Oil painting - Head of Sleeping Attendant from *Briar Rose*

Object: Oil painting

Place of origin: Britain (made)

Date: 1881-1886 (made)

Artist/Maker: Burne-Jones, Edward Coley (Sir), born 1833 - died 1898 (artist)

Materials and Techniques: oil on canvas

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Mrs Leonore Lena Graham

Museum number: E.328-1990

Gallery location: British Galleries, Room 125, Edwin and Susan Davies Gallery, case WW

Public access description
This monochrome study demonstrates Burne-Jones's ability to draw with a paintbrush. The study is for a female sleeping attendant in one of a series of four paintings. It takes the theme of the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty, but freezes it at a moment before the princess is woken by the prince’s kiss. One theory is that the series refers to Burne-Jones's disquiet at the impending marriage of his daughter, Margaret, wishing her to remain untouched for ever. Certainly, the sleeping girls, all of whom share the features of the figure in this study, resemble Margaret, and he gave his daughter a gouache version of the sleeping princess as a wedding present. The finished paintings are in the Faringdon Collection at Buscot Park in Oxfordshire.

Descriptive line
Oil painting of The Head of sleeping attendant from Briar Rose by Edward Burne-Jones, 1881 - 1886.

Physical description
In wooden frame.

Dimensions
Height: 42 cm estimate, Width: 42 cm estimate, Height: 500 mm framed, Width: 500 mm framed, Depth: 40 mm framed.

Museum number
E.328-1990

Object history note
Bequeathed by Mrs Leonore Lena Graham, 1990

Historical Significance
Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) was the leading figure in the second phase of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. His paintings of subjects from medieval legend and Classical mythology and his designs for stained glass, tapestry and many other media played an important part in the Aesthetic Movement and the history of international Symbolism.

This is a study in oil of the attendant who sleeps on the floor at the head of the princess's bed in the fourth painting of the Briar Rose series entitled *The Rose Bower*. Burne-Jones’s interest in the subject of the Sleeping Beauty grew out of a knowledge of the fairytales of Charles Perrault, the brothers Grimm and also Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poetic retelling *The Day-Dream* (published in 1842). Burne-Jones first depicted the theme in a tile panel of 1864 (Victoria & Albert Museum, London Circ.520-1953) which was painted as part of a decorative scheme for the house of the painter Myles Birket Foster. Although the central scene of the tiled panel directly foreshadows *The Briar Wood* of the Briar Rose series, *The Rose Bower* was not illustrated until Burne-Jones painted a smaller series of three pictures for William Graham, now known as the "small" Briar Rose series, in 1870-73 (Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico). Work on the final, larger series commenced in 1873 but the series of four paintings, *The Briar Wood*, *The Council Chamber*, *The Garden Court* and *The Rose Bower* (all Faringdon Collection, Buscot Park), were not completed until 1890. They were then purchased by Alexander Henderson, later 1st Lord Faringdon, for £5,000. In the summer of 1890 they were exhibited by Agnew's, 'to ever increasing crowds of delighted visitors,' (1) and were then installed in the saloon at Buscot Park, Oxfordshire, where they remain. Burne-Jones subsequently painted connecting scenes (without figures) to make them into a continuous frieze.

This monochrome study of the primary attendant in *The Rose Bower* demonstrates Burne-Jones's ability to draw with a paintbrush. The four paintings in the series take the theme of the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty, but rather than a chronological rendition, each is frozen at a moment before the princess is woken by the prince’s kiss. One theory is that the series refers to Burne-Jones's disquiet at the impending marriage of his daughter, Margaret, wishing her to remain untouched for ever. Certainly, it is known that Margaret was the sitter for the sleeping princess, and many of the other sleeping girls, all of whom share features of the figure in this study, also resemble Margaret. Furthermore, he gave his
daughter a gouache version of the sleeping princess as a wedding present on the event of her marriage to J. W. Mackail on 4th September 1888. Kirsten Powell has written that ‘only in an enchanted world like the Briar Rose palace could the princess, Margaret, remain a child and the king, her father, escape aging and death.’(2)

References:

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O88802/head-of-sleeping-attendant-from-oil-painting-burne-jones-edward/