

SIR FRANK DICKSEE, P.R.A. (1853-1928)

Paolo and Francesca

Signed and dated 'Frank Dicksee 1894' (lower left),
further signed and inscribed on the reverse:
'Paolo & Francesca/Frank Dicksee/80 Peel Street/Campden Hill'
Oil on canvas, circular
50 ¾ in. (129 cm.) diameter
52 x 52 ¼ in. (132 x 132.7 cm.) (canvas)
67 ¾ x 67 ¾ in. (172 x 172 cm.) (framed)



Provenance
William Knox D'Arcy of Stanmore Hall.
Thence by descent to his daughter Violet Berthe and her husband Brigadier General Sir Archibald Home.
Her sale Christie's, 25 January 1957, lot 128 (bought 'Dent').
Private collection, Italy.
Christie's, London, 11 December 2008, lot 38.
Private collection.

Exhibited
London, Royal Academy, 1895, no. 171.
London, Guildhall Art Gallery, 1897, no. 150.
London, Royal Academy, *Winter Exhibition of Work by Deceased Members, 1933*, no. 161.

Literature
Henry Blackburn (ed.), *The Academy Notes 1895*, London, 1895, pp. 9, 50 (illustrated).
The Times, 4 May 1895, p. 12.

The Athenaeum, no. 3525, 18 May 1895, p. 647.
Claude Phillips, 'The Royal Academy II', *The Academy*, no. 1203, 25 May 1895, p. 449.
Robert Jope Slade, 'The Royal Academy of Arts, 1895', *The Art Journal*, 1895, p. 171.
M.H. Spielmann, 'The Royal Academy Exhibition - I', *The Magazine of Art*, 1895, p. 244.
Austin Chester, 'More Pictures by Modern Artists: Some Themes from History and Romance', *The Windsor Magazine*, January 1908, pp. 216 (illustrated), 225-7.
Simon Toll, *Frank Dicksee 1853-1928 – His Art and Life*, 2016, pp.9, 99, 100, 109, 190, illustrated p.28, p.232, cat.no. FD.1894.2.

Paolo and Francesca

'It was one of his most tragic, passionate and beautiful compositions'

Simon Toll, *Frank Dicksee 1853-1928 – His Art and Life*, 2016, p.99

'The history of Francesca da Rimini is one of those which appeal to the sympathy of all ages... it is the tenderest and most pathetic of all love stories. Save for that of Juliet and her Romeo, it is incomparable. As in Shakespeare's tragedy, everything that can rouse our deepest pity and inspire the truest poetry is gathered up into one burning point. Its elements are the pride of knightly valour and beauty, the sweetness of loves' young dream, the horror of a sudden and violent end, the passionate strength of woman's devotion.' (Julia Cartwright writing in *The Magazine of Art* in 1884, p.137)

The story of the thirteenth-century star-crossed lovers of Rimini, Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Polenta was one of the most inspirational tragedies for nineteenth century artists, as popular as that of Romeo and Juliet, Othello and Desdemona and the countless Greek and Roman lovers. Dante recounts the tale of their love in the fifth Canto of the *Divine Comedy*, in which Dante encounters the couple in the second circle of Hell. Punished for their adultery, they float eternally in an embrace through the shadows of the Underworld, unable to rest or find peace. Dante tells us that Francesca was unhappily married to the deformed Gianciotto Malatesta but she fell in love with his brother Paolo one day when they were reading together the romantic tale of Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot:

One day together, for past time, we read
Of Lancelot, and how Love held him in thrall.
We were alone, and without any dread.
Sometimes our eyes, at the world's secrets call,
Met, and our cheeks a changing colour wore.
But it was one page only that did all.
When we read how that smile, so thirsted for,
Was kissed by such a lover, he that may
Never from me be separated more
All trembling kissed my mouth...
… We read no more that day.

Laurence Binyon's translation

Paolo was the son of Malatesta da Verucchio, lord of Rimini. He was reputedly so handsome that he was given his sobriquet 'il Bello' (the Beautiful), in contrast to the ugliness of his brother Gianciotto. It was his beauty and that of Francesca that drew the couple together when they first met. Francesca mistakenly thought she was to be married to Paolo rather than his brother and agreed to be married, only discovering later that it was Gianciotto who would be her husband. When Paolo returned to Rimini in February 1284, after many years in exile, he and Francesca rekindled their love. Enflamed by passion for one another they could not resist the forbidden temptation and fell into each other's arms only to be discovered by her jealous husband who stabbed them both to death in the Gradara Castle. Dante had known Paolo during his youth when Pope Martin IV had made Paolo Captain of the People of Florence, hence the reason that he inserted the story of Paolo and Francesca's love in his *Divine Comedy*. Dante found the story so tragic that he wrote that he fainted in pity for the lovers.



George Frederic Watts
Paolo and Francesca, 1872-5
Oil on canvas
60 x 51 in. (152.4 x 129.5 cm.)
Watts Gallery, Compton



Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres
Paolo and Francesca, 1819
Oil on canvas
18 ⅞ x 15 ⅜ in. (48 x 39 cm.)
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Angers

In the nineteenth century, the story of Paolo and Francesca was treated in Britain by John Flaxman (1807), William Blake (1822-7) and George Frederic Watts (1845, 1872) and by the French artist Ingres (1819) and German Ary Scheffer (1835) among many others. Most artists either chose to depict Dante's vision in Hell, or the moment when Gianciotto discovered the lovers and with his sword raised in jealous fury he prepares to slay them both with one strike. The latter inspired scenes of high drama and violence whilst the former excused the depiction of naked lovers in a sensual embrace. Rossetti made a triptych from the subject with Dante and Virgil, his guide in the Underworld, witnessing the moment of their first kiss and the eternal punishment. The image of the lovers flying through the flames of Hell, locked in the tragic and endless embrace of death, was seen to Victorian audiences as a moralising comment on adultery and forbidden love. The earlier scene perhaps warned of the temptation of temptation itself – like Eve with the apple, Orpheus and his backwards glance or the beauty of Helen of Troy. It was this moment of transgression that painters like William Dyce in 1835 and the sculptor Alexander Munro in

1851 and Frederic Leighton in 1860, chose - the moment when their love is rekindled, seated together reading a story so sensuously charged that the lovers are consumed with desire for one another. This was the same moment painted by Frank Dicksee later in the century in a painting that is romantic, sensual and beautiful but also well-studied and richly-coloured.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Paolo and Francesca da Rimini, 1855
Watercolour
10 x 17 ⅝ in. (25.4 x 44.9 cm.)
© Tate, London



Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
Harmony, 1877
Oil on canvas
62 x 37 in. (157.5 x 94 cm.)
© Tate, London

For an artist like Dicksee, fascinated by the romance of Medieval legend and also interested in narratives with tragic consequences, the story of *Paolo and Francesca* was irresistible. In some respects, it is surprising that it took him until 1894 to paint it. It is possible that he waited so that it would not be compared with other paintings of the same subject by other artists. It could be said that he had explored similar themes in his paintings since 1877 when he made his first public and critical success with *Harmony* (Tate, London), a painting of two lovers in historic dress. *Harmony* is essentially a painting of love, of the adoration of a young man for a girl who is so rapt in her musical reverie that she seems unaware of his besotted devotion to her. This picture had been painted when Dicksee had recently graduated from the Royal Academy Schools and was a young man in his early twenties. In 1884 he returned to a similar subject of a romantic tryst when he painted *Romeo and Juliet* (Southampton City Art Gallery) and by this time the subject of his paintings was less coy and the two Italian lovers' parting in the morning is decidedly steamy. In one of the book illustrations that he designed of the same composition, he even included a glimpse of Juliet's bedchamber to leave us in no doubt of where Romeo had spent the night. The physical closeness of the lovers of Verona is daring and when in 1894,

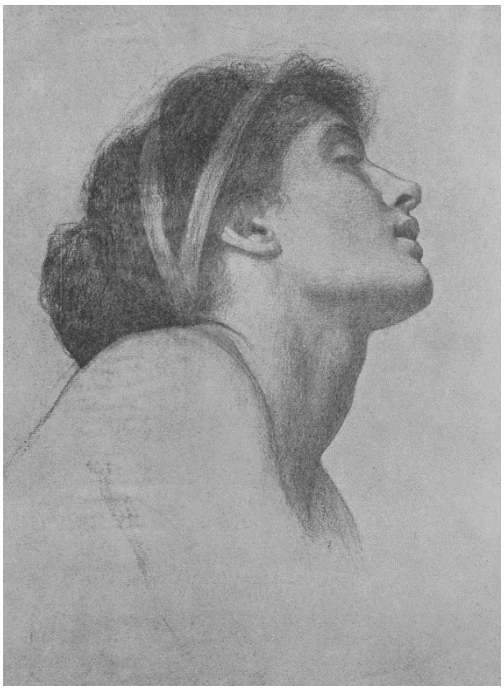
Dicksee painted *Paolo and Francesca* he was no less emphatic in the sexual charge between the two figures. The circular format of the picture thrusts the figures closer, emphasising the intimacy between them and us as the voyeuristic witness. They almost spill out of the painting, the book tumbling forward and the looming back of the settle creating a shallow perspective. The placing of Paolo's strong hand on Francesca's shoulder pulls her closer to him as he draws her pale hand to his lips. The contrast of his golden skin with her ivory-white hand emphasises their masculinity and femininity. She has literally become weak at the knees as he draws her body closer and she leans towards him. A nude study of two models posing for the painting demonstrates Dicksee's meticulous academic preparation for his pictures but also shows that he posed nude a male and female model together, embracing. However, there is nothing lascivious in either the drawing or the finished painting – it is intimate and romantic but not louche. Dicksee was far too sophisticated a painter to descend into eroticism, preferring suggestion and allusion to overt sensuousness.



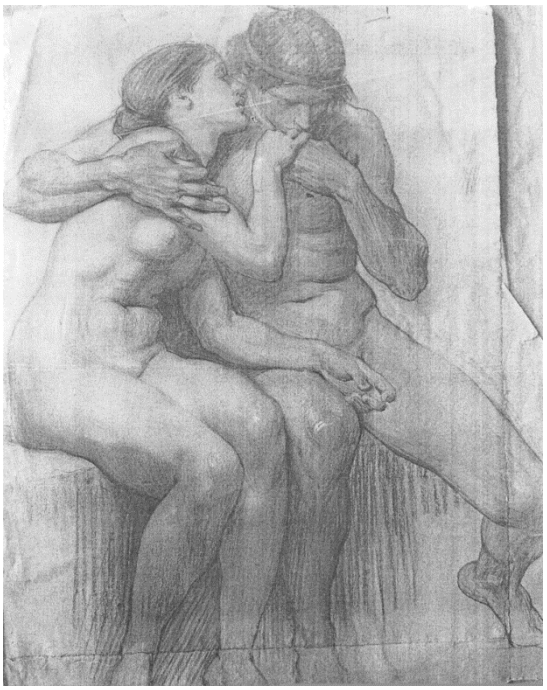


Paolo and Francesca - detail

Romeo and Juliet, 1884
Oil on canvas
67 ¼ x 46 ½ in. (171 x 118 cm.)
Southampton City Art Gallery



Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
Head study for Francesca in *Paolo and Francesca*
Pencil and white chalk
Illustrated in the *Magazine of Art*, 1895



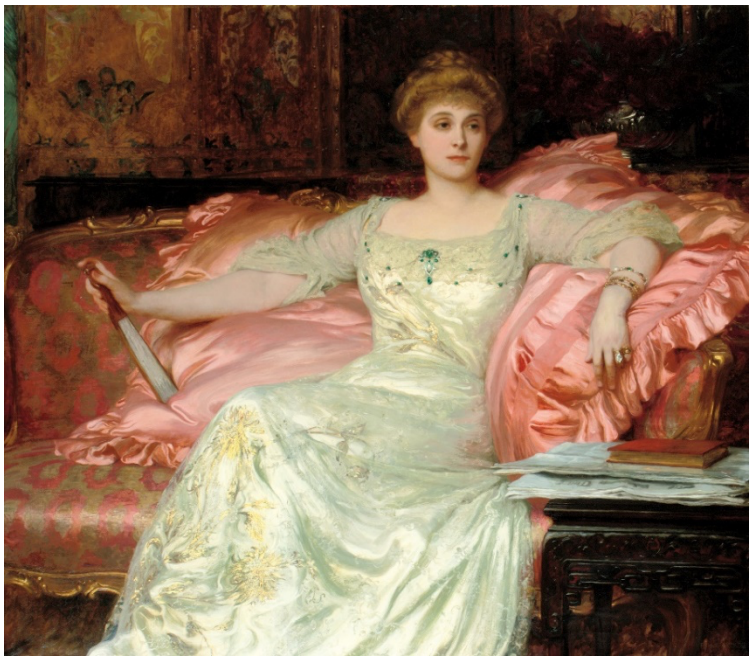
Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
Nude studies for *Paolo and Francesca*
Pencil and white chalk
15 ¾ x 11 ¾ in. (40 x 30 cm.)
Private collection

Paolo and Francesca was commissioned by the wealthy businessman William Knox D'Arcy (1849-1917). Dicksee had known D'Arcy since 1891 when he purchased the large mythological painting *The Mountain of the Winds* (untraced) to hang in his dining room at Stanmore Hall near Harrow. D'Arcy was regarded with snobbish derision by many, including William Morris who described Stanmore as *'a sham Gothic house of 50 years ago now being added to by a young architect of the commercial type men who are very bad. Fancy in one room there was not a pane of glass that opened.'* This was rather hypocritical as Morris & Co had decorated most of the interior. A photograph of D'Arcy and his second wife Nina shows the lower part of *Paolo and Francesca* hanging above a pianoforte which suggests that the picture eventually hung in a music room rather than the dining room.



Photograph of William Knox D'Arcy and his wife Nina
in the music room at Stanmore Hall

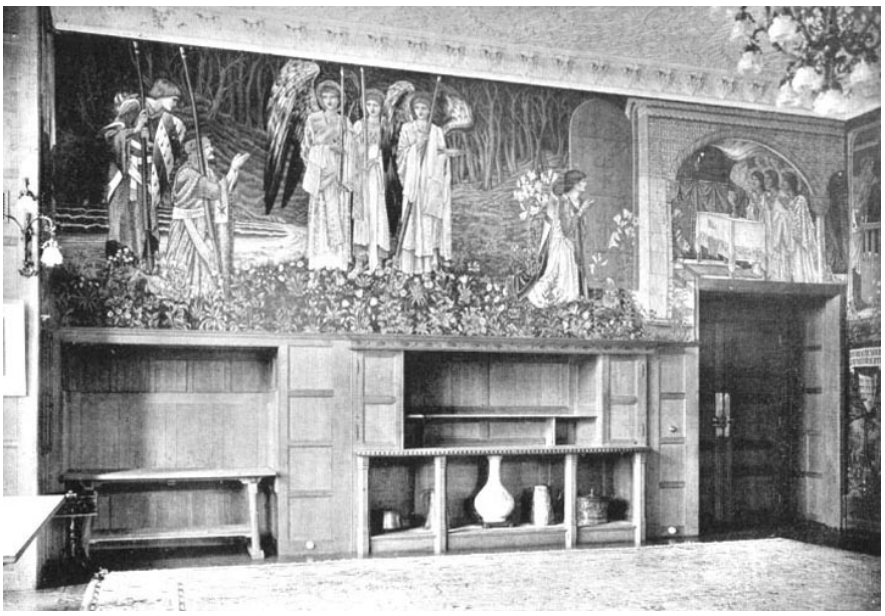
D’Arcy was the son of a solicitor and born at Newton Abbot in Devon. He was educated at Westminster School but left England with his family at the age of seventeen in 1866 when his father’s firm went bankrupt. Unable to face the embarrassment of their predicament his father sought a new life in Australia and arrived in Rockhampton in Queensland where he opened another law firm. For some years William worked for his father before speculating in land and gold stocks, setting himself on a path to success and vast wealth. He set up a syndicate in 1882 to develop Ironstone Mountain (later renamed Mount Morgan) where they found gold and made a fortune. By 1886 he was a multi-millionaire. director and major shareholder of the Mount Morgan Gold Mining Company. Three years later he decided to return to England, with his first wife Elena and their five children – he divorced Elena in 1897. He purchased a large London townhouse at 42 Grosvenor Square and the Gothic Stanmore Hall which he and his second wife Nina (née Boucicault) used for lavish entertaining – Caruso and Dame Nellie Melba performed at their private musical soirees. He also bought himself one of only two private stands at Epsom racecourse (the other was owned by King Edward VII) and another large estate, the 19,000 acre Bylaugh Park in Norfolk where he held parties to indulge his other passion, shooting. At Stanmore he employed the Ipswich architect Brightwell Binyon to enlarge the neo-gothic pile of 1847 by J. M. Derick. The photographer Bedford Lemere photographed the property in 1892 (the album of photographs is now in the National Gallery of Victoria). D’Arcy and his second wife had a large appetite for spending money and fortunately he had the means to pay for their extravagances.



Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
Mrs W. K. D’Arcy, 1902
Oil on canvas
54 x 61 ½ in. (137 x 156 cm.)
Private collection

In 1900 Dicksee was commissioned to paint D’Arcy’s youngest daughter Ethel Anastasia and two years later he painted one of his most sumptuous portraits of Ethel’s stepmother Nina D’Arcy (1902, Private collection). Nina was celebrated for her fashion sense and formidable character – she successfully sued a dressmaker who made a gown for her that did not fit and forced her to miss a day at the races. Dicksee’s portrait of her dressed in ivory silk embroidered in gold and bedecked in glittering emeralds, diamonds and opals is testament to the D’Arcy’s extravagance and his success in business to pay for them. In 1900 he funded a search for oil and minerals in Persia and after a few disappointing years that brought him close to bankruptcy, in 1908 the excavators finally struck oil, and in April 1909 the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was formed, with D'Arcy as a director. Anglo-Persian Oil Company would become British Petroleum, and D'Arcy may be regarded as the founder of the modern oil industry in the Middle East and the man who made one fortune and lost it only to make another.

It is likely that D'Arcy suggested that Dicksee paint a picture connected to the romance of the Morte d'Arthur. In 1894, the year Dicksee was commissioned to paint a picture for D'Arcy, Morris & Co completed a suite of tapestries designed by Edward Burne-Jones on the subject of the Quest for the Holy Grail for the dining room at Stanmore Hall. They had been commissioned in 1891, the year that D'Arcy purchased *The Mountain of the Winds* from Dicksee and likely that D'Arcy would have mentioned his plan to commission the tapestries. Although *Paolo and Francesca* does not depict a subject from the story of King Arthur and his court, the tale of Guinevere and Lancelot's adultery is integral to the subject.

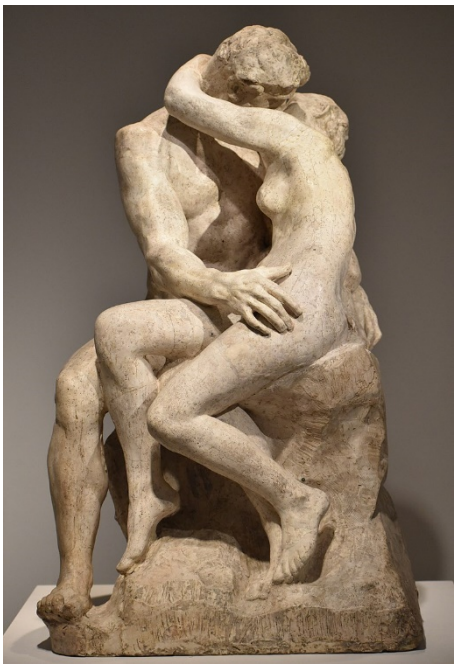


Photograph by Bedford Lemere of the interior of Stanmore Hall
with the Holy Grail tapestries designed by Edward Burne-Jones for Morris & Co.

It is difficult to know if Dicksee based the design of his picture on any of the many depictions of the scene or whether it was a more generic recollection of the way in which previous artists had painted and the two lovers. The most likely source of inspiration was Alexander Munro's famous marble which had first been exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851 (two years before Dicksee was born). In Dicksee's design the poses of the figures are reversed with Francesca leaning towards Paolo and the book has slipped from their grasp. Auguste Rodin sculpted a depiction of Paolo and Francesca for his Gates of Hell in the early 1880s which was later the basis for *The Kiss*, perhaps the most famous sculpted depiction of love ever made. The similarity of poses between Rodin and Dicksee's lovers points to a shared enthusiasm for the tradition of depicting Paolo and Francesca in this sensual embrace, rather than a direct influence – the modernity of Rodin's work made him an artist that Dicksee was unlikely to have admired. Dicksee's art was rooted in terms of a more academic visual vocabulary and the late nineteenth-century attempt to revive Pre-Raphaelite themes. He greatly disliked modernism and later in life, when he was President of the Royal Academy, he actively expressed his traditional views in a series of attacks on many aspects of twentieth century life, from the length of women's skirts to fashion for short, cropped hairstyles which he abhorred, jazz music and Vorticism. Painted towards the close of Queen Victoria's reign and the end of the nineteenth century, Dicksee's art upheld the romantic and beautiful style of an earlier generation.



Alexander Munro
Paolo and Francesca, 1851
Marble
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery



Auguste Rodin
The Kiss, 1882
Marble
Musée Rodin, Paris

As was his usual way of working Dicksee based his large oil painting of *Paolo and Francesca* upon a small watercolour of the composition. Dated 1894 it was almost identical to the exhibited painting, except for the position of Francesca's head. The watercolour was sold by Thomas Agnew's to Charles Churchill, a wealthy timber merchant in Surrey who also owned Dicksee's *Romeo and Juliet*. It was later bought by William Hesketh Lever, Viscount Leverhulme and hung at Thornton Manor, Wirral. The fact that Dicksee sold the watercolour to a private patron shows that he was pleased with the composition and until the rediscovery of the oil painting in 2008, this small watercolour was the only record of the composition – other than photographs and studies.



Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
Sketch for *Paolo and Francesca*, 1894
Watercolour heightened with bodycolour
8 ¼ in. (21 cm.) diam.
Private collection

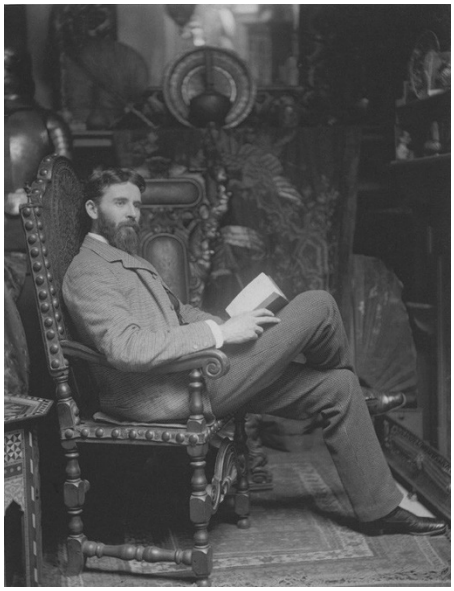
First exhibited at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1895 *Paolo and Francesca* was in stark contrast to Dicksee's other subject-painting of that year, *A Reverie* (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) an odd modern-life scene of a ghost appearing in a middle-class music room to haunt a weary former lover. *Paolo and Francesca* was seen as the more successful of the two large paintings but it was overshadowed by discussions about the enigmatic subject of *A Reverie*. The art critic Robert Jope Slade saw the two paintings when he visited Dicksee's studio at Peel Cottage in Campden Hill in 1895: *'When the two important canvases of Mr. Frank Dicksee stood side by side in his studio it seemed hardly possible that such different pictures had been painted by the same man in the same year'* (*The Art Journal*, 1895, p.171).



Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
Reverie, 1895
Oil on canvas
41 ¾ x 54 ½ in. (106 x 138.5 cm.)
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

Slade felt *Paolo and Francesca* was *'conceived and painted in a fashion that almost suggests the Pre-Raphaelites'* whilst Claude Phillips, writing for *The Academy*, described it as *'a well-balanced academic composition',* a *'more than respectable achievement'* in which *'effort is made to obtain beauty of colour by careful grouping of tints'* he agreed with Stephens that the picture was *'wholly inadequate as a rendering of this moment of passion's climax in the famous love tragedy'* (*The Academy*, 25 May 1995, p.449). The correspondent for *The Times* felt that the picture was *'a carefully-studied variation upon a theme on which it seems to be de rigueur that every painter should at one time or another try his hand' (The Times*, 4 May 1895, p.12) and Frederic Stephens, writing for *The Athenaeum*, admired the *'bright and attractive'* colour *(The Athenaeum*, 18 May 1895, p.647).

Dicksee had his first spectacular success in 1877 when he exhibited *Harmony (*Tate, London), which was purchased for the British nation and established him as the public's most popular painter. The romantic composition of a woman playing an organ whilst being watched by her adoring lover was the first of Dicksee's highly dramatic and narrative works which appealed to the public in those pre-cinema days: "during the whole time the Academy was open the public crowded round this picture" and the art critics wrote that with this picture Dicksee "took the world of London by storm" (Sidney Hodges, "Mr. Frank Dicksee A.R.A," *The Magazine of Art,* 1887, p. 218).



Through the 1880s, Dicksee carved out a career as a painter of romantic scenes from literature and legend with paintings like *The Symbol* (1881, Private collection) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1884, Southampton City Art Gallery). These pictures secured his popularity as a painter and in the next decade he continued to please the visitors to the Royal Academy annual exhibitions with his large and accomplished pictures, from the modern melodramas *The Crisis* (1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne) and *Reverie* (1895, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) to the epic drama of *The Funeral of a Viking* (1893, Manchester Art Gallery).

Frank Dicksee, 1889
Platinum print by Ralph Winwood Robinson
7 ⅞ x 6 in. (20.1 x 15.3 cm.)
© National Portrait Gallery, London

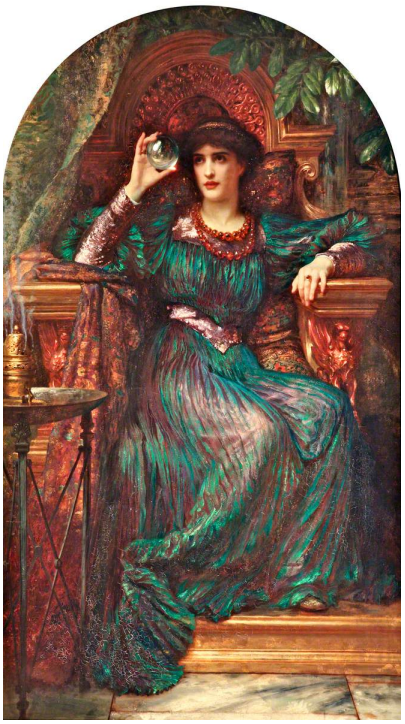


Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
The Funeral of the Viking, 1893
Oil on canvas
74 ⅜ x 117 ¾ in. (189 x 299 cm.)
Manchester Art Gallery

Female beauty would always be an important element of Dicksee's paintings, and his gorgeously decorative single-figure subjects are among his most celebrated pictures, including *Leila* 1891, Private collection), *The Mirror* (1897, Private collection) and *The Magic Crystal* (1894, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight). By the turn of the twentieth century, Dicksee painted fewer narrative pictures and more portraits, such as his elegant portrait of the Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos (1901, Tatton Park, Cheshire). However, there were a few significant exceptions including *The Two Crowns* (1900, Tate, London), *La Belle dame sans Merci* (1902, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery) and *Yseult* (1901, Private collection).



Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
The Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos, 1901
Oil on canvas
56 x 40 in. (142 x 101.5 cm.)
Tatton Park, Cheshire



Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
The Magic Crystal, 1894
Oil on canvas
66 ¼ 40 ⅛ in. (168.5 x 102 cm.)
Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight



Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
The Two Crowns, 1900
Oil on canvas
91 x 71 ¾ in. (231 x 182 cm.)
Tate, London



Sir Frank Dicksee, P.R.A.
La Belle Dame sans Merci, 1902
Oil on canvas
54 x 74 in. (137.2 x 188 cm.)
Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

In 1924 Dicksee became President of the Royal Academy at a time when the art world was a battle-ground for those who rebelled against the retrograde, academic style – his views were not forward-thinking but they were always heartfelt and his paintings were always superbly painted with the lustre of silk and glow of sunlight carefully rendered and heart-pounding drama and emotion conveyed.

We would like to thank Simon Toll for writing this catalogue note.

Simon Toll

Simon Toll is the author of Frank Dicksee 1853-1928 – *His Art and Life*, published in 2016, a major study and catalogue raisonné.. He has also written a monograph on Herbert Draper, *A Life Study*, published in 2003, and curated three successful exhibitions of figure drawings by Draper. He is Head of Victorian and Edwardian Art and Senior Director at Sotheby's in London, where he has worked for the last twenty years.