



PRESS RELEASE

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TATE BRITAIN

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

4 March – 25 May 2020

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This spring, Tate Britain will open a major exhibition celebrating the brief but astonishing career of Aubrey Beardsley. Although he died tragically young at the age of just 25, Beardsley's subversive, sinuous black-and-white images have continued to shock and delight admirers for over a century. Bringing together 200 spectacular works, this will be the largest display of his original drawings in over 50 years and the first exhibition of his work at Tate since 1923.

Beardsley (1872-98) became one of the *enfants terribles* of *fin-de-siècle* London and is perhaps best remembered for his powerful illustrations of Oscar Wilde's controversial play *Salomé*. His opulent imagery anticipated the elegance of Art Nouveau yet alighted on the perverse and erotic aspects of life and legend, shocking audiences with a bizarre sense of humour and fascination with the grotesque. Beardsley was prolific, producing hundreds of illustrations for books, periodicals and posters in a career spanning just under seven years. Line block printing, a photomechanical process, enabled his distinct black and white works to be easily reproduced and widely circulated, winning both notoriety and admirers around the world, but the original pen and ink drawings are rarely seen. Tate Britain will exhibit a huge array, revealing his unrivalled skill as a draughtsman in exquisite detail.

The exhibition will highlight each of the key commissions that defined Beardsley's career as an illustrator, notably Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* 1893-4, *Salomé* 1893 and Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* 1896, of which five of the original drawings will be shown together for the first time. As art director of the daring literary quarterly *The Yellow Book*, the artist created seminal graphic works that came to define the decadence of the era and scandalised public opinion. Bound editions and plates will be displayed alongside subsequent works from *The Savoy* and illustrations for *Volpone* 1898 and *Lysistrata* 1896, which further explore the artist's licentious fascination with eroticism and the absurd.

Beardsley's imagination was fuelled by diverse cultural influences, from ancient Greek vases and Japanese woodblock prints, to illicit French literature and the Rococo. He also responded to the works of contemporaries such as Gustave Moreau, Edward Burne-Jones and Toulouse Lautrec, whose works will be shown at Tate Britain to provide context for Beardsley's individual mode of expression. A room in the exhibition will be dedicated to portraits of Beardsley and the artist's wider circle, presenting him at the heart of the arts scene in London in the 1890's despite the frequent confinement of his rapidly declining health. As notorious for his complex persona as he was for his work, the artist had a preoccupation with his own image, relayed throughout the exhibition by striking self-portraits and depictions by the likes of Walter Sickert and Jacques-Emile Blanche.

Additional highlights will include a selection of Beardsley's bold poster designs and his only oil painting. Charles Bryant and Alla Nazimova's remarkable 1923 film *Salomé* will also be screened in a gallery adjacent to Beardsley's illustrations, showcasing the costume and set designs they inspired. The exhibition will close with an overview of Beardsley's legacy from Art Nouveau to the present day, including Picasso's *Portrait of Marie Derval* 1901 and Klaus Voormann's iconic artwork for the cover of *Revolver* 1966 by the Beatles.

Aubrey Beardsley is organised by Tate Britain in collaboration with the Musée d'Orsay, Paris and curated by Caroline Corbeau-Parsons, Curator of British Art 1850 – 1915 and Stephen Calloway, with Alice Insley, Assistant Curator of Historic British Art. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue from Tate Publishing and a programme of talks and events in the gallery.

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