



**Anna Mary Howitt by Rosetti 1853**

## **Anna Mary Howitt Watts 1824-1884**

### **Illustrator, artist, writer, artist medium**

Anna was born in Nottingham, eldest child of William and Mary Howitt themselves prolific writers - Anna illustrated some of her mother's books. The family moved to Heidelberg and she attended Henry Sass's Art School in London in 1844, alongside Rossetti and Holman Hunt, one of the few art schools then open to women. She developed a close friendship with Jane Benham and went with her to study in Munich publishing 'An Art student in Munich' with her own illustrations.

Anna became associated with the Langham Place Feminists and Barbara Leigh-Smith, an artist and feminist, was a close friend. Her first exhibition was at the National Institute of Fine Arts in 1854. In 1856 she helped collect signatures for a petition which would lead to the Married Women's Property act in 1870. In 1859 she married Alaric Watts a childhood friend and they moved to Chelsea.

With Benham and Leigh-Smith they founded 'Sisters in Art'. Anna's feminist subject matter earned her only criticism, particularly from John Ruskin who was so critical that she burnt all of her paintings. She also had a major painting rejected by the Royal Academy which contributed to a mental breakdown in 1857 after which she never painted again.

In 1883 she published 'Pioneers of the Spiritual Reformation' and in 1884 with her husband she published a collection of poems. She pioneered 'spirit drawing' as an artist medium – producing images without her conscious control—which have received academic interest. She died suddenly of diphtheria while visiting her mother in the Tyrol.