Belle Vue is arranged the same way, with greener ground in front of the factories.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1927.42

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Sweet Industry

Laura Theresa Alma-Tadema

1904 · Manchester Art Gallery



Laura Theresa Alma-Tadema. Sweet Industry. Image credit: Laura Theresa Alma-Tadema; Source credit: Manchester Art Gallery , image. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

In a dark room, light falls on the hands and needlework of a woman in a pink dress. Alma-Tadema shows her skill through concentration and a restrained gesture, and never turns the domestic task into a performance. The industry of the title is diligence with a needle, a long way from the chimneys of the Manchester views.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1904.13

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Grapes

William Jabez Muckley

1875 · Manchester Art Gallery



William Jabez Muckley. Grapes. Image credit: William Jabez Muckley; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Rose Magnus gives her thistles a plain ground to stand against. Muckley packs glass, grapes, fabric and a patterned dish closely together and still keeps each one distinct. Reflections and degrees of translucency separate them where gaps might otherwise have done the job, and the same light gives glass, fruit and cloth each a different surface.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1936.120

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Berengaria’s Alarm for the Safety of Richard I

Charles Allston Collins

1850 · Manchester Art Gallery



Charles Allston Collins. Berengaria's Alarm for the Safety of Her Husband, Richard Coeur de Lion, Awakened by the Sight of His Girdle Offered for Sale at Rome. Image credit: Charles Allston Collins; Source credit: scan of painting. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

A visitor holds out a small object. Berengaria rises, and the figures around her turn towards the exchange. The news about Richard I arrives in something small enough to hold in the hand, and the title says what kind of news it is: Berengaria fears for his safety. In the picture itself the meaning is carried by gesture, in her rising and in the turning of the figures around her.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1896.1

Kinds of work

Work takes many forms across this selection. Ford Madox Brown's Work puts labour out in a public street, while Laura Theresa Alma-Tadema's Sweet Industry keeps it indoors, as domestic skill. In James Collinson's Answering the Emigrant's Letter, keeping up a relationship across a distance is itself a task. Henry Herbert La Thangue adds labour on the land, and George Stubbs's attendants are working too, handling the cheetah while the animal takes most of the attention. William Holman Hunt's The Hireling Shepherd shows the reverse: a man paid to watch a flock who has stopped watching it.

Further reading

The Elements of Drawing

John Ruskin · Read free · English

Ruskin's book is a manual of drawing, built around exercises that train close observation. That habit of attention suits the Pre-Raphaelite pictures in this selection and the paintings of plants and ordinary materials, such as Magnus's thistles, Muckley's grapes and glass, and Alma-Tadema's needlework under light. The exercises also offer a way of examining details closely without reading every object as a symbol.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12

Artline · Manchester Art Gallery: Masterpieces