

Shine Brighter 2de

Flashfile 12 A muse forever

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The first supermodel

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a movement Rossetti co-founded in the 19th century, loved symbolism, but I'm more interested in Siddal the person, who was herself an artist. What does it mean that we remember her life stories far better than we do the craft to which she dedicated her life?

Her life stories are, to be fair, exciting: art historical myths in their own right. One of the most famous is that she was discovered behind the counter at a milliner's shop¹ by Sir Walter Deverell, who cast her as Viola in a painting of scenes from Twelfth Night. One of my favorites is that her first exposure to poetry was a poem by Tennyson that had been used to wrap² butter.

But beyond the stories are the facts: Elizabeth Siddal was born Elizabeth Siddall to a lower-middle class family and changed her name when Rossetti suggested that dropping an L would improve her aesthetic; she was a painter and poet who had to work for her money; and her red hair and long, lanky³ frame were not considered attractive until she became the foremost muse to the Pre-Raphaelites. She was, in many ways, the first supermodel, shaping the cultural landscape with her image.

Amina Khan, *artic.edu*, 2023

1. *boutique de chapeaux* 2. *envelopper* 3. thin and tall