

Evocative watercolours collected by Victoria and Albert to go on display at Queen's Gallery

Going on display at The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse in 2021 will be watercolours collected by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. This collection which provides evocative record of their public and private lives together. Throughout their marriage Victoria and Albert were passionate patrons of watercolour painting, and formed a collection of thousands of works.

'Victoria & Albert: Our Lives in Watercolour' will feature 80 of their treasured watercolours, including several by Scottish artists, some of which will be on display in Scotland for the first time.



James Roberts, The Drawing Room, Balmoral, 1857. Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020

The watercolours the Queen and her consort acquired together captured moments of significance, from the christenings and birthday parties of the royal children to glittering court balls, views of the cities and landscapes they saw on their travels at home and abroad, and records of the places they lived, such as Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace and Balmoral Castle.

The royal couple spent happy evenings together organising their watercolours into albums, as recorded by the Queen in her journal. Following Albert's death in 1861, the albums took

on even greater significance to the widowed Victoria, functioning as both a tangible memory of the time spent with her beloved husband creating them and a visual record of their lives together.

Victoria and Albert undertook frequent travels around the British Isles and commissioned artists to depict the places they visited. Early in their married life, the couple developed a deep affection for Scotland. A watercolour by William Leighton Leitch depicting the royal yacht sailing into Granton Pier, on display for the first time, emphasises the warm welcome Victoria and Albert received when they arrived in Edinburgh for their first tour of Scotland in 1842.

Victoria wrote afterwards that 'Edinburgh made a great impression upon us; it is quite beautiful & totally unlike anything I have seen'. Between official engagements they enjoyed visiting landmarks in the city such as Arthur's Seat and Rosslyn Chapel.



William Simpson, Queen Victoria at the unveiling of the statue of Prince Albert in Edinburgh, 1876. Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020

A highlight of the exhibition is an atmospheric watercolour showing Edinburgh at sunset by the Dunfermline-born painter Waller Hugh Paton. Victoria commissioned Paton to capture the view she enjoyed on her approach to the Palace of Holyroodhouse from the railway station, looking west over St Margaret's Loch and Holyrood Park, with Calton Hill and the National Monument in the distance. (*Top image – Waller Hugh Paton, Edinburgh with a distant view of the Palace of Holyroodhouse, 1862*)

Another Edinburgh scene, this time by Glaswegian artist William Simpson, is on display for the first time, depicting Victoria at the unveiling of the memorial to Albert in Charlotte Square in 1876, a landmark in Edinburgh to this day.

One of Victoria's favourite watercolourists was William Leighton Leitch, a self-taught Glaswegian artist who became one of the most celebrated Scottish landscape painters of the 19th century. He was also the Queen's watercolour tutor for almost 20 years, and under his supervision she grew to be a talented amateur watercolourist. She often took as her subjects those close to her, including her pets, family and acquaintances, as shown by a watercolour of her third son, Prince Arthur, aged three, painted at Osborne House in 1853.



Eugène Louis Lami, Marie-Amélie, Queen of the French, greets Queen Victoria at Le Tréport, c.1843-4. Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020

Upon Leitch's death in 1888, Victoria wrote in her journal of her sadness at the passing of 'dear old Mr Leitch, my kind old drawing Master, such an excellent artist, known to me for so many years, connected with happy & sad times, & with Scotland'.

The royal couple's travels in Europe were also recorded in watercolours. In 1843 they visited the château d'Eu in Normandy at the invitation of the French King Louis-Philippe, Victoria's first journey abroad. The following year the King presented Victoria with an album of watercolours, which captured private interactions between the two royal families alongside the pomp and spectacle of the visit. The Queen in turn commissioned watercolours of Louis-Philippe's reciprocal visit to England in 1844, including a scene by Joseph Nash depicting the monarchs departing from Windsor Castle for a carriage drive.

Victoria and Albert's many trips to Germany were also recorded in their watercolour albums, including a charming view of Rosenau just outside Coburg, a site of great personal significance to the couple and described by Victoria as 'my dearest Albert's birthplace & favourite place'.

Victoria and Albert's desire to document events of public significance is perhaps best illustrated by the series of watercolours they commissioned depicting the Great Exhibition of 1851, which capture the temporary spectacle in a permanent visual record. The resulting works serve to emphasise the dazzling scale of the Crystal Palace and the variety of exhibits on display, from stuffed elephants to stained glass.



Louis Haghe, *The Great Exhibition: moving machinery*, c.1851-2. Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

In Louis Haghe's representation of the hall of moving machinery, visitors marvel at modern iron and steel contraptions, reflecting the Great Exhibition's aim of promoting industry and progress. Albert was a leading figure in the event's organisation, and is painted by Joseph Nash delivering a closing address to thousands of spectators in the Crystal Palace in October 1851.

The colourful, dynamic watercolours collected by Victoria and Albert illuminate aspects of both Victoria's reign and the royal couple's passions. They capture the pomp and spectacle of the British court, a shared love of Scotland, foreign travel and diplomacy, and the close-knit family at the heart of it all.

Victoria & Albert: Our Lives in Watercolour is at The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, 5 March – 5 September 2021.

Visitor information and tickets for The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse: www.rct.uk, T. +44 (0)30 3123 7301. Advance booking is essential.