



The Parrot in Art: From Durer to Elizabeth Butterworth

Richard Verdi

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Parrots have long been a favourite subject for artists. Ever since Julius Caesar was greeted by a parrot with the words 'Ave Caesar', the bird has been indelibly linked with the Virgin Mary (Ave Maria) and become the subject of innumerable works of art from the 15th to the 17th centuries, including examples by Durer, Schongauer and Rubens. With the Age of Exploration in the 16th and 17th centuries, parrots were imported into western Europe and became the favoured accompaniments of the aristocracy, where their innately human behaviour led to them being depicted as 'stand-ins' for people, especially in scenes mocking or commenting on the follies of human behaviour (Jan Steen's Allegory of Temperance). This fascination with parrots as impersonators of people continued into the 19th century, culminating in such Victorian masterpieces as Henry Stacy Marks' A Select Committee . Concurrently, parrots were seen as symbols of exoticism, East meeting West (Tiepolo's Woman with a Parrot) and as household

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