

Painting Pairs 2025-2026: Art Historical and Technical Study **Report**

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Henry Strachey, *Night Pursuing Day*, 1918, Private Collection, Mixed Media on Canvas, 760 mm x 1267 mm x 20 mm



Abstract

This report details a collaborative technical and art historical investigation of *Night Pursuing Day* (1918), a mixed-media painting by British artist Henry Strachey (1863-1940). It was completed for the 2025/2026 Painting Pairs collaborative research project at The Courtauld Institute of Art. The painting is privately owned and has been held within the family since the death of the artist. The work depicts an allegorical scene of Night chasing Day, contextualised by an inscription found on the reverse, from Dante's *Purgatorio XVII*.

This project reevaluates Henry Strachey into a wider art historical context, as he is often overshadowed by his more famous cousins, Bloomsbury group members, Duncan Grant and Lytton Strachey. It examines Strachey beyond his familial ties and highlights his position in the wider conversation of muralism and queer cultural history in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. The art historical research draws upon the correspondence between Strachey and his uncle, the writer and supporter of homosexual desire, J.A. Symonds and analyses the painting's Dantean reference to demonstrate how Strachey utilised allegorical motifs to navigate male desire and Christian spirituality.

Concurrently, technical analysis investigated Strachey's material choices and whether the object was an intended mural scheme. The findings, evidenced by an artist primed gypsum ground layer, heterogeneous mixed-media paint, varied gilding techniques, and underdrawings revealing horizontal lines of a planned and thought-out composition, revealed Strachey's use of traditional muralist techniques along with experimental strategies to create a particular aesthetic result.