

PRESS RELEASE
Beardsley and Beyond:
Exhibition at University of Leeds Tells Story of Book
Illustration 1890-20

Art Exhibition: 'Fancy and Imagination: Beardsley and the Book Illustrators'

16 November 2010 – 12 February 2011

Press preview: Monday, 15 November, 2010, 2-4pm

Opening Reception: Tuesday, 16 November, 2010, 6-8pm



Aubrey Beardsley, one of the most celebrated and controversial book illustrators of the Art Nouveau era, will be featured in a forthcoming exhibition at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery, University of Leeds. 'Fancy and Imagination: Beardsley and the Book Illustrators' runs from 16 November until 12 February 2011. The Gallery is open Mon-Sat, 10-5pm, and admission is free.

The exhibition presents Beardsley's black and white fantasy world – at once wondrous, monstrous, and exotic – in context, celebrating the richness and variety of the medium of book illustration in Britain, during the vibrant period between 1890 and the 1920s.

The exhibition will also showcase works by other major illustrators of the era, including Arthur Rackham, Harry Clarke, Edmund Dulac, Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, Kay Nielsen and Jessie M. King. The works of his contemporaries exhibited alongside Beardsley's illustrations and sketches, provide an illuminating backdrop to the unique collection on display at the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery, within the fine art deco setting of the landmark Parkinson Building of the University of Leeds. The artworks and books displayed come from the University of Leeds collections as well as from private collections.

The tragically short-lived Beardsley was born in Brighton in 1872; he died of tuberculosis at the age of 25 in 1898. He was a musical prodigy among other artistic talents, and at the age of nineteen he was warmly encouraged by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones. His career as a book

illustrator was first supported by publisher J.M. Dent. Dent commissioned the young artist to illustrate an edition of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* in neo-Kelmscott medieval style; a massive and sometimes tedious task. While Beardsley found the work increasingly boring, his technique matured in the process, and the results brought him fame.



One of the rare treasures to be displayed is an early sketch in a letter of 1892 to his school friend. Writing excitedly of being advised by Burne-Jones and starting work on *Morte D'Arthur*, Beardsley ends his letter with a little sketch showing himself as a stick-man striding up the dark side of a mountain, on the other side of which is the sunny destination "Art". Despite the few brief years he had ahead of him as an artist, he made it to the other side: at the peak of his short career, he was the art editor of the iconic

1890s magazine, *The Yellow Book*. Here, he worked with well-established writers and artists like Henry James and Sir Frederick Leighton, as well as figureheads of the *avant-garde*, such as W.B. Yeats and Max Beerbohm. This side of the mountain, however, proved to be less idyllic than he had imagined as a young aspiring artist.

Beardsley famously illustrated the first edition of Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*. However, Beardsley's reputation suffered from the reverberations and adverse public opinion surrounding Oscar Wilde's arrest in 1896. His late work turned increasingly towards dark images and grotesque erotica. Beardsley converted to Catholicism in 1897, and unsuccessfully entreated his publisher, Leonard Smithers, to destroy all copies of his "obscene drawings". While his imagination and inspiration seem to have been infinite, the tuberculosis that he had battled with from childhood finally cut his life short in 1898.

Most of the items illustrating Beardsley's work in the present exhibition are drawn from the Fay and Geoffrey Elliott Collection, an extraordinarily generous benefaction to Leeds University Library in 2001. One of the most important motives for this gift was Fay and Geoffrey's wish that their outstanding collection of manuscripts and printed works should become available for direct use by a substantial body of young people. 'Fancy and Imagination: Beardsley and the Book Illustrators' at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery makes a significant part of this collection accessible for wider audiences for the first time. A complementary display, exploring the publishers, presses and printing methods of the 1890s, will be open to the public during the exhibition run, in Special Collections at the University of Leeds. A catalogue related to the main exhibition and this complementary display will be available for sale in the Gallery shop.



The exhibition will be accompanied by a full programme of related events, including the recently launched Saturday Club, offering creative activities suitable for all ages. Full event details can be found on the gallery website: www.leeds.ac.uk/gallery/events.htm.

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Notes to Editors:

IMAGE INFO:

1. *How La Beale Isoud Nursed Sir Tristram*, from *Le Morte d'Arthur*, by Aubrey Beardsley, 1894, University of Leeds Special Collections, The Fay and Geoffrey Elliot Collection
2. *Portrait of Camille*, by Aubrey Beardsley, 1897, University of Leeds Special Collections, The Fay and Geoffrey Elliott Collection
3. Sketch by Beardsley, 1892, University of Leeds Special Collections, The Fay and Geoffrey Elliott Collection

IMAGE CONTACT & EXHIBITION CURATOR:

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ADMISSION/ HOURS:

10.00 - 17.00, Mon-Saturday
Admission: FREE

VENUE INFORMATION:

The Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery, Parkinson Building, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT
www.leeds.ac.uk/gallery
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The Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery is an accredited art museum at the heart of the University of Leeds campus, recently refurbished in 2008 with funds from the Audrey & Stanley Burton Charitable Trust. The Gallery offers both a programme of temporary exhibitions and a display of selected treasures from the University Art Collection in its main gallery. An Education Room houses the University's collection of drawings and works on paper, while also offering space for private study, research and teaching.

Accumulated over more than a hundred years, the Collection consists mainly of European, principally British paintings, drawings and prints, dating from the 17th century up to the present day, with small collections of sculpture, ceramics, and photographs. Outstanding elements are the Sadler Gift of early 20th-century British art, the collections of drawings and paintings by artists of the Camden Town and Bloomsbury groups and their contemporaries, and works by former Gregory Fellows in Painting and Sculpture, and the recent gift of works from the late Stanley & Audrey Burton's personal collection of 20th-century British art.