

## **John Gibson RA: A British Sculptor in Rome**

### **Tennant Gallery and Council Room**

8 September – 18 December 2016

*John Gibson RA: A British Sculptor in Rome* will present over 30 rarely-exhibited works by the neoclassical artist John Gibson RA (1790-1866) who, during his lifetime, was one of Britain's leading sculptors. On display will be marble sculptures, plaster casts, plaster reliefs and drawings that were shown in Gibson's studio during the height of his career. Despite the artist's prominence at the time, he is little-known today. To coincide with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gibson's death, the exhibition will highlight a selection of artworks from his significant bequest to the Royal Academy of Arts. *John Gibson RA: A British Sculptor in Rome* will be the first exhibition to focus solely on Gibson's output, tracing his journey to becoming one of the best-known sculptors of his day.

Born in Conwy, Wales, Gibson moved to Liverpool with his family as a child where he was the apprentice of a cabinet maker and later a stonemason. From a young age, Gibson was fascinated by the art of Ancient Greece and Rome and his talent for art and passion for the classics led a group of supporters to fund a study trip to Italy in 1817. This was a decisive turning point for the young artist. In Rome, Gibson studied under Europe's leading sculptor Antonio Canova (1757-1822) who encouraged him to set up his own studio there. He built up a growing clientele of European patrons and was so captivated by Rome, its collections and its thriving artistic community that he chose to live there for the remainder of his life. Gibson said of his new life in Rome: 'In England my life would be spent in making busts and statues of great men in coats and neckties; here I am employed upon poetical subjects which demand the exercise of the imagination, and the knowledge of the beautiful.'

Gibson's take on neoclassical sculpture also proved highly popular in Britain and he was elected as a Royal Academician on 10 February 1836. By the time he made his first return visit to England in 1844, 'Gibson of Rome' was a celebrated artist, and soon counted Queen Victoria and Prince Albert among his patrons.

Highlights of the exhibition will include the large-scale marble sculpture *Narcissus*; plaster casts such as *Hero and Leander* and marble reliefs and drawings telling the story of *Cupid and Psyche*. The exhibition will also include preparatory drawings from Gibson's studio as well as archival material, all of which were bequeathed to the Royal Academy in 1866 by the artist. Further works by Gibson from his bequest to the Royal Academy can be seen on permanent display at Bodelwyddan Castle, Denbighshire, Wales.

### **Notes to editors**

#### **Publication**

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication *John Gibson RA: The British Canova*, which features essays by Dr Anna Frasca-Rath, co-curator of the exhibition and a lecturer at the University of Vienna, and Annette Wickham, Curator of Works on Paper at the Royal Academy of Arts.

Publication date: September 2016  
Extent: 72 pages, Illustrations, 50 in colour  
Binding: Paperback  
Price: £9.95  
ISBN: 978-1-910350-57-7

## **Events**

### **Curator's Collection Talk**

*Friday 9 September*

Join us at this Curator's Collection Talk where co-curator Dr Anna Frasca-Rath introduces *John Gibson RA: A British Sculptor in Rome*. Dr Anna Frasca-Rath is also a lecturer at the University of Vienna where she completed a PhD on the life and work of John Gibson.

*Meet in the Tennant Gallery; 2.30–3.00pm; Free with an exhibition ticket (no booking required)*

### **Curator's Collection Talk**

*Friday 4 November*

Annette Wickham, Curator of Works on Paper at the RA, introduces *John Gibson RA: A British Sculptor in Rome*, the first temporary exhibition to focus on this artist. This Curator's Collection Talk will explore the story behind Gibson's studio – which became a tourist attraction for visitors to Rome – and the transfer of its legacy to the Royal Academy.

*Meet in the Tennant Gallery; 2.30–3.00pm; Free with an exhibition ticket (no booking required)*

### **The Gibson Trail**

*John Gibson RA: A British Sculptor in Rome* is complemented by *The Gibson Trail*, a virtual exhibition project bringing together all of Gibson's works from London collections in one website. It provides images and information for more than 150 objects, including drawings, reliefs and sculptures from the collections at the Royal Academy, the Victoria & Albert Museum, Tate Britain, the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey, the National Portrait Gallery and Buckingham Palace. The site also features an interactive map of London, indicating all the current locations of Gibson's works. The virtual exhibition will be available at [www.gibson-trail.uk](http://www.gibson-trail.uk) from the beginning of September 2016.

### **The Tennant Gallery and Council Room**

#### **Dates and Opening Hours**

Exhibition open to the public: 8 September – 18 December 2016

Tuesday – Friday, 10am – 4pm

Saturday – Sunday, 10am – 6pm

Closed Monday

#### **Admission**

Complimentary entry with a valid Royal Academy exhibition ticket or £3 General Admission ticket. Friends of the RA and Under 16s go free.

## **Images**

Publicity images for *John Gibson: A British Sculptor in Rome* can be obtained from Picselect, the Press Association's image service for press use. Please register at [www.picselect.com](http://www.picselect.com) and once registered go to the Royal Academy folder in the Arts section of Picselect.

## **Social Media**

Join the discussion about the exhibition online at:

Facebook /royalacademy

Instagram @royalacademyarts

Twitter @royalacademy

#JohnGibsonRA

## **About the Tennant Gallery**

Located on the north side of Burlington House, the Tennant Gallery is a dedicated space within the Royal Academy for the display of works on paper, for which light levels must be carefully controlled. A changing programme of displays drawn from the Royal Academy Collections and the work of Royal Academicians runs throughout the year.

## **About the Royal Academy of Arts**

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The RA is undergoing a transformative redevelopment which will be completed in time for its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018. Led by the internationally-acclaimed architect Sir David Chipperfield RA and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the plans will link Burlington House on Piccadilly and Burlington Gardens for the first time, uniting and revitalising the two-acre site. The redevelopment will also reveal the elements that make the RA unique, sharing with the public the historic treasures in its Collection, the work of its Academicians and the RA Schools, alongside its world-class exhibitions programme. For more information on the RA visit [www.royalacademy.org.uk/ra250#video](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/ra250#video)

**For public information, please print 020 7300 8090 or [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk)  
Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BD**

**For further press information, please contact Binita Dave on 020 7300 5615 or [binita.dave@royalacademy.org.uk](mailto:binita.dave@royalacademy.org.uk)**