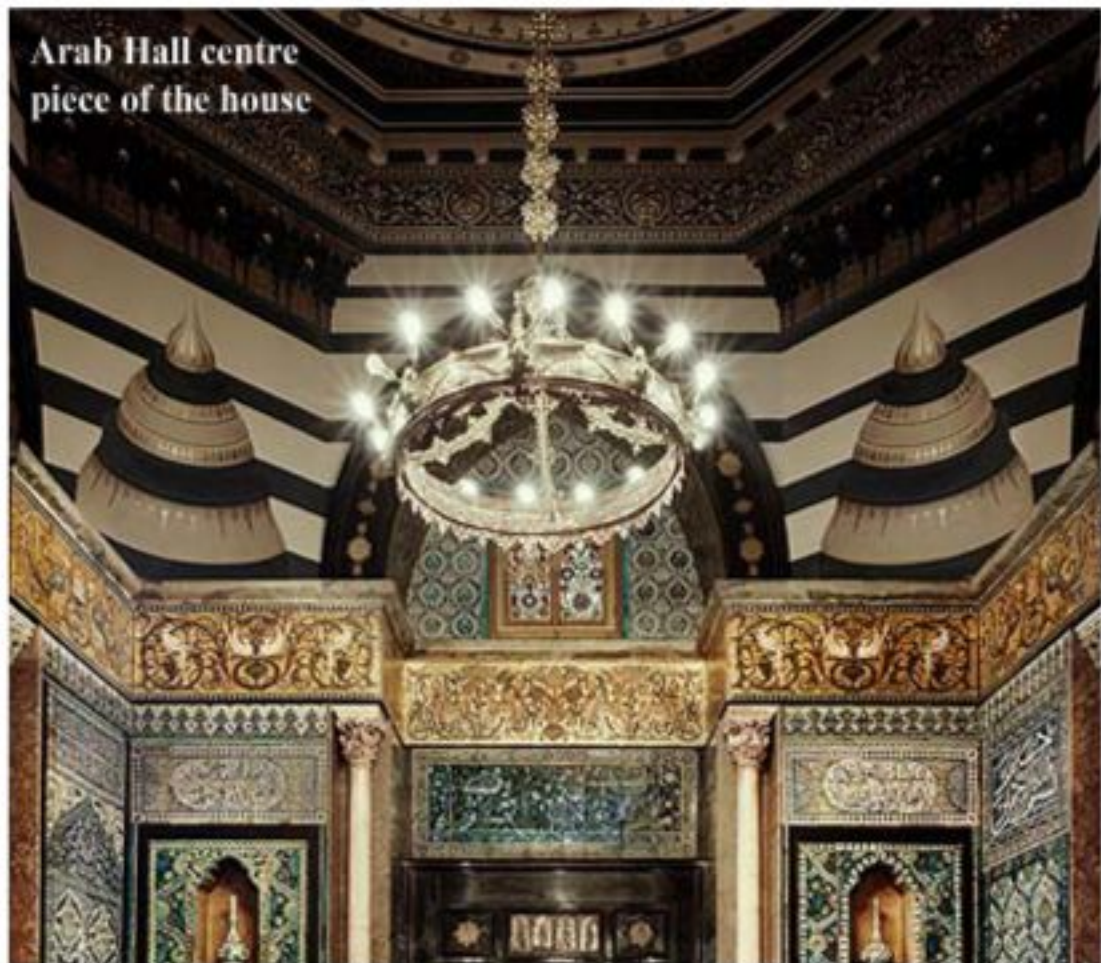


## **Arab Hall In Leighton House: Elegance And Beauty**

By: Karen Dabrowska

Arab Hall centre  
piece of the house



The Arab Hall, the centre piece in London's Leighton House Museum, with a magical fountain, is characterised by elegance and beauty.

The museum is the former home and studio workspace of the Victorian artist Frederic Leighton (1830-1896). The house was built in 1864 but Leighton, a perfectionist, continuously added to it and improved it throughout his life. Today it is an excellent example of a late nineteenth century artists home which the public can see.

The Arab Hall reflects the opulence which characterises the entire house. There are over 1,000 vibrant peacock blue tiles from Iran and Syria. Its brick ziggurats running around the parapet wall were restored in 2008 - part of a £1.6 million programme of refurbishment and restoration completed in April 2010. In the centre of the mosaic floor is

decorated rooms







a fountain with its murmur of the outdoors. The sumptuous atmosphere is enhanced by a golden mosaic frieze which encircles the room and elaborate decorative paint work illuminates the domed ceiling. Coloured marbles adorn the walls.

In common with many artists of the period, Leighton travelled to the Middle-East on a number of

occasions. Throughout North Africa, Turkey and Damascus (now part of modern Syria) he made numerous pencil sketches and other studies in oil. He was particularly affected by the quality of light he encountered together with what might now be considered a somewhat sentimental attachment to local colour. Many of the sketches were used in a

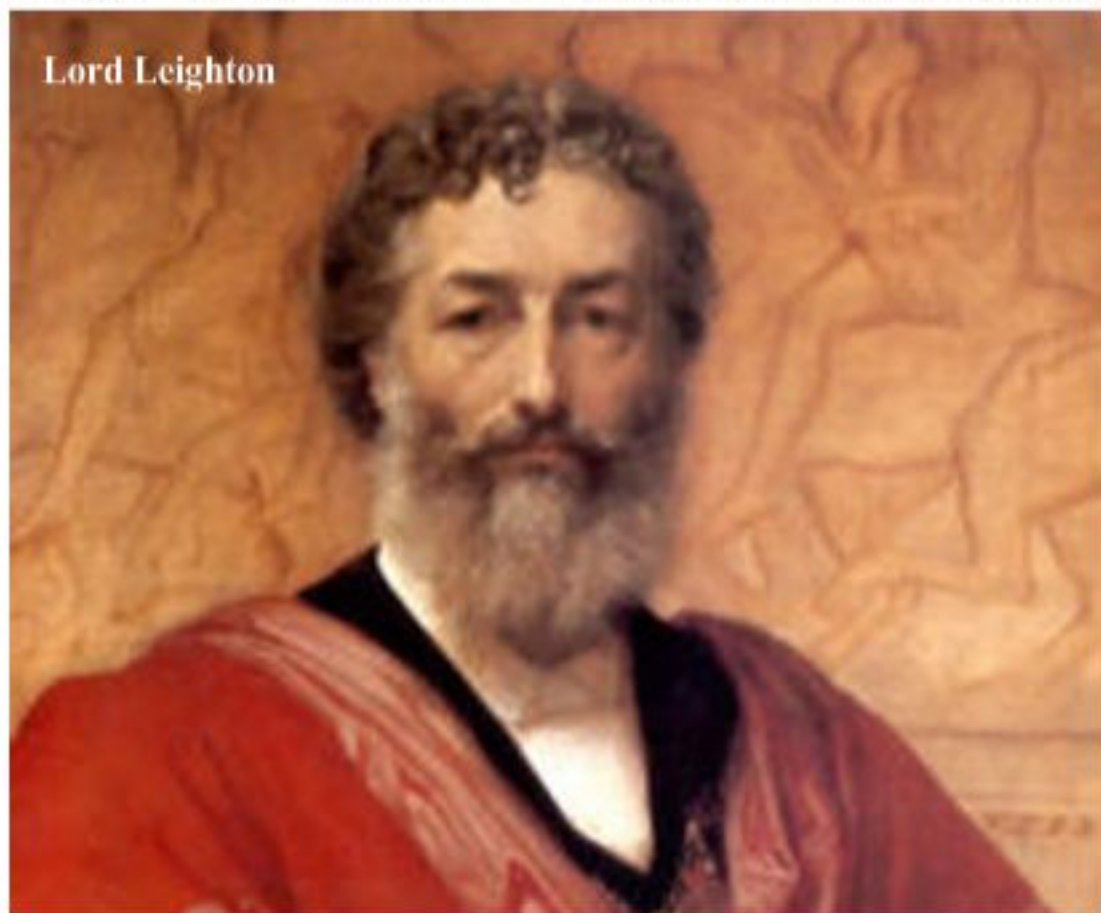
more developed form as background incident in his finished works.

The opulence of the Arab Hall, a striking celebration of the Middle East in London, continues through the other richly decorated interiors, with gilded ceilings and walls lined with stunning peacock blue tiles by the ceramic artist William De Morgan. On the first floor is

Leighton's grand painting studio, where he worked for many hours almost every day that he was at home. With its great north window, dome and apse, the studio is the heart and purpose of the house and was also the venue for Leighton's celebrated musical evenings.

Leighton's own collection of paintings included works by many

Lord Leighton







of his contemporaries, such as Burne-Jones, Millais, Alma-Tadema and Albert Moore. Important works by these artists remain hanging in the house as well as over eighty examples of paintings and sculptures by Leighton himself. With a programme of temporary exhibitions and events, the house remains one of the most remarkable buildings of the

nineteenth century.

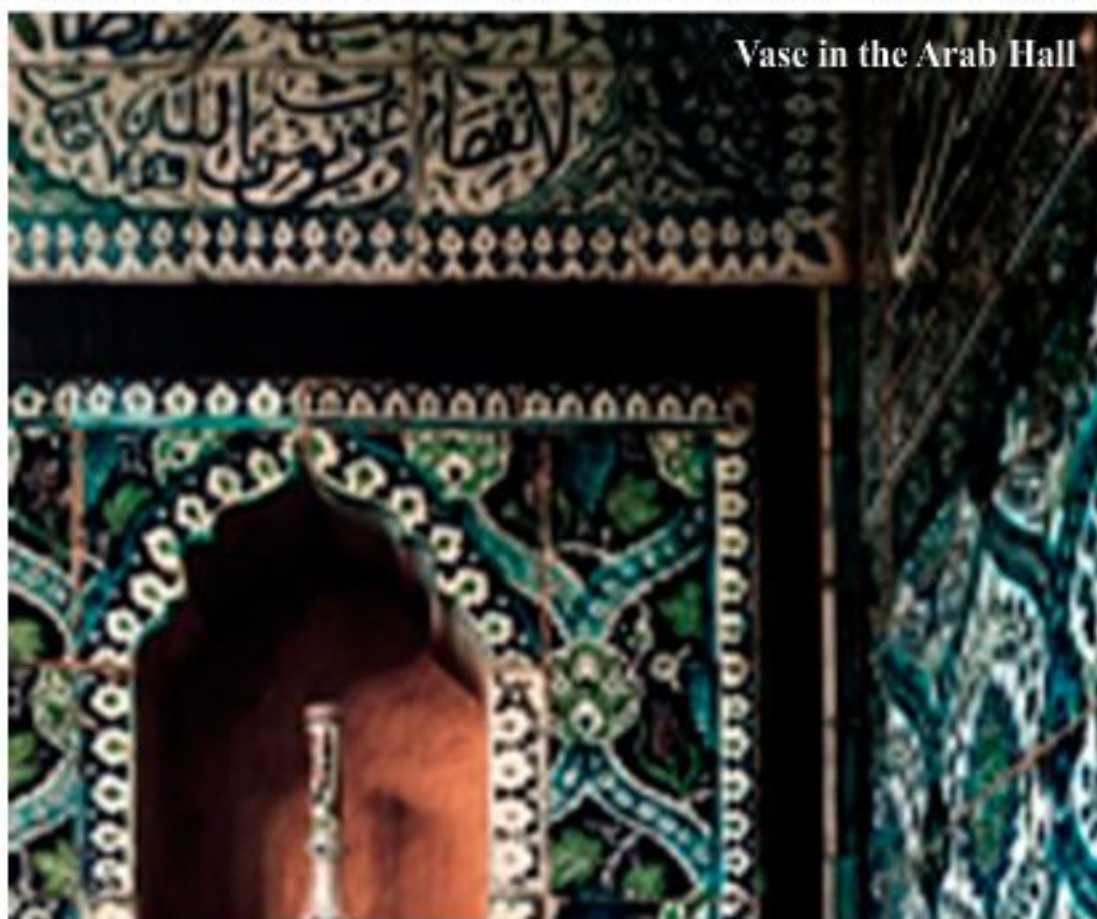
Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), was one of the most famous British artists of the nineteenth century. The recipient of many national and international awards and honours, he was well acquainted with members of the royal family and with most of the great artists, writers and politicians of the late Victorian era.

He was born in Scarborough, Yorkshire to a medical family. His father was a doctor, and his grandfather had been the primary physician to the Russian royal family in St. Petersburg, where he amassed a large fortune. Leighton's career was always cushioned by this family wealth, his father paying him an allowance throughout his life.

Leighton did succeed in becoming

'eminent in art' with Queen Victoria buying his first painting in 1855 and in 1878 he reached the pinnacle of his profession, becoming the President of the Royal Academy of Arts.

From an early age, travelling was part of Leighton's life. His mother, not liking the climate and 'polluted' environment of Britain, insisted the Leighton family spend prolonged periods of time in Europe. Leighton



Vase in the Arab Hall



## Works of art



therefore travelled widely around Europe and could speak French, German, Italian and Spanish. In 1857 at the age of 27 he made his first trip to Africa, visiting Algeria. This was the beginning of a lifetime's involvement with North Africa and the Middle East. It would ultimately lead in the construction of his Arab Hall in 1877 which was inspired by a

twelfth century Arab-Norman palace called La Zisa in Palermo, Sicily.

He never married and just before his death from heart failure in 1896, he was ennobled, becoming Frederic, Lord Leighton, Baron of Stretton. He is the only British artist to have been awarded this honour and is buried in St Paul's Cathedral.