

ART APPRECIATION 2024

May 2024: ART & INDUSTRY

For our May meeting we had the subject of Art and Industry.

We began by looking at the effect of the Industrial Revolution on art. The first painter we looked at was Joseph Wright, the Derbyshire artist. Wright grew up in Derby, which was one of the centres of early industrialisation. His *A Philosopher Lecturing on the Orrery* (1766) shows a group of people marvelling at a model of the solar system:



His painting *Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (1768) shows a family similarly in thrall to an early experiment.

Wright moved away from the subject of early experiments onto a series of paintings that showed the work of the local furnaces and refineries. His *Blacksmith's Shop* 1771, shows innovations that have been made in these early workshops. His work suggests that man is now in charge of the new science, rather than be in awe of it.

From Wright we moved on to a painter from the potteries, called Charles William Brown. He himself was involved lived around Stoke, and worked in the potteries. He has a variety of styles, but was regarded largely as a naive painter. We then went on to an American artist, Grant Wood. His painting *American Gothic*, 1930, shows a couple very soberly dressed. We finished with a painting of the General Strike in 1926, painted by Charles Roe.

September & October 2024: NUDE FIGURES

For our meetings in September and October we have been looking at the development of the nude figure in art history. We began by looking at figures from pre-history such as the *Venus of Willendorf* from around 25,000BC. These tiny but rotund figures are thought to have been fertility symbols, made at a time when continuity of the tribe was of paramount importance.

From here we went on to Classical Greek statues, which celebrated the physical beauty of the perfect physique, especially the male body.

With the rise of Christianity, the portrayal of nude figures was often restricted to paintings showing the fall of Man. Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden, or tortured figures descending into Hell were popular subjects.

There was a reversal of this attitude in the Renaissance, when again the nude figure was acceptable. Michelangelo's *David* idealised the male body, and emulated the Classical portrayal of perfection.

From around the 16th century female figures became more popular with painters. Titian's art showed the female nude as a sensual figure. In the 18th century French artists such as Boucher continued this sexualised attitude in their figure paintings.

In 1907 Picasso produced his *Demoiselle d'Avignon* where he painted four female figures in cubist style, so subverting the classical idealising of the nude.

In the work of Egon Schiele his depiction of nudity shows a fine line between art and pornography. Contemporary artists have recently attempted to show woman's bodies as they really are, warts and all. The artist Jenny Saville is one of these. She specialises in painting over-large females, bring an exaggerated realism to the subject. In general it is suggested that the society in which it is produced dictates the way in which nudity is portrayed.



November 2024: SPANISH PAINTING [1]

In November we began our latest subject - the history of Spanish painting. We began with the influence of the Moors upon the architecture of the country. Spain was under Islamic rule from 711 until the 15th century, and the influence of the Moors can be seen in many of the buildings of the time, especially in the south of the country. The Alhambra in Granada is one of the buildings that demonstrate the characteristic features - its horseshoe arches, elaborate brickwork and tiles and symmetrical garden design.

From architecture we went on to discuss Spanish painters. El Greco was a Greek artist who lived and worked in Spain. He was born in 1541 and his art is classed as Mannerism. His style was very distinctive and quite revolutionary. We compared his work to modern artists such as Picasso who were influenced by his work.

We then went on to discuss Velazquez, an artist that was successful in his time and continues to be regarded as one of Spain's finest painters. Born 58 years after El Greco, his style developed from Mannerism into the Baroque. He was very influenced by the Italian painter Caravaggio, taking on the characteristics of his paintings, using light and shade to emphasise objects in his paintings. His most famous painting is *Los Menenos*, The Maids of Honour, painted in 1656. The subject matter is King Philip of Spain's sole child, Margaretta Theresa, but the painting is very complex and can be analysed in various ways.

Murillo was virtually a contemporary of Velazquez, being born in 1617. We found his paintings though to be completely sentimental and insubstantial in comparison. We then jumped to Joaquin Sorolla, born in 1863. His paintings are very light and pastel in colour, his subjects often placed by the sea. Finally we went to a contemporary Spanish artist, Miquel Barcelo, who is still working today. He adopts a very experimental approach that does not appear to reflect any of Spain's traditional artists.



Alhambra



Valesquez

December 2024: SPANISH PAINTING [2]

In December we continued our subject of The History of Spanish Painting.

We began this session with a presentation by a member on Francisco Goya, (1746-1828). In 1789 Goya was the official painter at the Spanish court and was known for his portraits.

By 1808 however he had become interested in the politics of his country and produced the painting *The Third of May*. In this he commemorated Spanish resistance to Napoleon's armies in the Peninsular War.

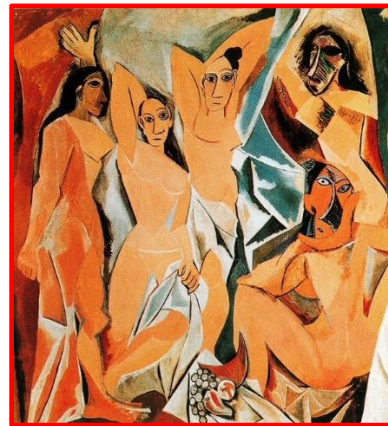
The painting is seen as a contender for being the first painting in a modern era.



We then discussed the work of Picasso (1881-1973), which is a huge subject. We began by looking at paintings from his red and blue periods, which included, *The Old Guitarist*, from 1903.

From there we looked at his painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, from 1907, which he had provocatively titled *Five Young Women in a Brothel*.

This is considered the first Cubist painting, and shows the influence of Cezanne upon his work.



Finally we looked at Joan Gris (1887-1927). Gris was also involved in the cubist movement and his form of it was entitled Crystal Cubism.

His paintings are composed of large overlapping geometric shapes. Like his contemporaries, he used the subject of guitars and musicians in his work.

His painting *Guitar and Pipe* (1913) demonstrates his style of overlapping geometric shapes.

