

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

SIR WILLIAM HAMO THORNYCROFT (English, 1850-1925)

Sir William Hamo Thornycroft was one of the leading figures of the New Sculpture movement, and a great inspiration to many artists of his day. He was born in London in 1850, the son of sculptors Thomas and Mary Thornycroft. Encouraged by the family's engagement with the arts, he entered the Royal Academy at the age of 19, while working in his father's workshop.

In 1871, at his aunt's death, the artist was left with a £50 legacy. With the money, he travelled to France and Italy with his sisters. Their tour lasted over seven weeks; they visited Paris, Venice, Florence and Rome, where the ruins of the Classical past were mingled with the work of the great sculptors of the Italian Renaissance.

After his return to England in 1872, Thornycroft's work was exhibited at the RA for the first time; he was only 22 years old. This date signals the beginning of the artist's long-standing relationship with the Academy. In 1875 he won the RA's biennial Gold Medal for the best work of sculpture on a given theme, *A Warrior Carrying a Wounded Youth from the Field of Battle*. The following year, the artist joined together with his family the so-called 'Holland Park Circle', purchasing a plot of land close to G.F. Watts' and Leighton's houses. The group was responsible for the definition of late-Victorian aesthetics and culture.

Thornycroft was made an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1881, taking up a teaching post was created appositely for him and ultimately influencing the development of British academic sculpture for over 30 years, ceasing to teach only in 1914. He was knighted in 1917 and won the RBS Gold Medal in 1923, two years prior to his death. A joint memorial exhibition of his and Francis Derwent Wood's work was held at the Royal Academy in 1927.

Thornycroft's success can be waged directly against the large number of public commissions he received throughout his life. These include the memorials to Gladstone (1882, The Strand), to General Charles Gordon (1887, originally erected in Trafalgar Square) and to Oliver Cromwell (1899, House of Commons, Westminster). A lover of the Classics, Thornycroft's art represents an invaluable contribution to the development of art and culture in 19th-century Britain.