

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **A Victorian Obsession: The Pérez Simón Collection at Leighton House Museum**

**14 November 2014 – 29 March 2015**

From 14 November 2014, Leighton House Museum will be home to rarely seen masterpieces of Victorian art belonging to the Mexican collector Juan Antonio Pérez Simón. *A Victorian Obsession: The Pérez Simón Collection at Leighton House Museum* comprises 50 exceptional paintings from the largest Victorian private art collection outside Great Britain, shown for the first time in the UK. Alongside five works by Frederic, Lord Leighton (four of which will be returning to the house in which they were painted) *A Victorian Obsession* will present paintings which have seldom if ever been exhibited before by many of the most celebrated Victorian artists, illustrating the astonishingly diverse representations of women that characterised this period of British art.

The images range from the domestic to the romantic and from the symbolic to the overtly sensual. The exhibition's highlights include Alma-Tadema's magnificent *The Roses of Heliogabalus* (1888), an iconic image of Roman decadence which has not been exhibited in London since 1913. One of the great paintings of the Victorian era, it memorably depicts the Emperor Heliogabalus's suffocation of his guests beneath a torrent of rose petals. Leighton's *Greek Girls Picking up Pebbles on the Sea Shore* (1871) is one of his earliest and most striking 'aesthetic' works, placing formal harmony above narrative content and showing Leighton as the master of English drapery. Two further works, *Antigone* (1882) and the sexually charged *Crenaia* (ca.1880), feature the model Dorothy Dene. Leighton's relationship with Dene was significant in his later years, when her role as his principal model, muse and social companion was widely commented on.

Outstanding pictures by Albert Moore, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, John William Waterhouse, Edward Poynter, John Strudwick and John Godward will also be displayed in the intimate and splendid environment of Leighton House. As President of the Royal Academy, Leighton and his extraordinary studio-house were at the centre of the late Victorian art world. His annual concerts and receptions became fixtures of the artistic social calendar. These artists knew the house well and Leighton's own collection contained pictures by several of them, including a nude study by Albert Moore that will return to Leighton House for the first time since 1896 as part of the exhibition.

The exhibition has been shown at the Jacquemart-André Museum in Paris to great acclaim and is currently on display in Rome at the Chiostro del Bramante. The collection will travel to the Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid before arriving in London, where it will be curated by Daniel Robbins, Senior Curator at Leighton House Museum and Véronique Gerard Powell who has worked extensively on the Pérez Simón Collection. With the exception of Leighton's painting studio, the permanent collections will be cleared from Leighton House and the exhibition hung throughout the historic interiors. Leighton's extraordinary decorative schemes will provide a uniquely appropriate and authentic setting for the pictures belonging to Juan Antonio Pérez Simón, making the exhibition an unmissable event and an unforgettable one-off aesthetic experience.

On his collection being displayed at Leighton House, Juan Antonio Pérez Simón commented '*It is an honour to be a part of the journey that allows these masterpieces to be shown in such an authentic setting, and in some cases returning to their home. It gives me great joy to know that the public will be*

*able to appreciate these exceptional paintings, making us accomplices in our everlasting duty to nourish the spirit.'*

Senior curator for Leighton House Museum, Daniel Robbins said *'It is a wonderful opportunity to work so closely with this fantastic collection of pictures and plan for their installation at Leighton House. The house will be transformed by the paintings and the paintings enhanced by setting them within Leighton's extraordinary decorative interiors. Holding a temporary exhibition throughout the house is something I have long hoped to achieve and nothing could be a better fit than the Pérez Simón collection.'*

Councillor Timothy Coleridge, Cabinet Member for Planning Policy, Transport and Arts, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, commented *'It is a great honour for us to be hosting the only UK exhibition of this prestigious collection at Leighton House Museum. There could be no more fitting venue than Leighton's studio-house where some of the works were actually painted and which was familiar to so many of the artists who are represented in the exhibition. We look forward to welcoming many new visitors to discover the museum and collection for the first time and enjoy a unique aesthetic experience.'*

## LISTINGS

**Exhibition:** *A Victorian Obsession: The Pérez Simón Collection at Leighton House Museum.*

**Dates:** 14 November 2014 – 29 March 2015

**Press View:** 13 November 2014

**Venue:** Leighton House Museum, open daily except Tuesdays, 10am - 5.30pm

**Entry:** £10 / £6 concessions / Art Fund and National Trust Members 50% discount

**Ticket booking:** [www.rbkc.gov.uk/buytickets](http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/buytickets) / 0800 912 6968

**Touring:** Leighton House Museum is the only UK venue for the exhibition. It will have previously toured to the Jacquemart-André Museum Paris (13 September 2013 to 20 January 2014), the Chiostro Del Bramante Rome (16 Feb 2014 – 5 June 2014) and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid (24 June 2014 – 5 October 2014).

**Exhibition Events Programme:** A Victorian Obsession will be accompanied by a full programme of events including lectures, concerts, life-drawing classes and special guided tours. Visit the Museum website for updates.

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**For further information and images please contact:**

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## NOTES TO EDITOR

### About Leighton House Museum

Located on the edge of Holland Park in Kensington, Leighton House Museum is one of the most remarkable buildings of the 19th century. Owned and operated by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the house was the former home and studio of the leading Victorian artist, Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830-1896). The house was built to his precise requirements combining studio space with domestic accommodation and entertaining space. Originally constructed on a modest basis, it grew to become a 'private palace of art' visited by many of the great artists of the day and regarded as one of the architectural sights of London.

The Arab Hall, designed to display Leighton's priceless collection of over a thousand Islamic tiles, is the centrepiece of the house. A compelling vision of the Orient is created through the Islamic tiles, mostly brought back from Damascus in Syria, combined with the gold mosaicked interior, marble columns and golden dome. The opulence continues through the richly decorated interiors, adorned

with elaborate mosaic floors and walls lined with peacock blue tiles by the ceramic artist William De Morgan. On the first floor, the grand painting studio with its great north window, dome and apse is the room in which all Leighton's important later works were produced, including the celebrated *Flaming June*. Also on the first floor, the Silk Room displays paintings by Leighton's friends and contemporaries. The house was restored to great acclaim between 2008-10, winning an RIBA award and a Europa Nostra award.

Leighton rose to become the President of the Royal Academy in 1878 and the pre-eminent classical painter of his age. He remains the only British artist to have been raised to the peerage, becoming Baron Leighton of Stretton just before he died. He was buried in St Paul's Cathedral amidst great ceremony.

For more information visit [www.rbkc.gov.uk/AVictorianObsession](http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/AVictorianObsession)

### **About Juan Antonio Pérez Simón**

Juan Antonio Pérez Simón is one of Mexico's most prominent and successful businessmen. Since 1976 he has been in partnership with Carlos Slim and is a board member of the Carso Group with interests in telecommunications and retail. He is also a board member of the Inbursa Financial Group and a number of other companies. His art collection is one of the largest in Mexico with a particular strength in nineteenth century painting. He is also the owner of one of the country's largest private libraries containing over 40,000 books. The collections are administered by his Fundacion JAPS through which loans have been made to many exhibitions around the world.

### **About Daniel Robbins**

Daniel Robbins is Senior Curator, Museums with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and is responsible for Leighton House Museum and 18 Stafford Terrace, two of London's best-loved house museums. He has organised many exhibitions and has contributed to numerous catalogues and publications around nineteenth-century art, architecture and design, including the authorship of the companion guidebook to Leighton House Museum published in 2011. He was also responsible for leading the award-winning project to refurbish and restore Leighton House, completed between 2008 and 2010.

### **The artists represented in *A Victorian Obsession: The Pérez Simón Collection at Leighton House Museum* are:**

Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema  
Frederic, Lord Leighton  
John Melhuish Strudwick  
Sir Edward Burne-Jones  
Albert Moore  
John William Godward  
Sir Edward Poynter  
Sir John Everett Millais  
Henry Payne

Edwin Long  
Dante Gabriel Rossetti  
Arthur Hughes  
Charles Perugini  
Frederick Goodall  
Hans Wontner  
Emma Sandys  
Simeon Solomon

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