

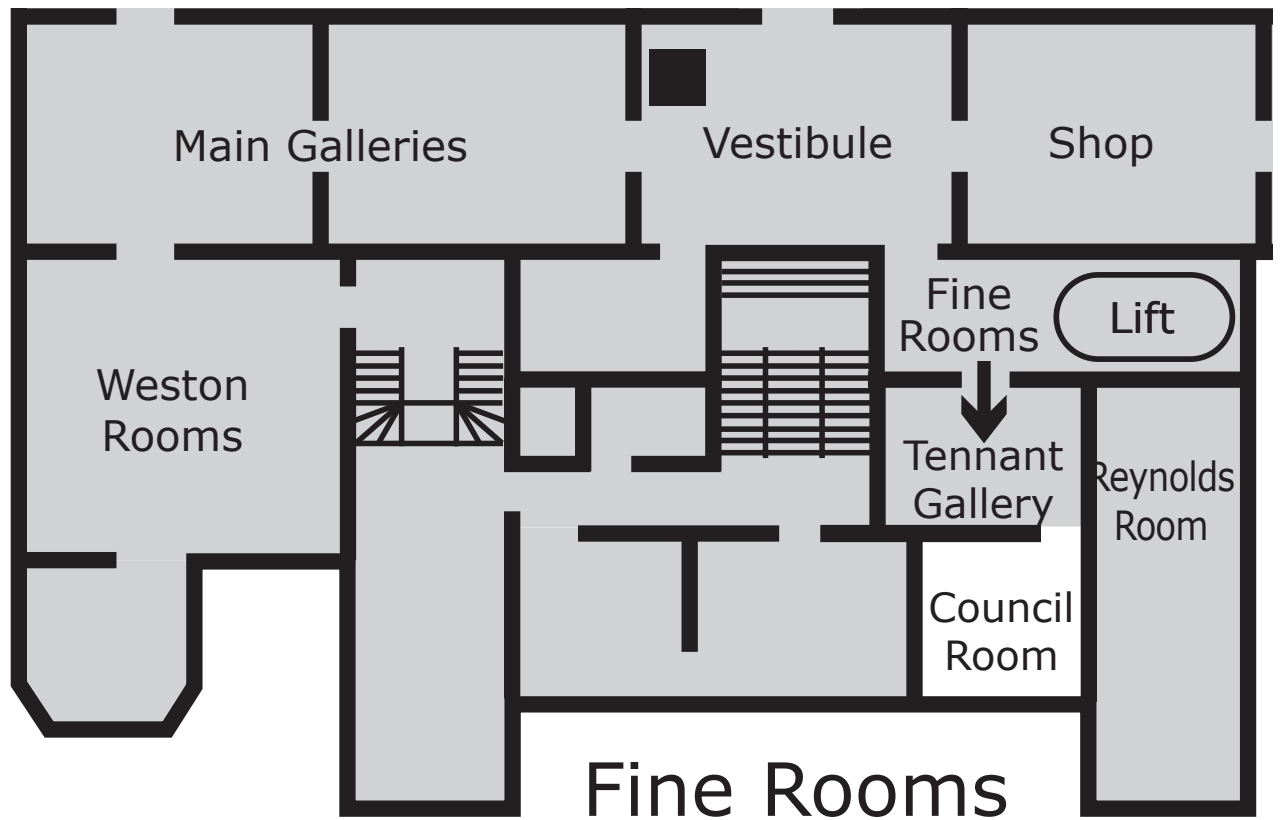


Large  
Print

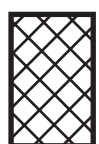
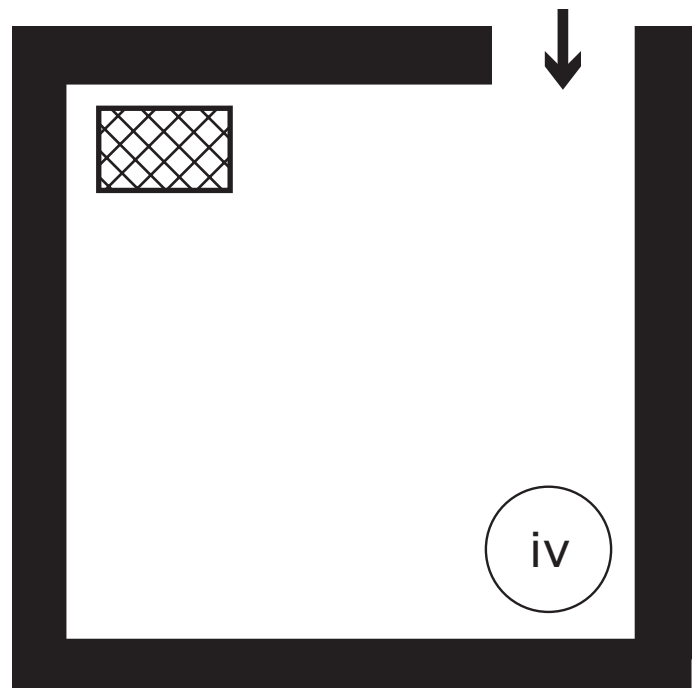
**John Gibson RA**  
**A British Sculptor in Rome**

The Richard Sharp  
Council Room

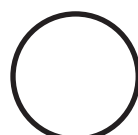
**Do not remove from gallery**



You are in The Richard Sharp  
Council Room



Showcase



Free standing sculpture

# **John Gibson RA**

## **A British Sculptor in Rome**

The John Madejski Fine Rooms

8 September – 18 December 2016

## **Contents**

### **Page 4**

Introduction to this room

### **Page 8**

List of works

### **Page 17**

Free-standing sculpture

### **Page 18**

Showcase

This exhibition on John Gibson RA is supported by



**The production of RA large print guides is generously supported by Robin Hambro**

# **Introduction to the Richard Sharp Council Room**

## **Gibson's Studio in Rome**

Gibson's studio, in the Via della Fontanella near the Spanish Steps, was modelled on those of Antonio Canova and Bertel Thorvaldsen.

Their practices reflect a significant change in the relationship between artist and patron that developed in the wake of the French Revolution.

Rather than waiting for a patron to commission a work in an expensive material like marble or bronze, sculptors began to produce full-scale plaster models of their own ideas for compositions.

This new approach freed them from the direct control of patrons and put greater emphasis on their own creative powers, an innovation that was hugely influential for subsequent generations of sculptors.

Like Canova and Thorvaldsen, Gibson ran a studio that was part workshop, part showroom. It became a well-known attraction for visitors to Rome, with one describing it as a “little bit of fairyland” filled with “gleaming sculptures”.

The drawings, plaster models and sculptures from Gibson’s studio reveal the various stages in his working process, while his account books list the names of the assistants engaged in the complex production of his sculptures.

These notes show that some worked for both Gibson and Thorvaldsen, which helps to explain the strong similarities between the work of the two artists.

## **The Gibson Bequest**

Gibson was considering his legacy as early as 1854, writing to a friend in Liverpool that he wanted to leave his work and “superfluous wealth” to “some important good”.

He eventually decided to bequeath most of the contents of his studio to the Royal Academy, following the example of Canova and Thorvaldsen who created their own museums through legacies to their home countries.

The Gibson bequest comprised marble figures and reliefs, busts, plaster casts, drawings, ephemera and an archive of correspondence along with a significant sum of money.

The artist specified that the latter be used to create space for his work to be seen by the public and students. The Academy duly opened its “Gibson Gallery” at Burlington House in 1876.

During the 1950s, however, many of the plaster casts were found to be in bad repair and the gallery was closed.

Most have since been conserved and a selection of Gibson's sculptures and plaster casts are on permanent display on the Sackler Landing while others are on long-term loan to Bodelwyddan Castle in Wales.

**List of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

## **Cupid and Psyche: Marble Reliefs and Drawings**

The two marble reliefs in this room are further proof of Gibson's enduring fascination with the story of Cupid and Psyche. They were among a small number of works in marble left in the artist's studio at his death.

By the end of his career Gibson was wealthy enough to be able to execute marble sculptures without a commission.

Some of these were bought by those who visited his studio, while others seem to have been executed with an eye on posterity as finished examples of the artist's skill.

In his will, Gibson emphasised that the Royal Academy should receive all the drawings, models and works in marble left in his studio. In cases where there were marble and plaster versions of the same composition, preference was to be given to the marble work.



# Cupid Pursuing Psyche

By 1843

Marble



# Cupid Pursuing Psyche

Pencil with pen and ink and wash on wove paper



# Desire Pursuing the Soul

Red and white chalks on grey wove paper



# Girl Carrying a child

Pencil with wash on laid paper



# Venus and Cupid

Pen and ink on wove paper

# Two Girls Dancing

Pencil with wash on wove paper

# Memorial Monuments

Gibson's reputation was founded on neoclassical sculptures like 'Narcissus', but he was also popular among his British clientele for his sensitively composed memorial monuments, including this imposing example.

Produced in memory of the 1st Countess of Leicester, who died in childbirth, this relief was described by the critic Anna Jameson as being “of consummate beauty”.

Plaster casts like this one played an important role in Gibson’s development of compositions from first idea to finished three-dimensional sculpture.

After drawings and three-dimensional sketches known as **bozzetti** had been made in wax and clay, small-scale models were produced and cast in plaster.

Gibson’s assistants then made large-scale versions in clay, over a skeleton base of wood and wire, which were then cast in plaster before the artist set to work on a marble.

Plaster casts also served as a three-dimensional record of the artist’s designs to be displayed in the studio. Many workers and assistants were needed for this process and the studio of Thorvaldsen counted more than two hundred.

# **Preparatory Drawing**

for the Monument to the 1st  
Countess of Leicester  
c. 1844

Pen and ink with wash on wove paper



# **Venus and Cupid Appearing to Sappho to Console Her**

Pen and ink with wash on wove paper



# **Monument to the 1st Countess of Leicester**

c. 1844

Plaster cast



# **An early design for the monument to Lady Knightley**

c. 1856

Pen and ink on wove paper

# **Preparatory Drawing for Charity,** a Memorial to John Hammerton

By 1832

Pen and ink with wash on wove paper



## **Reproducing Gibson's Works**

During the nineteenth century, the most famous works of living sculptors were often reproduced as prints.

These drawings, after Gibson's statues of Queen Victoria (now housed at Buckingham Palace) and the MP William Huskisson (versions in Pimlico Gardens, London, and St. James's Cemetery, Liverpool), were made to be reproduced in 'Engravings from the Original Compositions of John Gibson, R.A., Sculptor. Rome', London 1861.

They are outstanding examples of this genre. The careful drawing of strong highlights and dark shadows successfully creates the impression of rock-cut sculpture on flat paper. Publications like these played an important role in promoting Gibson's work at home and internationally.

**Leonardo Camia (active  
c.1810 –1830) after  
John Gibson**

John Gibson's First Statue  
of William Huskisson MP

By 1861

Pencil on wove paper

**Paolo Guglielmi (1804  
–1862) after John  
Gibson**

John Gibson's Statue of  
Queen Victoria

By 1861

Pencil on wove paper



# Cupid and Psyche

c. 1859

Marble

Free-standing sculpture

**iv**

**William Theed (1804–1891)**

Portrait Bust of John  
Gibson RA

1868

Marble

This bust was on display in the Royal Academy's "Gibson Gallery" from 1876 until the 1950s.

It is a copy of an earlier version by Theed, who trained at the Royal Academy Schools before living in Rome from 1826–1848.

There, he studied with Gibson, Thorvaldsen, Pietro Tenerani and Richard James Wyatt.

## Showcase

a.

**A copy of the agreement**  
between John Gibson's executors  
and the Royal Academy of Arts

b.

**An inventory of works**  
included in the Gibson bequest

C.

**One of Gibson's sketchbooks,** with drawings after Italian Renaissance frescoes  
c. 1820s

d.

**A selection of Gibson's account books**

# Your feedback, please

As we are committed to access for all, we would like your feedback on our large-print provision. Feedback forms are available from the Information Desk on the ground floor.

We also offer one-to-one audio descriptive tours of the exhibitions with trained volunteer audio describers.

Wheelchair users can also benefit from our volunteers, who can assist with taking you around the galleries so you can enjoy our exhibitions at your leisure. With prior notice we can arrange these at a time that fits in with your schedule. Contact me for further information.

Thank you.

Molly Bretton, Access Manager



**InTouch**  **at the RA**

Design & typography by WfS Create: [mail@wfscreate.com](mailto:mail@wfscreate.com)

© Copyright Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2016.