

Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Bt. ARA, RWS (British, 1833-1898)
The Days of Creation

To be sold in the *19th Century Paintings, Drawings & Watercolours* sale on the 23rd January, 2013



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a set of six, framed as one, bearing a label verso for the estate of Aglaia Coronio
pencil, each
48.5 x 17.5cm (19 1/8 x 6 7/8in).
(6)

£150,000-250,000

PROVENANCE:

Aglaia Coronio née Ionides (1834-1906)
Zoë Manuel née Ionides (1877-1973), niece of the above
Zoë Manuel's deceased sale Phillip's, London, 30th September 1974, lot 147
The Maas Gallery, London, purchased from the above for £3,600
The mother of the present owner, purchased from the above.

EXHIBITED:

The New Gallery, London, *The Works of Sir Edward Burne-Jones*, June 1898 – January 1899, no. 178, lent by Aglaia Coronio.

LITERATURE:

The Athenaeum, 1899, p. 152, "Of the drawings in the Balcony at the New Gallery.... They are chiefly studies for the compositions of pictures, most of which hang in the galleries below, like Mrs. Coronio's Study for the Days of Creation (178)."
Malcolm Bell, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones, A Record and Review*, 1903, pp. 49-51, illustrating and describing the painting of *The Days of Creation* (referred to by Bell as *The Angels of Creation*) now in the Fogg Art Gallery Cambridge, Mass.
Charles Sewter, *The Stained Glass of William Morris and His Circle – A Catalogue*, 1975, pp. 134 and 184.
Martin Harrison and Bill Waters, *Burne-Jones*, 1979, p. 110.
John Christian, *Painter-Designer or Designer-Painter*, in *The Journal of Stained Glass, Burne-Jones Special Issue*, vol. XXXV, 2011, pp. 22, 24 and 26-27.



Figure 1. Furthest Left.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6. Furthest right.

The reappearance of Burne-Jones's highly finished drawing *The Days of Creation* is of major importance. Dating from circa 1871, he subsequently translated this superbly crafted pencil study into his celebrated painting of the same title (1872-76, gouache and watercolour on linen; Fogg Art Gallery, Cambridge, Mass), which was unveiled to the public at the Grosvenor Gallery inaugural exhibition in 1877. Like the latter, the present six panels were framed as one, most probably for its original owner Aglaia Coronio (1834-1906), who was a close friend of the artist and mutual admirer. Hidden from public view for many years, it stands as testament to Burne-Jones's mastery as a creative designer, who in his own words wanted to portray "visions and dreams and symbols for the understanding of people." (Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 1904, vol. I, p. 143).

In 1871 Burne-Jones wrote in his autograph work-record (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) "designed...the angels holding the circles of creation", which in all probabilities refers to the present work. A further entry in the artist's work-record for 1872 notes "Began the series of Angels of Creation", which we know relates to the painted version; Burne-Jones returned to the subject in 1875 when he spent "many months of work" on the painting and in 1876 "worked for all the first months on the days of Creation – altogether ten months and finished them." Finally the painted panels were arranged within an elaborate Renaissance style frame and in 1877 were shown alongside seven other of the artist's works at the Grosvenor Gallery. The event marked a gap of seven years during which Burne-Jones had refrained from showing at public exhibition. His comeback was triumphant. *The Days of Creation*, also known as *The Angels of Creation*, was heralded a sensation and ensured Burne-Jones's position as a leader of the Aesthetic movement. His painting was purchased by William Graham, one of the artist's most ardent patrons; it was later acquired by Alexander Henderson and also Lord Faringdon before being bequeathed by Grenville Winthrop to the Fogg Collection in 1943. Unfortunately the fourth painted panel was stolen in 1970 and remains missing.

The theme of Creation was one that Burne-Jones frequently returned to and like many of his greatest compositions from the 1870s evolved out of designs for stained glass windows. One of his earliest visualisations of the subject appeared in designs made in 1861 for the rose window at Holy Cross and St. Lawrence, Waltham Abbey. Then in 1863 he executed a series of six designs, for the Dalziel Brothers for their Illustrated Bible. The small landscape orientated gouaches titled *The Seven Days of Creation* (Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery), show the influence of William Blake; they include images of birds, vegetation, the celestial bodies and Adam and Eve and thus anticipate the present iconography, though compositionally they have little bearing. After visiting Italy Burne-Jones's portrayal of the subject took on a new guise when his angelic figures became more robust and sculptural. Under the influence of Michelangelo, Botticelli, Signorelli, Mantegna and other Renaissance masters, in July 1870 the artist made a series of stained glass designs for his friend William Morris for the tracery in the west window of All Saints, Middleton Cheney, Northamptonshire. Bearing close similarity to the present composition, the six grisaille and gold arched glazed panels portray six Angels of Creation each holding a globe; these were loosely modelled on a tarot card engraving, then attributed to Mantegna, that the artist had seen in the British Museum. Morris later transformed the Middleton Cheney cartoons into coloured glass windows for the east window at St. Editha, Tamworth, Worcestershire, 1874. In between the installation of the two windows Burne-Jones executed the present drawing and began his painting.

Rather than a preparatory sketch for the painted version, the present piece should be considered a semi-independent work, executed as much for the artist's personal pleasure as to mark a distinction between his stained glass designs and a fully completed easel work. However the composition and imagery bear the closest comparison to his painting even though a number of individual details differ - in this respect we can see how Burne-Jones evolved the subject as the years progressed. Both the present panels and those in the Fogg (which are about twice their size) were conceived as a complete picture; in it they portray the story of Creation as described in the first book of Genesis. Each panel shows a central winged angel crowned with a flaming finial holding a crystal globe. In the first light and darkness are divided, in the second the waters separate from the land; this is followed by the appearance of plant life and subsequently, in the fourth, the emergence of the sun, moon and celestial bodies. The penultimate globe shows the appearance of animal life symbolised by a flock of birds, whose wings echo those of the attendant angels. Finally the sixth angel's globe contains man in the guise of Adam and Eve. Beneath sits a seventh angel who plays a winged instrument to represent the day of rest. As the narrative progresses from left to right the seraph from the preceding day joins the next so that in the sixth panel we see all seven. Likewise when it came to the painting, Burne-Jones gradually heightened the colouring, adding greater amounts of gold and platinum to the original blues and greens so that the final day almost glows.

Colour and tone are not the only elements that mark a distinction between the pencil and painted works for by its very nature the present piece is richer in linear description. It also differs in other aspects, for instance the angels' faces are slightly softer than those in the painting. It is said that the model for the latter was William Morris's daughter Jenny (1861-1935), although it is unlikely that she posed for the drawing since she would only have been about ten years old. Among other variations are the details contained within the crystal globes; for instance here, in day one, a dove appears in the light as it separates from darkness while in the painting Burne-Jones simplified the imagery by deleting the bird. Likewise the separation of land and sea, the depiction of the planets as well as Adam and Eve all take on slightly different guises. The stringed instrument held by the seventh angel also varies, the present example comparing more closely to that portrayed at

Middleton Cheney. Again like the earlier stained glass the seventh seraph has no flowers while in the painting he is surrounded by roses. Interestingly the depiction of the feathers and wings in both versions is equally intricate yet here there is a greater amount of open space above their wings but conversely more detailing in the rippled water and emerging land on which they stand. Such differences are subtle but inevitable when comparing a painting with a detailed drawing. It was in the latter that Burne-Jones excelled for he was a supreme draughtsman whose linear inspiration was rarely surpassed.

One of the many artistically discerning who admired Burne-Jones's drawings was his friend Aglaia Coronio, the original owner of this piece. She also acquired other of his works including his painting of *The Madness of Sir Tristram*, a study for King Cophetua and the *Beggar Maid* and three other studies for St Catherine, which like the present piece were all lent by her to the New Gallery Burne-Jones Exhibition, 1898-99. In addition to Sir Edward her close circle included Rossetti and G. F. Watts, both of whom painted portraits of her and her family. She was also a friend and confidante of William Morris (her exact contemporary) with whom she frequently corresponded and likewise was on close terms with Whistler, whose brother William married Mrs. Coronio's cousin Helen Euphrosyne. Known for her formidable intelligence, sound judgement, humour and slight eccentricity, Aglaia Coronio belonged to an influential Anglo-Greek community that played a decisive role in determining artistic tastes in Victorian England. As the eldest daughter of Euterpe née Sgouta and Alexander Ionides, a wealthy merchant, she and her four siblings grew up in the family home at Tulse Hill, which became a meeting place for the artistic and literary elite. Aglaia's eldest brother Constantine shared the family's passion for art and formed an impressive collection (bequeathed to the Victoria and Albert Museum) which included works by Delacroix, Corot, Millet and Degas as well as those by Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Watts. Of her younger brothers Luke and Alexander, known as Alecco, were once both part of the bohemian Whistler/du Maurier set in Paris. Luke, like her, formed a close relationship with Burne-Jones while Alecco (on whom du Maurier based his Greek in *Trilby*) created a sensational Aesthetic interior for his home at number 1 Holland Park. Aglaia was nearly ten years older than her youngest sibling Chariclea, wife of the musician Edward Dannreuther who founded the Wagner Society.

In 1855 Aglaia Ionides married Theodore Coronio (1826-1903), a successful merchant; their marriage however was not particularly happy. In 1869 the couple moved to 1A Holland Park, next door to Aglaia's brother Alecco, where she raised their two children, Calliope and John, and poured her energies into her intellectual and artistic interests. With striking looks and a personality to match she, with her cousin Maria Zambaco (who had a passionate affair with Burne-Jones) and the artist Marie Spartali Stillman, were known amongst friends as the Three Graces, appearing as a trio in Burne-Jones's *The Mill* (1870-82; Victoria and Albert Museum). Mrs. Coronio was a frequent visitor to both Burne-Jones and Watts's studios, often offering them sound advice. As Lady Burne-Jones later remarked she had "perfect taste" and "helped him [Burne-Jones] a hundred times by finding fabrics and arranging dresses for models" (Georgiana Burne-Jones, op. cit, vol. II, p. 196). It was probably on one such occasion that Aglaia Coronio acquired her *Days of Creation*, most likely as a token of the artist's gratitude for her valued assistance.

By 1906 many close to Mrs. Coronio had died; among them were Rossetti (1882), Morris (1896), Burne-Jones (1898), her brother Constantine (1901) and Watts (1904). Her sense of loss was compounded by the diminishing health of her beloved daughter Calliope, who died on 19th August 1906. Distraught with grief, the following day, Aglaia Coronio took her own life by stabbing herself with a pair of scissors. Three months later her home was sold by Hampton and Son and then on 20-21st November, thirty five of her paintings, twelve drawings, her library and other possessions went under the hammer. A report in *The Times* (24th November 1906, p. 14) mentioned that "An interesting sale has just been held in Holland-park, by order of the executors of a relative of the late Mr. Alexander Ionides. Some pencil sketches by Burne-Jones varied from 13 to 27 guineas each." The article continued to cite other works from Aglaia Coronio's collection including Burne-Jones's *The Madness of Tristram* (240 gns), his watercolour of *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (290 gns) as well as Rossetti's *Lady with Lute* (£150), a drawing by Albert Moore and a small panel and a portrait of Professor Kairis by Watts.

It appears however that *The Days of Creation* was not included in Mrs. Coronio's deceased sale. Instead it was acquired (most probably just before the sale) by her niece - Zoë Ionides (1877-1973) who was the seventh of eight children belonging to Aglaia's brother Constantine. Like the rest of the Ionides family Zoë grew up within a cultured milieu and as a child had her portrait painted by Watts (later bequeathed to the V. and A.). In 1911 she married her second cousin Stephen Manuel (1880-1954), son of Sophia née Ionides and Miltiades Manuel. In 1885 her husband's youthful likeness was immortalised by Whistler (his maternal aunt's brother-in-law) in *Arrangement in Grey: Portrait of Master Stephen Manuel* (Freer Art Gallery, Washington, DC). In adulthood Stephen Manuel worked in the civil service as a head in the Raw Materials Department and as an advisor on East Indian hides and skins. He and Zoë had three children, he predeceasing her by two decades. Zoë Manuel died at Woodbridge Suffolk in December 1973. The following September some of her pictures were sold by Phillip's London. Included in her sale was the present work, Rossetti's study for Joli Coeur (which she had inherited from her father) as well as drawings by Edmund Dulac, Arthur Rackham and a pencil portrait by William Strang of Eirene (most probably Mrs. Manuel's daughter). *The Days of Creation*, which fetched £3600 - a considerable figure at that time, was acquired by the Maas Gallery who subsequently sold it to the mother of the present owner. Having remained in private hands for most of its existence the reappearance of *The Days of Creation* cannot fail to arouse considerable interest, not only from Burne-Jones admirers but all who appreciate true beauty.