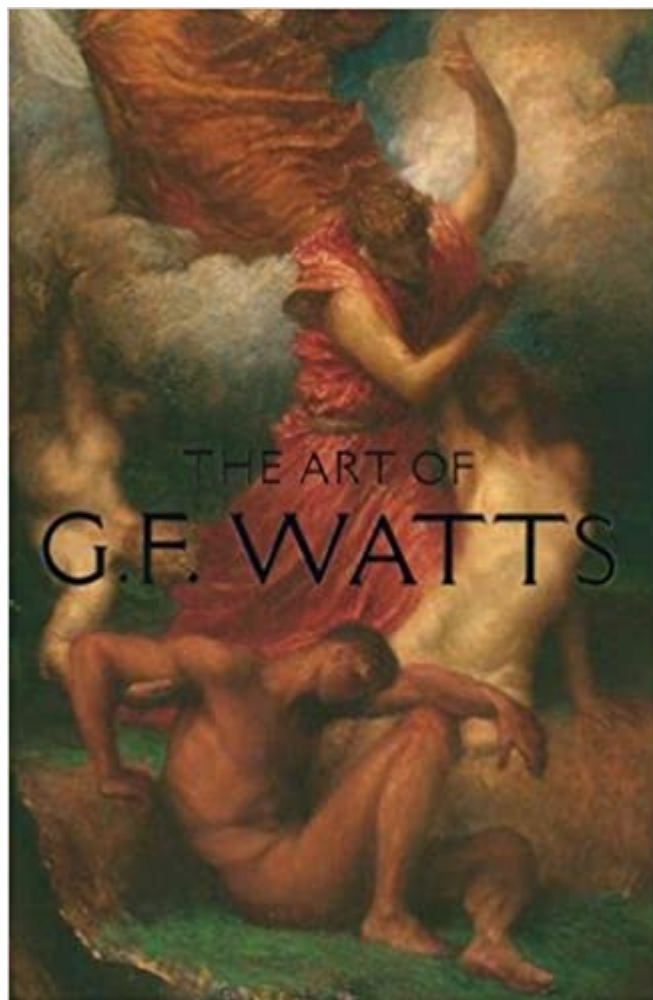


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# The Art Of G.F. Watts



## Synopsis

Published to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of G.F. Watts, this book provides a lively and engaging introduction to one of the most charismatic figures in the history of British art. Covering all aspects of Watts's career, it places him back at the center of the visual culture of the 19th century. George Frederic Watts (1817–1904) was one of the great artists of the 19th century. As a young man Watts exhibited alongside Turner, and by the end of his long career he was influential upon Picasso. Sculptor, portraitist and creator of classic Symbolist imagery, Watts was seen also as more than an artist – a philanthropic visionary whose art charted the progress of humanity in the modern world. After four years in Italy in the 1840s, Watts was recognized as a Renaissance master reborn in the Victorian age. Nicknamed ‘Signor’, and working in isolation from the mainstream commercial art-world, he became a cult figure, obsessively returning to a series of subjects describing the fundamental themes of existence – love, life, death, hope. Engaging in turn with Romanticism, the Pre-Raphaelites, the Aesthetic Movement and Symbolism, Watts remained true to his own personal vision of the evolution of humanity. As a portraitist, Watts set out to capture the essence of the great characters of 19th-century Britain, donating his finest portraits to the National Portrait Gallery in London. Watts's portraits of figures such as William Morris, John Stuart Mill and the poets Tennyson and Swinburne have become the classic images of these cultural celebrities, while more intimate portraits such as *Choosing*, showing the artist's first wife, the actress Ellen Terry, are among the most popular of all British portraits. During the 1880s Watts emerged from his cult status to be embraced by the public. Feted as the great modern master, even as ‘England's Michelangelo’, he was given large retrospective exhibitions in London and at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. His reputation grew also in Europe, where the Symbolists revered him as one of their great exemplars. Watts's most celebrated works, such as *Love and Life*, *Hope*, and the epic sculpture *Physical Energy*, were reproduced globally and their fame was unsurpassed within contemporary art in the years around 1900. By this time, Watts had acquired a country home in Surrey – *Limnerslease* – around which he and his second wife, the designer Mary Watts, built a type of utopian settlement, which has recently been restored and opened to the public as Watts Gallery – *Artists' Village*. By the end of his life Watts was a national figure, an inspirational artist who had found a meaningful role for art as a catalyst for social change and community integration.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Tromans offers a frank, fair and ultimately endearing overview of Watts' curious career and the complexities of his personality whilst conjuring a lively picture of the cultural, social and political climate." (Art Quarterly, Summer 2017)"This currently somewhat neglected Eminent Victorian is well worth a second, or even a third, look at [a] compact biography." (Artlyst)"This lively introduction to the charismatic artist places him back at the centre of the visual culture of 19th-century Britain." (Artists & Illustrators)"Unclassifiable as an artist | Watts could be one of the best of Victorian portrait painters." (The Spectator)

Nicholas Tromans is curator at Watts Gallery. He has published widely on nineteenth-century British art, including the acclaimed Richard Dadd: The Artist and the Asylum.

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