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| Puvis (de Chavannes), Pierre-Cécile (1824-1898) |
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| Pierre Puvis de Chavannes was a French painter and draughtsman, active between 1850 and 1898. He achieved wide acclaim during his lifetime and profoundly influenced modernism. After the 1850s, Puvis produced two kinds of works which shared many formal characteristics, but differed greatly in intention and effect. The first strand consisted of large murals commissioned for various public buildings around France. In the 1860s, Puvis developed a decorative style based on a high-minded classicism, characterised by washed-out colours, flattened forms with little modelling, strongly outlined figures, rhythmically arranged compositions and a proto-modernist economy of brushstroke. Puvis was attentive to the architectural contexts of the murals: their flattened pictorial space harmonised with the two-dimensionality of the wall and their mute palette and repetitive composition matched the prevailing Beaux-Arts architectural style. The subject of these murals celebrated the values of bourgeois France: national patrimony, stability, tradition and the family. Puvis applied these decorative principles to the second strand of his work, private easel paintings. In contrast, these paintings frustrated easy interpretation; they depicted psychologically challenging, ambiguous, and unsettling scenes. It was to these highly innovative paintings that subsequent post-Impressionist and Symbolist artists would look with greatest enthusiasm. |
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| Further reading:  (Mitchell)  (Petrie and Lee)  (Price)  (Price, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes)  (Robinson)  (Shaw)  (Vachon)  (Werth) |