

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

FREDERIC LORD LEIGHTON (English, 1830-1896)

'There can be no doubt, whatever the rapid advance made in the art of sculpture during the last thirty years was, to a considerable extent, due to the sympathy and the interest which Leighton gave to it'

- Hamo Thornycroft (in Beatty, *The New Sculpture*, p.30)

Frederic Lord Leighton was one of the most prolific and influential artists in Victorian Britain. Born in Scarborough, he studied and worked in Europe before settling in London in 1859. He became an associate member of the Royal Academy in 1864, and a Royal Academician in 1868. He was elected president of the RA in 1878.

Although Leighton is primarily known for his paintings, he was also a fundamental figure in the development of late-Victorian sculptural aesthetics. The exhibition of his first ever model, *An Athlete Struggling with a Python* (1877), has been hailed by scholars as one of the founding moments of the New Sculpture movement. This piece was then followed by two other works, *The Sluggard* (1885) and *Needless Alarms* (1886). These works cemented Leighton's interest in the medium, influencing over two generations of British artists.

Leighton's contribution to the New Sculpture is not only confined to his artistic merits. Thanks to his influential position as president of the Royal Academy, he was able to mentor the development of sculpture in late 19th-century Britain. Leighton contributed to the study of the discipline by supporting Hamo Thornycroft's election to the RA Associateship in 1881, and instituting changes to the Academy's exhibition rooms dedicated to the display of sculpture. He was also responsible for the progress of Alfred Gilbert's career in Britain. After the young sculptor exhibited his *Perseus Arming* at the Grosvenor Galleries in 1882, it was Leighton who commissioned his following submission, *Icarus* (1884) and ultimately convinced the sculptor to move back to London from Rome.

After being honoured with a knighthood in 1878, Leighton was the first artist to be given a peerage, becoming Lord of Stretton in 1896, the year of his death. In 1900, he posthumously represented Britain with his paintings at the Great Exhibition in Paris.