

Young Priestess

You are standing before *Young Priestess*, painted in 1902 by William-Adolphe Bouguereau. In this traditionally-painted, oil on canvas painting, a young woman with long chestnut hair, dressed in a flowing pink robe, gazes straight ahead. The young woman, painted in an ultra realistic manner, holds a gold-colored staff and stands barefooted on a mosaic floor before a background of lush white drapery. The painting measures almost 6 feet high by 3 feet wide and is an example of the idealized realism that French artist Bouguereau favored during his long career.

The young woman in the painting has thick chestnut hair and pale, ivory skin. Her waist-long, abundant wavy hair is parted in the middle and fully covers her left shoulder and upper arm. The hair on her right side falls alongside her neckline and down her back. She is wearing a golden headband and, on the top of her head, a braided section of her hair is tied in a bow. She has an oval face, dark eyebrows, and has on gold earrings. Her large dark brown eyes, with prominent surrounding shadows, gaze intently and directly at us. The young woman has high cheekbones, a slightly pointed chin, and her rosy, full lips are closed.

The young priestess is posed with her left arm bent, resting against her waist and chest and her middle finger touching the left side of her face just below her mouth and chin. Her pinky and ring finger are curled loosely under her chin. Her right arm is bent as she grasps the golden staff with its decorative finial. The shimmering, dusty pink sleeveless robe reveals her bare right shoulder, arm, and neckline. This full-length robe is tucked in around a discreet belt. Excess folds of fabric drape from her waistline. Protruding from beneath the dress, you see the young woman's right toes and a small part of her foot. Her entire left foot and ankle are visible.

The young priestess is standing on a mosaic floor made of tiny light gray and black square tiles. An angular, black mosaic pattern on the floor runs behind the young woman and beside her right foot, ending at the left corner of the painting. Bright, reflective white drapery in soft, vertical folds covers the wall behind her. The luxurious, satiny fabric—painted with visible brush strokes in various shades of white—spills onto the mosaic floor behind the young woman.

William-Adolphe Bouguereau lived from 1825 to 1905. He painted *Young Priestess* three years before his death. The painting, which is in a simple gold frame, was a gift of Paul T. White in memory of Josephine Kryl White.