

Waterhouse

DELPHI  CLASSICS

Masters of Art

John William Waterhouse

(1849-1917)



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Masters of Art Series

John William Waterhouse



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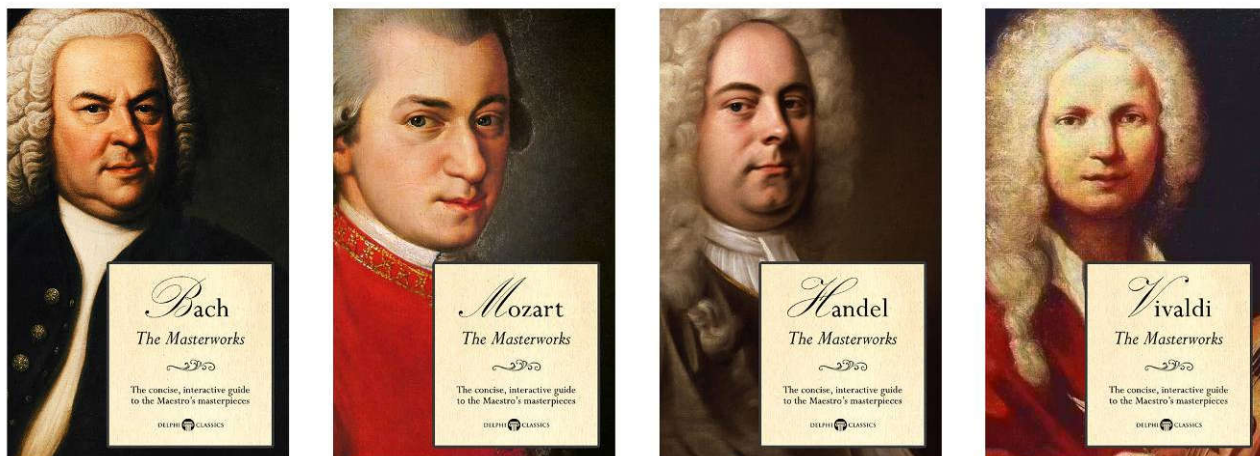


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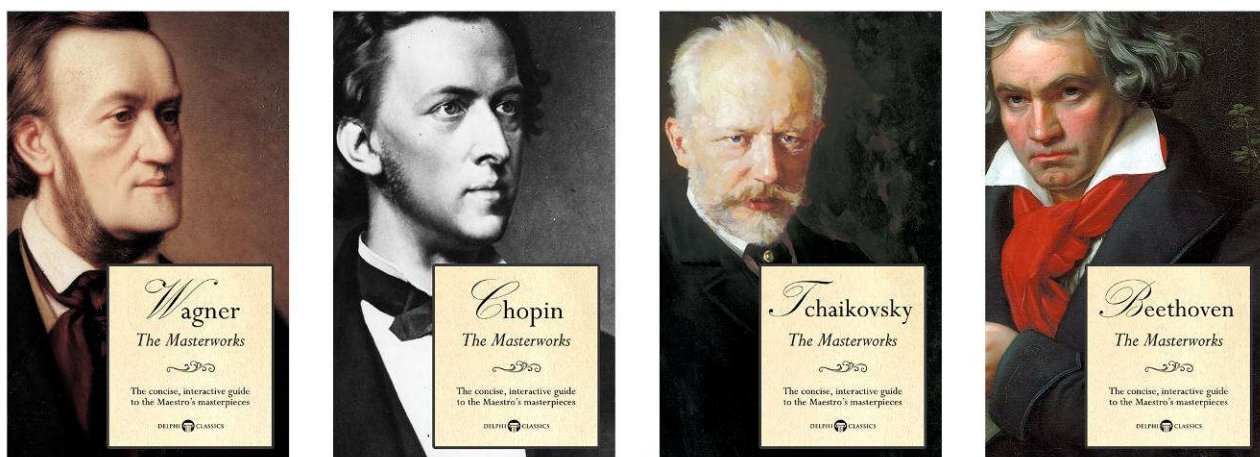
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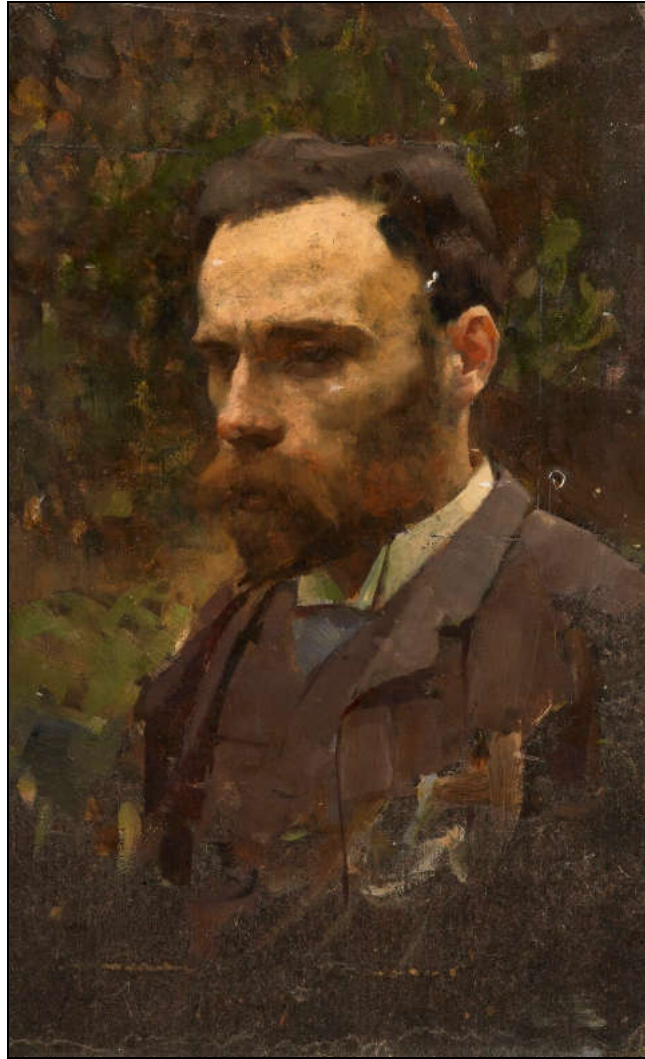


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The Highlights



Rome, Italy — John William Waterhouse's birthplace



John William Waterhouse by William Logsdail, 1887

The Highlights



In this section, a sample of Waterhouse's most celebrated works is provided, with concise introductions, special 'detail' reproductions and additional biographical images.

Sleep and His Half-Brother Death (1874)



A leading member of the Royal Academy of Arts, John William Waterhouse was the son of two English painters, William and Isabella Waterhouse. He was born and baptised in Rome in 1849. As a child he had the Italian nickname 'Nino' (little John), which remained with him for the rest of his life. When he was five years old, the family returned to England and settled in Kensington, London, where his mother and two younger brothers later died of tuberculosis. In 1860 his father remarried and Waterhouse was sent to school in Leeds, where he became familiar with the world of Roman history for the first time. During this early period, he entertained hopes of becoming an engineer, due to his fine technical abilities in design work. On his return to London, he helped his father with portraits and by 1870 he had enrolled at the Academy Schools as a Probationer in sculpture. Six months later he was admitted as a full student and he began exhibiting at the Dudley Gallery. However, his submissions were not sculptures, but paintings. His destined path was finally settled.

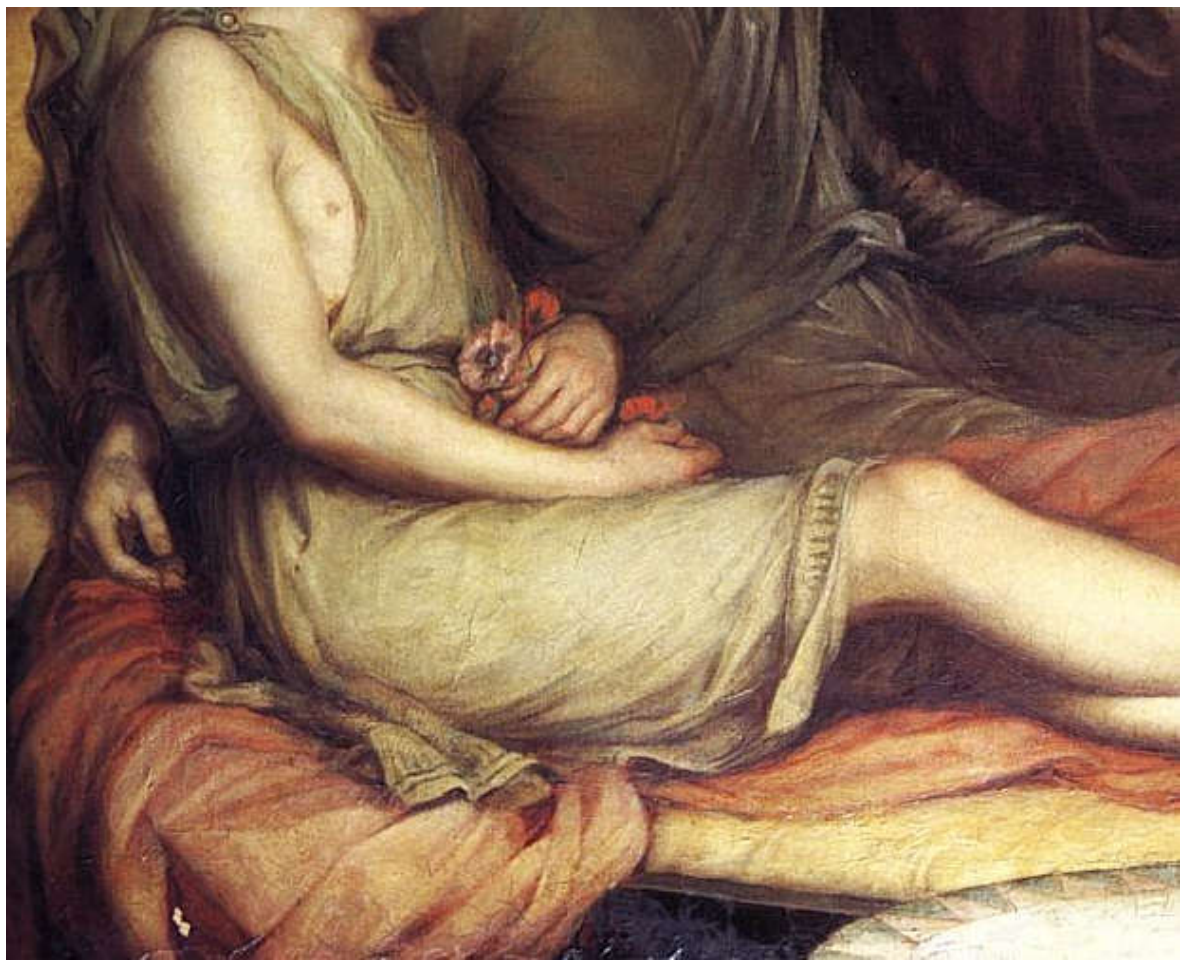
The first work by Waterhouse to be accepted for the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition was an allegory with a Roman setting, *Sleep and his Half Brother Death* (1874). He would continue regularly exhibiting through this channel up until his death in 1917. In this early period his paintings are characterised for their rich, glowing colour, often portraying dramatic and beautiful women, with haunting and melancholic themes. The painting concerns the Greek gods Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death), who according to Greek mythology were brothers. The two figures recline side by side on a low couch. The interior is lit by a lamp, highlighting the foremost figure, Sleep. His head hangs in a heavy daze on his breast, while his right hand holds some poppies, connoting the theme of narcosis and dreamlike-states. By his side lies Death, conversely in dim shadow, with his head thrown back, his posture expressive of peace and lethargy. At Death's feet, an antique lyre is placed, while immediately in the foreground there is a low round table bearing two pipes. The half-brothers are both young and attractive in their depiction, having a strong likeness with each other, which is echoed by the pairing of the pipes, which are crossing in contact. Architectural elements in the dim background give the scene added depth. The columns of a colonnade are open to the night and touched with muted moonlight, reinforcing the theme of repose.

The painting was clearly important to Waterhouse, still in his early twenties, after the recent loss of two younger brothers to tuberculosis. It is a small canvas, though it signals an important stage in the artist's development. There is an assured handling of colour, light and shade, which was judged to be a success at the Royal Academy's exhibition. Critics were impressed by the young artist's handling of the subject of death and the exploration of the border between unconsciousness and awakening. The canvas reveals Waterhouse's interest in Aestheticism, through his depiction of a genderless form of beauty, concerned with intense and sensuous experiences, which could be induced by intoxication and psychotropic excess. Similar to Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* sculpture, these brothers appear to be locked in the throes of a euphoric rest, tentatively balanced between life and death. Though Waterhouse had lost his two beloved brothers, he had preserved their memory for all time through this impressive debut submission.





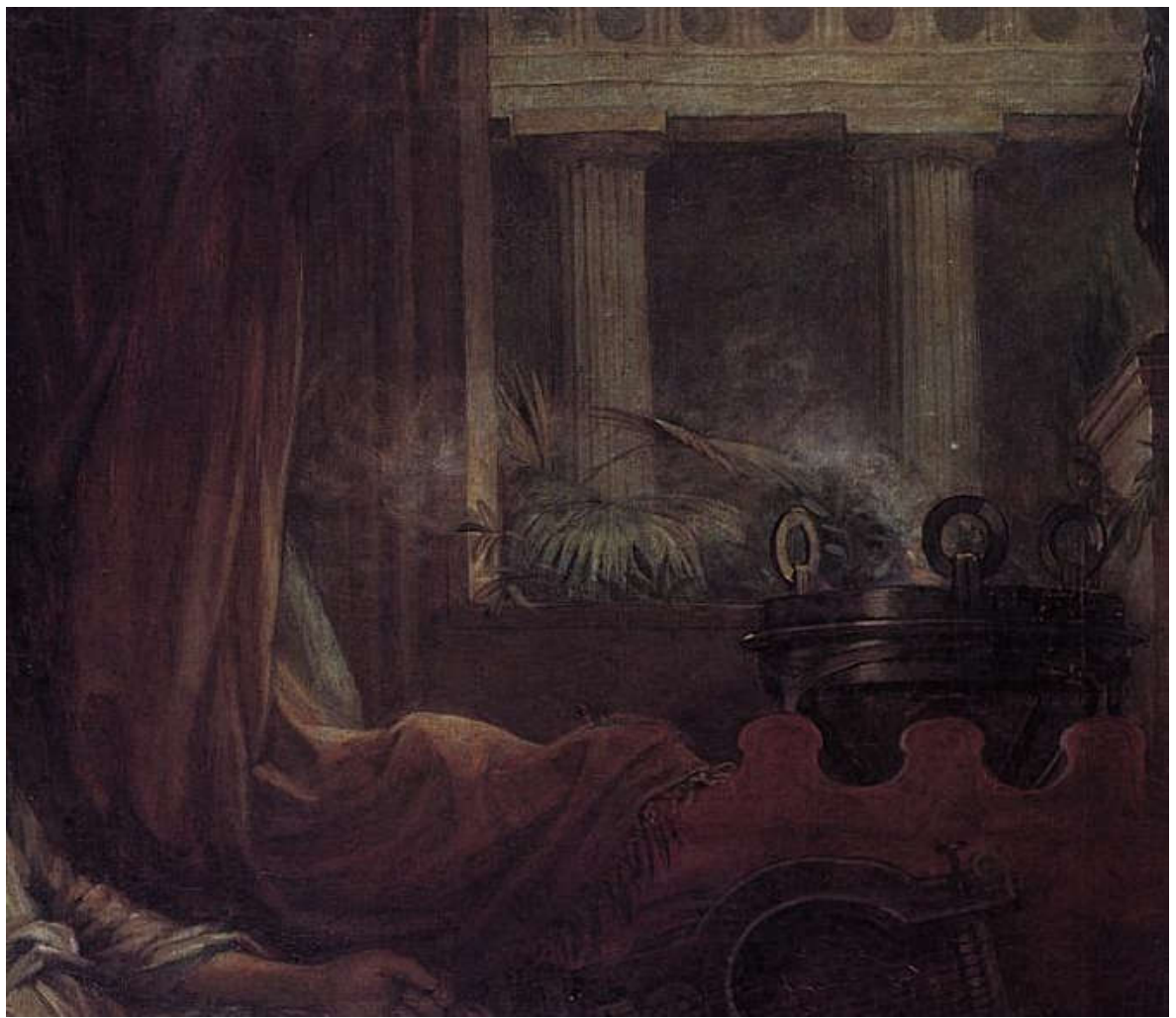
Detail



Detail



Detail



Detail



'The Dying Slave' by Michelangelo, Louvre, Paris, 1516



End of Sample