



John William Godward: The Eclipse of Classicism

Vern G. Swanson

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Plucked from oblivion, Godward serves as the last best example of 19th century Greco-Roman Classicism. Of a reclusive nature and painting in a style completely out-of-date with post-war Europe, this genius was and remained obscure. Godward's brilliance, with the recent revival of interest in his fallow Classicists, Alma-Tadema and Lord Leighton, is only now coming to light. Godward's art sought to portray peace, feminine beauty and ideal perfection in an age careening headlong into atrocity. He did so by marvelously painted and composed pictures of beautiful women in halycon classical environments. He was a niche painter whose subject, while arresting, was narrow. However, only Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema was better at painting this genre of 'patrician women on marble benches'. Melancholia, fed by ill health and increasing artistic criticism overwhelmed his fantasy world of serenity and he died by his own hand.

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