

# The Guardian



## Rossetti drawing found in Edinburgh bookshop to go on display

**Pre-Raphaelite painter's preparatory drawing for Pia de' Tolomei bought for £75 in 1956**

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A drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti for one of his greatest paintings and discovered in a secondhand bookshop for £75 is to go on display for the first time.

The preparatory drawing for his oil painting *Pia de' Tolomei*, produced late on in his career in 1868, depicts one of the artist's favourite models, Alexa Wilding, a dressmaker he discovered when he saw her walking on the Strand in London and was captivated by her flowing auburn hair.

But by the time Rossetti came to complete the final work in 1881 he had replaced Wilding with Jane Morris, the wife of textile designer William Morris, with whom the pre-Raphaelite artist had fallen passionately in love.

The drawing was found in an Edinburgh bookshop in 1956 by Sir Ivor Batchelor, professor of psychiatry at Dundee University, and his wife Honor, who spent decades collecting fine and



Rossetti's Pia de Tolomei. Photograph: Cambridge University handout

(1872) and The Blessed Damozel (1875-78).

It shows that at this time Rossetti had come close to the final composition for the painting, which would eventually show Jane Morris, with her head hanging forward in a brooding, melancholy pose.

The drawing is still in its original frame, and has a label on the back from Rossetti warning those that might want to de-frame the work of the fragile nature of the pastel.



Gallery technicians install Ricorditi di me che son la Pia (from Dante's Purgatorio) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

Sir Ivor, who died in 2005 aged 88, wrote of the couple's find: "It was in the tiny secondhand bookshop in Bruntsfield, Edinburgh in the years immediately after World War II that I found drawings and prints which were within our minuscule budget and which were often of real quality.

"It was a red letter day in 1956 when off the floor in Aitken's shop, with a windfall of royalties from a book, we bought for £75 Rossetti's very fine and very large drawing for La Pia".

The subject is inspired by Dante's *Purgatorio*. The woman, La Pia, is one of the souls that Dante encounters on his journey through purgatory.

Highlights from the collection will be on display for the first time, including drawings by Rossetti, John Ruskin, William Orpen, Walter Sickert and Gwen John, as well as stoneware, glass, bronze and pottery pieces.

Collecting and Giving: Highlights from the Sir Ivor and Lady Batchelor Bequest runs from 4 December 2018 until 3 March 2019

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