

Art Appreciation 2019

January 2019: ETHIOPIAN ART

In January the group met at a member's home, where our discussion was on the art of Ethiopia. Historically, Ethiopian art is largely ecclesiastical. This is due to the fact that the country claims to have been the first to declare itself a Christian country.

We first looked at some of their pre-Christian art, which dated from the 4th century. This was a number of stelae or obelisks, some of which are still standing. After their conversion the stelae were abandoned, and by the 10th century their interests turned to the building of their famous rock churches, hewn for rock faces of cut from the surface of the earth down.

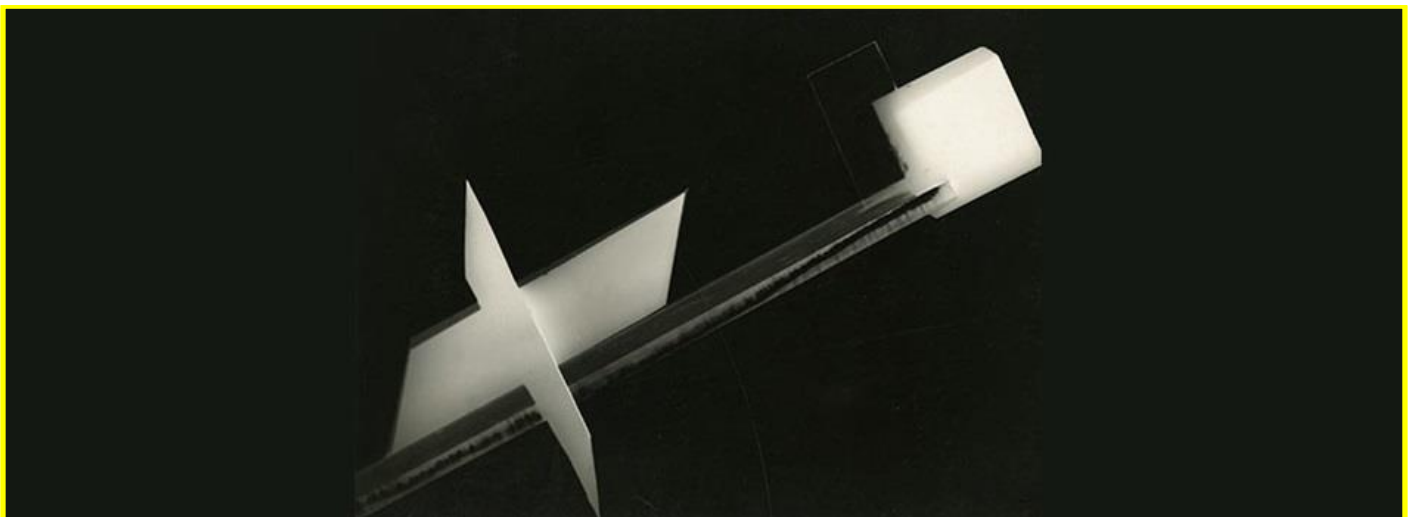
Inside these churches are often decorated in frescoes and relief sculptures which retell biblical stories, with a distinctive Ethiopian influence.



March 2019: The Bauhaus

This month we visited the current Djanogly Centre exhibition, entitled **Homage to the Bauhaus**.

We were given a guided tour which has been arranged to celebrate the centenary of the foundation of the Bauhaus School of Art in Weimar in 1919. The paintings and photographs on display are not those produced while the school was functioning, but rather the work of subsequent artists that were influenced by it. Its philosophy of functional aestheticism was a principle that permeated from the original idea through to the work of many 20th century artists. The exhibition demonstrates this in the many works on display.



April 2019: REMBRANDT and LENKIEWICZ

The group met twice in April. Our first meeting was at the Broadway cinema, where we saw a film on the Dutch artist Rembrandt. Rembrandt lived from 1606 to 1669. Although he began his career by following in the tradition of biblical painting, he became successful through portrait paintings of his contemporaries. One of his most famous works is *The Night Watch*, a painting that is now at The Rijks Museum in Amsterdam.



Rembrandt



Lenkiewicz

Our second meeting was at the home of two of our members, Jill and Brian. They both gave us a really interesting introduction to work of the artist Robert Lenkiewicz. His name was new to the rest of us in the group, but having seen his art, we all agreed that he deserved to be much more widely known.

Born in London in 1941, he moved to Plymouth in 1964. He became well known for his paintings of vagrants, and was a very prolific painter. His method of painting was largely realist, and his portraits managed to convey the thoughts and feelings of his many subjects. Although he was highly skilled, he was not given a great deal of recognition in his life time. Since his death in 2002 he has become much more sort after. Two of his murals are still on public display on walls in the Barbican in Plymouth.

May 2019: JAPONISM

As an introduction to the forthcoming film at the Broadway cinema, our May meeting looked at the influence of Japonism on the work of the Impressionists, particularly that of Van Gough. Van Gough (1853-90) was a dutch painter, who suffered from mental health issues for much of his life, as well as living an impoverished life in order to paint. Supported by his brother Theo, he was a prolific painter, and completed around 860 oil paintings , as well as selling only one in his short lifetime. He died at the age of 37, the general assumption being that he took his own life.

One of the influences on his work was the art of Japan. Until around 1850 Japan had chosen to isolate itself from the rest of the world. Increasingly though, trade between itself and the west meant that Japanese prints became available for the first time to the population of Europe. Van Gough and his brother collected many of these prints, and these had a profound influence on his work. We look forward to learning more form the film in June.

June 2019: VAN GOGH AND JAPAN

In June we viewed a film on Van Gogh and Japan at the Broadway cinema. It is part of a series of films made to show recent exhibitions of well-known artists, so making them available to a far wider audience.

This was an exhibition shown in Amsterdam, where there is an art gallery dedicated entirely to the work of Van Gogh. The intention of this special exhibition was to highlight the way Japanese art had been a huge influence on the work of the artist.

We learnt that Japan was largely closed to the outside world for around 250 years, and only reopened to outsiders from 1853, coincidentally the year of Van Gogh's birth. By the time he was in his twenties Japanese prints had flooded into the west, and had begun to have a distinct influence of contemporary artists.



The Impressionists were particularly affected by them, and although not defined as a member of this group, the work of Van Gogh took on many of the styles and techniques associated with Japanese art. Van Gogh worked partly in Paris, but it wasn't until his move to Arles in the south of France that his work adopted many of the characteristics of the prints. We also learnt the Japanese in turn have become interested in the work of Van Gogh, and exhibitions of his work have been shown there.

September 2019: PIETER BRUEGEL

Our group met at a member's house for an introductory talk on the work of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. As Rob, who led the talk said, most of will be familiar with his work largely through images on Christmas cards. His most famous painting, and most widely reproduced, is *Hunters in the Snow*, an evocative image of winter in the Low Countries.



We learnt that Bruegel lived in times of extensive religious upheaval, yet his paintings reflect daily peasant life rather than spiritual subjects. His paintings are full of details, often with an earthy humour, showing densely populated scenes. In his last ten years Bruegel changed from painting to

printing. His paintings were much sort after, and it was this that led his son, Pieter Bruegel the Younger, to imitate his painting, and produce a good many copies of his father's work.

We all agreed that we'd learnt a lot about an artist that is widely recognised but who we knew little of - not least of all who was the Elder and who the Younger!

October 2019: MAUD LEWIS

This month the Art Appreciation group met to discuss the work of Maud Lewis, a Canadian artist, known as a naïve or folk artist. She lived in Nova Scotia, a relatively isolated province on the eastern seaboard of Canada. From an early child Maud suffered from the crippling effects of rheumatoid arthritis, the result of which her movements were very restricted.

Her artistic life began as a painter of Christmas cards, from which she received a small income, but over time this developed into her painting colourful domestic scenes from the life she knew. Landscapes, and animals such as cows, cats and birds were the subject of her paintings. In 1964 an article in a Toronto newspaper brought her to the attention of an audience across Canada, and by her death in 1970 Maud was receiving commissions from various well-known figures.

Our discussion was based on how do you evaluate a work of art, and where do naïve painters such as Maud Lewis fit in with this. We also mentioned the work of Alfred Wallis, a Cornish painter who followed in the same naïve/folk tradition. Finally, we discussed Lowry, whose work initially seem equally simplistic. We agreed though that Lowry's work had artistic qualities that went beyond his apparently simplistic figures, and that his adoption of 'faux-naïve' was partly for the purpose of demonstrating the insignificance of the human figure in an industrial landscape.



November 2018: IVON HITCHENS

In November the Art Appreciation group met twice. The first meeting was to the Broadway cinema to see a streaming of an exhibition of the work of the artist Leonardo de Vinci. This is part of a regular series of films shown at the cinema, which enable an audience to view a wide range of works by an artist. We were presented with the full range of his work, including one of his final pieces, his Salvator Mundi, which has only recently been attributed to him.

The group also met to visit the latest exhibition at the Djanogly Gallery. This was on the work of Ivon Hitchens (1893-1979), an abstract artist known for his landscape paintings and his use of bright colour. The exhibition considered the full scope of the artist's career, spanning six decades. In the 1920s and '30s Hitchens was part of London's Avant Garde and he was influenced by the French painters Matisse and Cezanne, as well as the British artist Ben Nicholson. His move to Sussex at the beginning of WW11 though had a profound influence on his work, and he began producing large colourful landscapes. The exhibition is on until February.

