

## Victoria & Albert: Art & Love Special

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Welcome to the Royal Collection Podcast, I'm Rachel Salaman. In this special edition we're focussing on the relationship between Queen Victoria and Prince Albert ahead of a new exhibition highlighting their passion for art, and for each other. It's called *Victoria & Albert: Art & Love* and it's on at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, from the 19th of March until the end of October 2010.

Coming up in this podcast I'll be finding out about Victoria and Albert's art collecting, their interest in the new medium of photography and how Victoria expressed herself as a vibrant young woman. But first, what can visitors expect when they come to this exhibition? I put that question to Jonathan Marsden, the Exhibition's Chief Curator and Deputy Surveyor of the Queen's Works of Art.

One of the things that may be surprising is, I don't think people will find here the Queen Victoria they may have in mind, the mourning Queen Victoria, the perpetually widowed, black figure. This is not the person you will see here at The Queen's Gallery. The room will be full of intense colours and very lively group portraits of people enjoying themselves, of this young couple whose twenty-one years together we're celebrating in the exhibition.

**Queen Victoria and Prince Albert shared an enormous enthusiasm for art in many forms and had a unique partnership as collectors, didn't they? Can you tell us a bit more about that?**

I think what we really found is that it was in art that they really came closest to one another. Queen Victoria was the more vivacious, the more outgoing of the two; they first became comfortable in each other's company looking through an album of drawings, and that's, I think, very telling – their shared enjoyment of art was the way they came closer together. Now, whether this was in playing music together or in buying each other gifts of works of art, or in arranging the Royal Collection together, which they did well into the evening at Windsor habitually.

**How did they go about collecting?**

Well, the two of them had quite different tastes, in a way, but they were complimentary, and the way they did it was to buy each other birthday and Christmas presents, and this is the most remarkable thing that goes right through the 1840s and 50s. Hundreds of works of art are exchanged in this way and it's a very sort of measured process, it's as if, rather like with a child, you say you'll have the train for your birthday and the track for Christmas. There's a sort of measuredness about it and they did indeed have to proceed on a budget. They weren't able to compete in the auction rooms with the great new patrons and buyers of the day, far, far from it. One of the areas that Prince Albert was able to achieve some success in was this field of early Italian paintings and they were really rather

underappreciated and undervalued in the marketplace, so you could buy a 14th-century Italian painting for thirty pounds or something, as opposed to a more modern old master for two thousand pounds, so this was the area they were, they were active in. Of course they went annually to the exhibitions at the Water Colour Society and the Royal Academy and that was how they got to meet and to patronise contemporary artists, again, often conspicuously, spreading their patronage, so there are a number of occasions, something like seven or eight artists, from whom they bought one picture. It's as if they're trying to spread their means to give the maximum benefit.

**Tell me about the process of putting this exhibition together.**

Well, it's always been known that the Royal Collection was very rich in its, in Victorian art and so on, and the things that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert collected, and in fact the problem has been really limiting ourselves to the space we have, so we had to set some boundaries. These involved the dates, which is the time that Victoria and Albert were together, and we thought also a boundary to do with what they did at home rather than in the wider sphere and the public area. We wanted to confine ourselves very specifically to their tastes in art and not the many, many other interests, often complimentary, which they exhibited.

**And what's a personal highlight for you?**

Well, right at the beginning of the exhibition are two statues. These are marble statues of twenty-one-year-olds. She has just come to the throne, she's dressed, as she said to the sculptor, like a Greek statue and he on the other hand, is dressed as a Greek warrior, a twenty-one-year-old Greek warrior. I think these will confront our visitors in a good way with a new Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

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**To find out more about how Queen Victoria and Prince Albert collected art and what they particularly loved, both as individuals and as a couple, I've come to the Conservation Studio in St James's Palace to meet curators Anna Reynolds and Lucy Whitaker.**

**Now, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were first cousins but they were brought up very differently in different countries. How similar were their tastes, Anna?**

ANNA        When they got married they both shared a love of music and art but Prince Albert had been exposed much more to a kind of more rounded education, had gone on a Grand Tour in Italy, whereas Queen Victoria, although she'd been exposed to obviously amazing pictures that had been collected in the past by her ancestors, her education was perhaps less formal than Prince Albert's.

LUCY Prince Albert loved the art of his own part of Europe but he, as a young man, did this Grand Tour of Italy and he was very, very keen on what we call sometimes Gold Backs or primitive paintings, so very early 14th-century Italian art, people like Duccio, Daddi. This taste was very unusual at the time – he was one of the first collectors of this area. An outstanding example of that is the Bernado Daddi, *Marriage of the Virgin*, but there are others in the exhibition, including the incredibly important altarpiece by Duccio.

ANNA Some of the things that particularly appealed to Queen Victoria were a good likeness in a portrait and a picture that evoked a memory of some kind, so happy memories at Osborne, for example, or at Balmoral or in their scenes of family life, so she commissioned lots of portraits, mostly by Winterhalter, who went on to produce over a hundred works in oil for the royal couple during their marriage.

**Now, some people might be surprised at her attitude toward nudity – she wasn't exactly a prude was she?**

ANNA She wasn't, and I think that's one thing that really does come across in this exhibition. We will have a wall of pictures which were collected by Queen Victoria, mostly purchased by her as gifts for her husband, and they'll all be hung together and I think that will make quite a powerful statement about her attitude towards nudity, and one example is the painting *Florinda* by Winterhalter and it's the scene taken from an 8th-century legend that comes from a Spanish ballad called *La Cava*, which shows the Spanish maiden Florinda. Florinda's depicted with her hand maidens, preparing to bathe in the stream in the grounds of her castle in Toledo.

**And where would Queen Victoria have hung this picture?**

ANNA She hung it in Queen Victoria's Sitting Room as it's called at Osborne, where Prince Albert and Queen Victoria had both their writing desks, did a lot of their work – their writing desks were positioned next to each other and faced this rather large picture.

**The royal couple did an enormous amount as patrons, didn't they, supporting contemporary art and artists? Who were some of their other favourite artists of the day?**

ANNA Several artists produced really an extraordinary number of works for the royal couple and most important were Winterhalter and Landseer. They patronised both continental artists and English artists, so one example that you can see in the exhibition are the two pictures by the German artist Oswald Achenbach that are called *Morning* and *Evening*, and what's interesting about these pictures is that they were purchased in 1854 when Achenbach was really at the very beginning of what would go on to be a very long career.

**One of the most touching features of their relationship was that they often gave each other art as gifts, didn't they, Lucy?**

LUCY They did, and there was an extraordinary number of exchanges between them and celebration of their, their birthdays and at Christmas as well, and some of the most important Italian paintings that came into the collection were bought by Queen Victoria and presented to Prince Albert for his birthday – for example the Bernado Daddi was a gift from Queen Victoria. Of course Prince Albert would have let her know what he wanted, so in many cases they weren't secret or unknown to the person who was going to receive them.

ANNA Sometimes the gifts were secret, and an example in the exhibition is *Eos*, which is a portrait, as it were, of Prince Albert's favourite greyhound Eos, and this was painted by Landseer, and it includes a number of Prince Albert's personal belongings, his top hat and his cane, and Queen Victoria, together with the Prince's grooms, undertook an extraordinary programme of secrecy in order to arrange for these sittings without Prince Albert knowing about it, and she does write in her journal that it was a complete surprise to Prince Albert.

**So what are some of the exhibition highlights for you?**

LUCY Well, the three most important artists of the north were Durer, Holbein and Cranach. Lucas Cranach had worked for Prince Albert's ancestors, so it's understandable that Prince Albert was particularly interested in this artist. There are about fifteen Cranachs in the Royal Collection. All but three of them were collected by Prince Albert, and the most stunning of the Cranachs in the Royal Collection is the painting of *Apollo and Diana*, a really superb work by the artist and very much encapsulating all the characteristics of German art that Prince Albert really liked.

ANNA One that is one of my personal favourites that you'll see in the exhibition is William Powell Frith's picture of Ramsgate Sands, and it depicts the contemporary crowd of the 1850s on the beach at Ramsgate, a town that had become accessible only recently due to the invention of the railways, and it really shows all classes together – the rich, the poor, street entertainers. It even includes a portrait of the artist himself, a self-portrait, peering over the shoulder of a man on the far right of the picture, you can see. Another reason that Queen Victoria probably loved this picture is this association again with happy memories. She stayed at Ramsgate when she was a Princess with her mother, and she stayed actually in the tallest house overlooking the beach there, called Albion House. Even though she had typhoid and was recovering from typhoid while she stayed in Ramsgate, she really associated this with a happy time and I think it's this that particularly appealed to Queen Victoria.

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**The art of photography emerged and developed during Queen Victoria's reign, and the royal couple became keen supporters of this new art form. I'm joined by Sophie Gordon, Curator of the Royal Photograph Collection, who will tell us more. So Sophie, how did photography develop during the 19th century?**

Well, in 1839 two photographic processes were announced to the public. One was in France – Daguerre announced his own process, called the Daguerreotype, and almost at exactly the same time in the same month, January, William Henry Fox Talbot, a British aristocrat and scholar, announced the results of his researches into experimentations with light-sensitive chemicals and presented the results of his experiments to the Royal Society, and it's from these two processes that photography emerged and gradually became something that excited the public and, and took off.

**How did Queen Victoria and Prince Albert become interested in it?**

Prince Albert had a great interest in, in new technology and new inventions, and so it's really part of that whole exploration of the new and the developing technologies. Prince Albert was the first member of the Royal Family to be photographed. When the court was at Brighton in 1842 he went to William Constable's studio and had a number of portraits taken, and one of these survives today. Only a few years later Queen Victoria was photographed with her eldest child, Princess Victoria, and from that time really both of them then started to gradually explore photography and to acquire examples and to use photography as a tool to record particularly paintings and works of art in the Royal Collection. And then it was really not until the early 1850s that they began to collect in a serious way, and it was their encounter with Roger Fenton and the Photographic Society in particular that brought a new dimension to their collecting of photography.

**To what extent can they be seen as pioneers of photography?**

The Queen and Prince Albert in particular were certainly pioneers in the interest that they took in collecting photography and acting as patrons. They were very aware that their patronage would help make photography into an acceptable art form, something that was respectable and that brought photography up to a level that was equal with engravings or with drawings – the fine art in other words.

**What would it mean to a photographer to become favoured by the royal couple?**

It was tremendously important for their careers and often it would transform them. In the 1840s William Kilburn became one of the favoured Daguerreotypists for the Royal Family, and he was invited to photograph them on a number of occasions. He was responsible also for taking one of Queen Victoria's least favourite objects. He photographed her with five of her children and she disliked the way she looked so much that she tried to scratch out her own face on the plate. This aside, he became a favourite photographer and was asked to return a number of times. Then in the

1850s the relationship with Roger Fenton was tremendously important for his career. Fenton became almost their family photographer. He came to Windsor Castle, he came to Buckingham Palace, he photographed private domestic scenes for the Royal Family, so producing portraits that were never intended to be seen beyond the family circle. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert also acquired examples of his commercial work, his professional work, so there was very much an exchange of ideas, a back-and-forth; they were exploring the photographic world.

### **So what are the photographic highlights that people will see in the exhibition?**

The full range of what Queen Victoria and Albert collected is in the exhibition. We have some of the early Daguerreotypes from the 1840s which they acquired; particularly interesting are the two portraits of Jenny Lind, the famous opera singer. One of them was displayed at the Great Exhibition in 1851 and received a prize, and it's a beautiful, very fine example of a portrait with the singer reflected in a mirror, so you get almost a double portrait. And then in the print photographs we have the range of material that interested the Queen and Prince Albert, so we have Fenton's portrait of Queen Victoria after a drawing room, so she's wearing her formal court dress, is an example of one of the private photographs that he took, but then we have these wonderful folding screens which contain a number of *cartes de visite*, which are the small business card-sized photographs that were produced from the late 1850s onwards and became a collecting craze. They really caught on in the public's imagination and people would acquire portraits of celebrities and well-known people of the day, and the Queen both collected these but was also quite a sort of valuable commodity as a sitter for these portraits herself. And in 1860 she allowed portraits that had been taken of her and the Royal Family to be released as *cartes de visite*, and this was the first time that the public were able to acquire a portrait of the Queen and of Prince Albert, and they sold in their thousands. They were so valuable and exciting to the public who had never had the opportunity to see the Queen before.

### **What's your personal favourite?**

There's two of them. They're two animal portraits which were taken by the Comte de Montizon, a Spanish aristocrat and amateur photographer. He is very well-known really for the photographs of animals at London Zoo that he took in 1852. When Queen Victoria and Prince Albert came to the exhibition of the Photographic Society some of these photographs were on display and the Queen particularly noticed these. She stopped in front of them and admired them, and at this time it seemed likely that she acquired a set of them. Over 40 of these photographs now survive in the Royal Collection, and in the exhibition we have two of them. There is the Hippopotamus and the Flamingo. The Hippopotamus has now become quite a well-known popular image because it shows this wonderful hippopotamus which is something that was new and exciting to a London audience, and he's asleep, and in the photograph you see the crowd standing behind the grill all just staring at him, absolutely transfixed. The

other photograph is the flamingo, and I'm very fond of the flamingo because it's one of these photographs that really shows a moment in time just captured perfectly, because the flamingo is standing on one leg and his other leg is bending up behind him in an absolutely perfect right-angle, and it's a shot that would have had to have been taken really almost quite instantaneously but it just captures him perfectly as he's about to take a step.

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**Because Queen Victoria's reign was so long it's easy to forget that for many years she was a vivacious and fun-loving young woman. She threw herself into all sorts of enjoyable diversions, from attending the theatre and opera, to hosting lavish balls. Some of the objects in the exhibition give visitors a glimpse into this side of her life. To find out more I sat down with curators Kathryn Jones and Caroline de Guitaut.**

CAROLINE            If we look at the early part of her reign particularly, we see the Queen with Prince Albert enjoying many different musical, theatrical entertainments, both out in London and also at home, at Buckingham Palace and at Windsor Castle.

KATHRYN            And don't forget she was actually only a teenager when she came to the throne, so of course she was still living that, that sort of young life and she was just exploring her freedoms for the first time, really.

**Queen Victoria was the first monarch to actually live at Buckingham Palace, wasn't she? And she chose to add a ballroom – how often did she entertain there?**

KATHRYN            Well, the ballroom was built sort of halfway through the period that we're talking about, and it was used very extensively because they had concerts there quite frequently; at some points in her reign she, they were having concerts there once or twice a week.

CAROLINE            And then, of course, there were the three absolutely magnificent *Bal Costumé* costume balls which the Queen and Prince Albert gave. The first was in 1842 and a further one in 1845, and finally in 1851 the third and final costume ball was the Stewart Ball which of course gave wonderful freedom to those invited, not only to the Royal Family themselves, to dress in the most sumptuous dresses possible.

KATHRYN            Queen Victoria didn't often make comments on her clothes but that's one of the few costumes that she actually writes about in her journal.

CAROLINE            Yes, and we learn from her journal she describes at great length the dress that she wore, the costume designed for Prince Albert and for her half-brother Charles. This is one of the most sumptuous dresses that she ever wore, of the surviving dresses that we still have from her wardrobe. It's a very, very rich dress. It's made of beautiful silk moiré

which is trimmed with silk braid and velvet ribbon, and the bodice is trimmed with fake pearls and has a wonderful lace bertha, a deep collar of lace, and underneath all this, as if that wasn't enough to make a very grand and beautiful dress, the main skirt is all open at the front and reveals a beautiful underskirt, a petticoat of woven Banares silk, and there's some wonderful quotes, as Kathryn has said, from Queen Victoria's journal, and she says that "our dresses and Charles's were really beautiful and so correct. Dearest Albert looked very handsome in his and his admiral wig made him look so young. Our dresses were most exactly carried out from Eugène Lami's drawings", and in fact it was Eugène Lami, as the Queen says, who designed her costume and that of Prince Albert, and the Queen even went to the extent in her journal entry for that day to draw a little watercolour sketch of herself with Prince Albert and with her half-brother.

**KATHRYN** We know that Queen Victoria loved dancing and we know from her journal that when she was younger that she would often dance all night literally until it was daylight. But the other, her other great love, of course, was music, and she and Albert shared that love very much and they would play duets together, and she was very, very fond of the music of Mendelssohn. We know that he came and visited the Palace and he played the piano and she sang for him, and he was quite surprised at how accomplished she was as a musician, and there's a wonderful story of, of them, when Mendelssohn arrived he obviously expected it to be a royal palace, quite formal and he walked into the room and the music was all blown around and the Queen was on her hands and knees picking up all the pages, and then the parrot started squawking and so had to be removed from the room.

**What is there in the exhibition that demonstrates this love of music that they had?**

**KATHRYN** Well, there's a wonderful gold painted piano, covered in little playing monkeys, but there are also some of the original compositions that were written by Prince Albert or annotated by him, pieces that were written for the two of them to play together.

**CAROLINE** Whilst I think we know that Queen Victoria took her duties of state very seriously, we do see from this exhibition a real sense of a fun-loving young couple enjoying their artistic patronage together, sharing music, sharing dancing and sharing, most importantly of all, their family.

**Curators Caroline de Guitaut and Kathryn Jones.**

***Victoria & Albert: Art & Love* will be at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace from the 19th of March until the end of October 2010. Information about this and other exhibitions can be found on the Royal Collection website, and don't forget that tickets purchased directly from the Royal Collection can be converted into a 1-Year Pass, giving 12 months' complimentary re-admission. On the day of your first visit to the Gallery all you have to do is sign and print your name on the reverse of your ticket, ask a member of staff to stamp**

**and validate the ticket and then retain this ticket for future visits to the Gallery.**

**Thanks for listening and goodbye.**