



FRANCIS JOHN WYBURD (1826–1909)

Imogen

Signed with monogram (lower left)

Oil on board, arched top

7 ⁷/₈ x 6 ¹/₈ in. (20 x 15.5 cm.)

14 ¹/₂ x 12 ³/₄ in. (37 x 32.5 cm) (framed)

c. 1866

Provenance

Edward John Poole Esq., London.

The Property of E. J. Poole, Esq., Christie's, 30 March 1889, lot 112 (as *Madeleine*, 10 gns to Hardy).

Maas Gallery, London.

John Schaeffer, Sydney, purchased from the above on 31 August 1994, until 2021.



Literature

J. Dafforne, 'The Works of Francis John Wyburd', *Art Journal*, vol. 39, 1877, p. 140.

'The characteristics of Mr Wyburd's art are, principally, a perfect realisation of female beauty, an attractive manner in setting out his figures, and a refinement of finish which is sometimes carried almost to excess...'

James Dafforne, 'The Works of Francis John Wyburd',
Art Journal, vol. 39, 1877 p.140

Francis John Wyburd was born in London at 25 Bryanston Street, near Portman Square in 1826. He remained at this address for at least the next 50 years. He received his early education in Lille, in northern France and on his return to London trained under the lithographer, engraver and portrait painter Thomas Fairland (1804-1852). Wyburd won a silver medal at the Society of Arts in 1845 and the following year he exhibited his first picture at the Royal Academy: *Medora*, the popular character from Lord Byron's poetic ballad *The Corsair* – one of the most celebrated works of Victorian literature. The expressive head of the beautiful young woman in profile awaiting in anticipation, the return of her pirate-captain *Medora* echoes the intensity captured in the present work *Imogen*, the princess daughter of Cymbeline in Shakespeare's eponymous late romantic play.



Francis John Wyburd

Medora

Oil on board

12 x 9 ¼ in. (31 x 23.5 cm.)

1846

Bonhams, London, 17 November 2004

Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* provided inspiration for a number of 18th and 19th century British artists. Set in ancient Britain, Cymbeline was the Roman Empire's vassal king. His two sons, Guiderius and Arviragus had been abducted as infants by Belarius, an exiled traitor. Thus, King Cymbeline's only daughter and sole heir was Princess Imogen. Against her father's wishes, she secretly marries Posthumus Leonatus, a member of court but of low birth, who is banished from Britain for his defiance. The plot evolves with the inevitable Shakespearean deceptions and hidden identities.

The present work depicts Imogen disguised in boy's clothes as a youth named Fidele who travels to Wales in search of her husband Posthumus, who has returned from exile in Italy with the Roman soldiers. Fiercely loyal as the name Fidele suggests, she happens upon Belarius who lives in a cave with his adopted sons, who turn out to be Imogen's long-lost brothers. The painting is a highly finished head study of Imogen for Wyburd's *Imogen entering the Cave* painted in 1866 and exhibited at the British Institution in 1867 (no. 380). Priced at 150 guineas, this was a major composition, with the full title from *Cymbeline*, Act III, Scene VI: *'But draw my sword; and if mine enemy, But fear the sword like me, he'll scarcely look on't.'*



Francis John Wyburd

Imogen entering the Cave of Belarius

Oil on canvas

30 x 21 ½ in. (76 x 54.5 cm.)

1866

Private Collection

Photo (as *Siegfried*)

© Peter Nahum at The Leicester Galleries



The picture shows the standing figure of Imogen painted in profile with her sword pulled from its sheath as she looks towards the entrance to Belarius's cave with determination, yet trepidation. Rather than the luminous blue of the present work, Wyburd has painted the cloak draped over Imogen's left shoulder red in the full composition and she is wearing the same fringed leather tunic. Even in this small scale, the artist has conveyed an urgency and sense of drama in Imogen's ardent expression. When sold by Peter Nahum at The Leicester Galleries, *Imogen entering the Cave of Belarius* was entitled *Siegfried*, the hero of the first part of the Nibelungen-Lied, and youngest son of Siegmund and Sieglinde, the king and queen twins who ruled the Netherlands. As was so often the case with the range of literary and historical subject matter in Victorian paintings, titles were often interchanged. However, there can be no doubt the subject is indeed Imogen.

In James Dafforne's article 'The Works of Francis Wyburd' in the *Art Journal*, vol. 39, 1877, he describes '... Mr Wyburd's most pleasing single figures: several pictures of this class, such as 'Undine', 'Titania', 'Imogen', and others, were, we have heard him say, suggested by the caves round the Isle of Arran, visited when staying in Scotland with his brother-artist, Mr George E. Hering.'

This scene from *Cymbeline* was a subject taken up by several artists including Paul Falconer Poole, R.A. (1807-1879) exhibiting *Before the Cave of Belarius* at the Royal Academy in 1865. Richard Westall (1765-1836) painted the subject in c. 1795 for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and reproduced in the *Graphic Illustrations of the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare* published in 1802. It remained popular later in the century as seen in Herbert Gustave Schmalz's *Imogen* painted in 1889 and reproduced in *The Graphic* in 1892. Here Imogen is shown in profile with a determined gaze, similar to the present work, looking towards the unseen cave removing her sword from its sheath in readiness to encounter potential danger within.



Richard Westall (1765-1836)
Imogen entering the Cave of Belarius
 Oil on canvas
 33 x 22 in. (84 x 56 cm.)
 c.1795
 Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D.C.



After Herbert Gustave Schmalz (1856-1935)
Imogen
 Engraving
 1889
 Published in *The Graphic*, 1892

Wyburd entered the Royal Academy Schools in 1848 and over the next decade he embarked on a successful artistic career. As described, he was particularly adept at capturing female beauty, frequently drawing on literary and historic themes. Wyburd continued to exhibit at the Royal Academy until 1889, whilst also exhibiting at the British Institution and the Society of British Artists. In 1858 Wyburd and his friend the landscape painter George Edwards Hering (1805-1879) travelled to northern Italy and the Tyrol. The sketches he made on this trip broadened his subject matter to include a range of religious themes such as *The Convent Shrine*, exhibited at the British Institution in 1862.

Although it appears Wyburd was not much of a Continental traveller, like so many Victorians he was fascinated by the romance and exoticism of Orientalist subjects. One such example is the exquisitely painted *Xarifa: the Zegri lady rose not, etc.*, 1863, a scene from 'The Bride of Andalla', the Spanish ballad by John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854), calling to mind the closely observed work of John Frederick Lewis (1804-1876).



Francis John Wyburd

Xarifa: the Zegri lady rose not, etc.

Oil on canvas, oval

25 x 30 in. (63.5 x 76 cm.)

1863

Christie's, London, 15 July 2021, lot 49

Wyburd married Jemima Corbould (1840-1913), a painter of figurative subjects and daughter of the history painter Edward Henry Corbould (1815-1905). Their son Leonard Francis Wyburd, R.A. (1865-1958) was a noted designer of furniture and interiors. In 1883, when he was only 18, Leonard became head of Liberty's newly founded Furnishing and Decoration Studio. His furniture influenced by Spanish,

Moorish and Arab designs were particularly popular. He remained at the Liberty Studio until 1903 when he established his own design business. Francis John Wyburd died in 1903, aged 81, at which time he was living at 41 Bryanston Street, the home of his son Leonard.

The present work was originally in the collection of Edward John Poole, Esq. of Sussex Gardens on the north side of London's Hyde Park. Born c. 1848, Poole was a civil servant and major art collector. A patron of Whistler, Poole owned a number of his works. Several pictures from Poole's collection were sold at Christie's on 30 March 1889, including the present work, lot 112, catalogued as *Madeleine* and sold for 10 guineas. It is not known at what point the picture was re-identified as *Imogen*, but Wyburd himself may well have been aware of the Christie's auction. In more recent times *Imogen* was with the Maas Gallery. It was purchased by John Schaeffer in 1994, and hung at Rona, his Sydney home on Bellevue Hill. The picture was in Schaeffer's collection at the time of his death in 2020. An exquisite and finely painted work, with a distinguished provenance, *Imogen* is once again offered for sale after nearly thirty years.