

# EVELYN DE MORGAN

Tracey Hebron introduces us to artist Evelyn de Morgan (1855–1919), a niece of the Spencer Stanhope family who owned Cannon Hall.

**E**velyn De Morgan was one of the most successful and prolific professional female artists of her time. As a niece of the Spencer Stanhope family she spent a great deal of time in her early years at Cannon Hall sketching her surroundings. As a child she visited Cawthorne regularly in order to spend time with her relatives and found it liberating to be allowed to roam the beautiful countryside, feel the fresh air and discover the nature surrounding her.

Born Mary Everlyn Pickering in 1855, she came from a wealthy background as her mother (Roddam Spencer-Stanhope's sister) was descended from a long line of landowners in Yorkshire and to the Coke of Norfolk, Earl of Leicester. She displayed a flair for art from an early age. On the morning of her seventeenth birthday she wrote: '17 today, that is to say seventeen years wasted in eating, dawdling and flittering (frittering) time away... Art is eternal, but life is short... I have not a moment to lose'.

In the same year Evelyn drew a study of the male nude from a wooden model, shocking her drawing teacher, who had been employed to instruct her in copying fruit and flowers. In 1873, Evelyn enrolled at the Slade School of Art (which had opened two years earlier) where she was able to develop her abilities with different artistic forms such as drawing, painting and sculpting. She became one of the first women to attend life drawing classes. Her skills in drawing were well respected and she won several prizes including a coveted silver medal. Her uncle, Roddam felt her drawing skills were superior to his own and commented; 'You can draw infinitely better than I do, I can only envy you!'

Evelyn was particularly close to her uncle Roddam Spencer Stanhope, of Cannon Hall, who was a Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist painter and encouraged by him, she followed in his footsteps, first by attending art school and later working as a



Evelyn De Morgan.



*Love's Passing*, Oil on Canvas, 1883–1884. This painting is an allegory for the passing of time and the life cycle. The lovers in the foreground sit listening to the piping angel, the male figure seems entranced, but the woman is distracted. The book open before them shows a passage from the Latin poet Tibullus's *Elegy*. Evelyn painted *Love's Passing* shortly after meeting the older William De Morgan and prior to her marriage. She didn't sell the work and it remained within the family until her younger sister's death in 1965.

professional artist. She also visited him frequently during the time he spent in Florence in Italy.

These visits were to affect her profoundly and the influence of Pre-Renaissance art features heavily in both their work. Evelyn's works, such as *The Garden of Opportunity* tended to favour Old Testament or mythological themes, executed in a Pre-Raphaelite or neo-classical styles, in oils on canvas. In choosing these techniques and subject matters, Evelyn was positioning herself as a professional artist, during a period when few women succeeded in this field. Evelyn married the ceramic artist William de Morgan in 1887 and their union was a meeting of minds both artistically and politically. Both were concerned with the inequalities that they saw in society around them. They campaigned for prison reform and women's suffrage. In later life Evelyn used her paintings to express her social and political views. ■

A new long-term permanent display of works by both Evelyn and William De Morgan is now housed at Cannon Hall Museum, on loan from the De Morgan Foundation. The De Morgan Foundation Collection was formed by Evelyn's sister, Wilhelmina Stirling. Her lifetime passion was to preserve and promote the works and reputation of her sister and brother-in-law. She displayed her collection at her home, Old Battersea House, in London and often gave tours of it to the public. After Mrs Stirling's death in 1965, the De Morgan Foundation charitable trust was formed in order to care for the Collection. [www.demorgan.org.uk](http://www.demorgan.org.uk).