

ART APPRECIATION 2022

January 2022: EDWARD HOPPER and ANDREW WYETH

The Art Appreciation group met at a member's house to discuss the works of two modern American painters, Edward Hopper and Andrew Wyeth. While most of us knew the work of Hopper that of Wyeth was a revelation to us. The men overlapped in time, Hopper being the older, but both produced their best known work in the 1940's and 50's. Hopper was very much a New York artist, drawing his subjects from the sights he saw in the city, whereas Wyeth's subjects reflected rural America.

The talk was led by two of our members, Rob and Chris, and with their guidance we discussed the similarities and differences of each artist. We looked at images of Wyeth's most famous paintings, including *Christina's World* and Hopper's, which included *Nighthawks*. Both artists portray in their work a sense of aloneness and social isolation, delivered in the form of stylised figurativism.

It was a very interesting meeting, and many thanks to Rob and Chris for all they put into it to make it so enjoyable.



Nighthawks



Christina's World

February 2022: GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM [1]

The discussion was a preparation for our visit next month to Leicester Art Gallery to view their collection of German Expressionist artists.

Expressionism was a style of painting that occurred in Germany from the beginning of the 20th century until around the 1920s. The artists belonged mainly to one of two groups, the first of which was called Die Brücke, or The Bridge. The name was meant to signify that the artist was a link between the past and the future. They were centred in Dresden and formed in 1905. The most famous of the group was Ernst Kirchner, who painted scenes of figures from the streets of Dresden, displaying their feelings of alienation in their urban lives.

The second group were Der Blaue Reiter, or Blue Rider. This was led by Wassily Kandinsky. Besides being a painter Kandinsky was very interested in Modernist music, especially that of Arnold Schoenberg. He attempted to make his paintings a replica of a piece of music, without any form of representation. He is attributed to having produced the first abstract painting.

By the outbreak of war in 1939 the movement had lost momentum. This Modernist movement in Germany was given a crushing blow in 1937 when an exhibition entitled The Degenerate Exhibition, was held in Munich. This was organised by the National Socialist party, who invited the public to view paintings that they had seized from artists that they considered held un-German ideas that were corrosive to their party's views. By then many of the surviving artists had moved to other countries and Expressionism had morphed into other forms of representation.



Kandinsky Composition v11

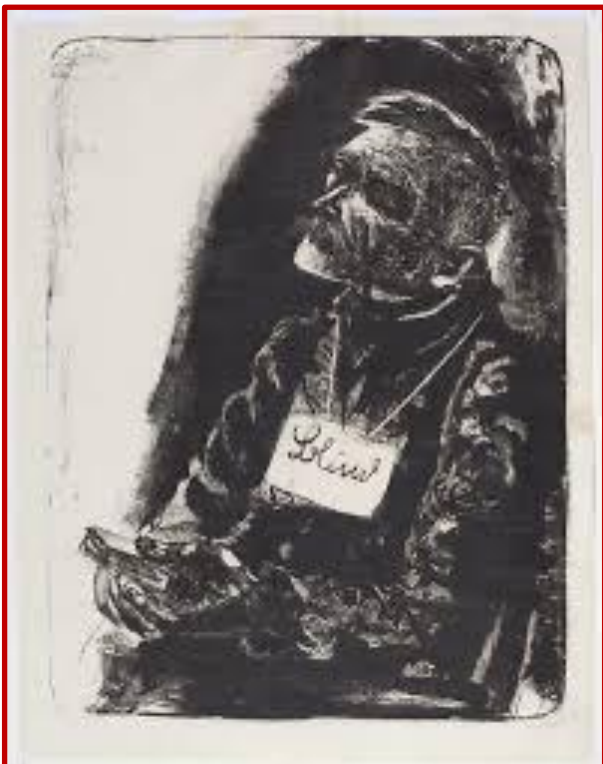
March 2022: GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM [2]

We visited the Leicester Art Gallery to view their permanent exhibition of German Expressionist paintings. The visit followed a meeting we had held the previous month when we had had an introductory talk on the background to the group.

Many of the paintings in the exhibition were bequeathed to the gallery by a German art collector after the second world war, and there is an extensive number of art works in their collection.

Included in the exhibition are works by Max Beckmann, one of which is *The Dancers*. Another artist is Otto Dix and his works *Stormtroopers Advancing Under Gas* (1924), and *Blinder* (1923) both of which convey the horrors of the 1914 -18 war and its aftermath. The most famous collection in the exhibition is Franz Marc's *Rote Frau*, an evocative painting of a woman done in earth colours.

The exhibition successfully conveys the themes of German Expressionism and its critical reaction to the early twentieth century.



Otto Dix: Binder (Blind Man)



Franz Marc: Rote Frau (Red Woman)

April 2022: JOHN NASH and ELIZABETH BLACKADDER

We met at a member's home and the talk was given by two of our members.

The first of these was on the artist **John Nash**. Like his more famous brother, Paul Nash, he was a war artist as well as having an interest in a wide range of subjects matter.

John Nash was born in 1893 and died in 1977. He worked in a variety of media, including oils, wood engraving and lithographs. His primary interest was in painting nature, and we saw a number of his works that showed his ability to create his own image of the landscape. These were often brooding and bleak. He said he wanted to convey a human condition rather than just a painting.

One of his most famous paintings is *Over the Top*, which shows a counterattack during the first world war. We were told that there had been a retrospective exhibition of his work at Compton Verney last year, and I and others thought how interesting that would have been.

The second artist we discussed was a Scottish painter called **Elizabeth Blackadder**. Her dates were 1931 to 2021. The artist was new to all but one of us in the group. Like Nash, she was largely interested in nature, which was very evident in her work. She lived in Scotland all her life and taught at The Edinburgh School of Art. Her early paintings were influenced by abstract expressionism, but her later work showed largely her interest in botany. She also developed an interest in painting cats, for which she is well known. Although she lived in Scotland all her life, she travelled a good deal, and her knowledge of the variety of plant life was conveyed through her beautiful and detailed botanical paintings.



John Nash: **Over the top**



Elizabeth Blackadder: **Cats**

May 2022: SOROLLA and MORISOT

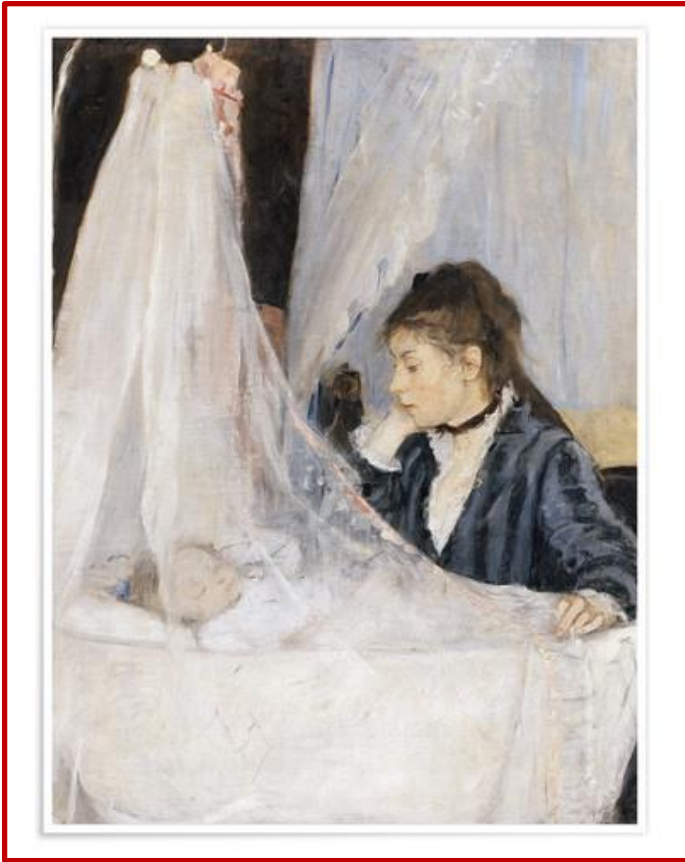
The subjects for our May meeting were the two artists **Joaquin Sorolla** and **Bertha Morisot**.

Sorolla was a Spanish artist, born in Valencia in 1863, and died in 1923. He was an extremely prolific painter, producing around 4,000 pieces of work. He began in the style of a traditionalist painter, taking his influence largely from Goya. Gradually he focused more on social paintings, showing the poverty of workers especially in the fishing industry.

From around 1908 he began painting in the style of the Impressionists, and became recognised especially for the way in which he created light in his paintings. His *Running along the Beach* is a wonderful example of how he captured the light and movement of figures running through the waves. His ability led him to be given the accolade of 'the master of light' by the painter Monet.

The second artist was the French painter Bertha Morisot. Born in 1841 in Paris, she also painted in the style of the Impressionists. Morisot's uniqueness was that she was a woman in a world in which almost everyone was male, and as a consequence she never achieved the same recognition as that of her contemporaries.

Excluded by her gender from formal art training, Bertha and her sister Edma painted together in their home. Because of the restrictions of her life, many of her paintings reflect domesticity. Her most famous work is *The Cradle*, painted in 1872, in which a mother is gazing at her child in the cradle. It was exhibited in the Impressionist exhibition of 1874, the first woman to exhibit within the group. Morisot had a close association with the painter Manet, who appreciated her paintings, but said it was a pity she was not a man! She died in 1895, having contracted pneumonia from her daughter Julia.



The Cradle by Bertha Morisot



Running along the Beach by Sorolla

June 2022: PRIMITIVE ART

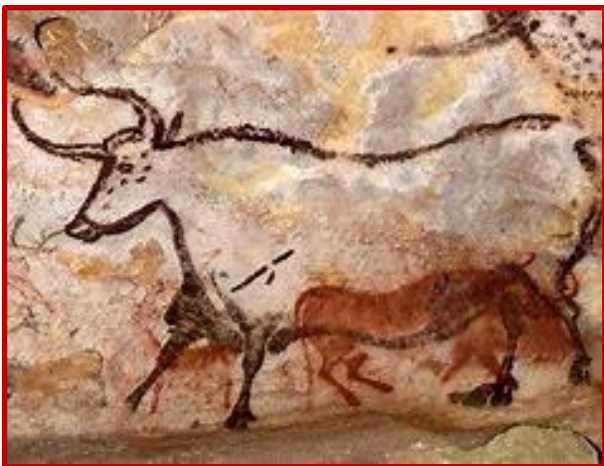
In July the art appreciation group met to discuss what is meant by 'primitive art' and look at the variety of forms it takes.

We began by analysing the differences between 'primitive art' and 'primitivism'. We concluded that primitivism was a term used to describe contemporary works where the artist has adopted a simplified, derivative form in order to enhance their own paintings or sculpture. Picasso was a good example of this, as he adapted the images of African masks in his move towards cubism, as in the painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger*.

We then looked at examples of primitive art. First we saw images from the caves at Lascaux in the Dordogne in France. The paintings are thought to be about 20,000 years old and cover the walls and roof of a series of caves. The paintings were discovered in 1940, but due to their deterioration they are now closed to the public. However, a facsimile of them has been built where the paintings have been reproduced as accurately as possible. There are approximately 600 paintings on the walls, showing numerous animals stags, bison and bulls - the animals they depended upon for their survival.

We also looked at rock art from Namibia. The most famous of these paintings is the so called White Lady, from the Brandberg mountain range. The main figure, named as the White Lady, is in fact a male member of the tribe, involved in a tribal dance. He is surrounded by the animals they hunt, as well as other figures of the tribe. This painting is thought to be 2000 years old.

Also discussed were other examples of primitive art. These were the art of native American Indians and Maori art of New Zealand. We looked at the similarities between the art of these cultures, and how they related to the art of the rock artists.



Lascaux rock painting

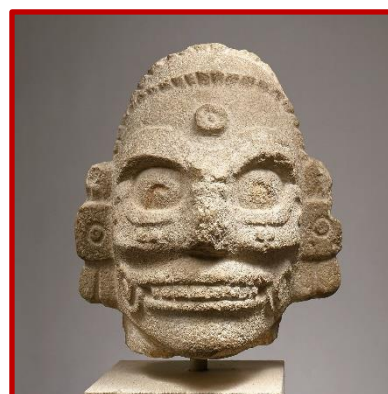


White Lady painting

September 2022: ART OF THE MAYANS AND INDIAN ART

In September we continued our discussion on ancient art and two of our members gave talks on the art of the Mayans and Indian art.

Mayan art was the name of the ancient art of present day Guatemala, Belize and Honduras, and lasted from around 250 to 1550 AD. It was a society that had no metal tools yet managed to build massive stepped pyramids and create intricate and beautifully carved reliefs. Their paintings were brightly coloured and consisted of their many gods, alongside kings, priests and animals. These images, or codices, conveyed messages of everyday life of Mayan society.



The second part of the meeting was on the Buddhist caves of Ajanta. These are to the east of Mumbai.

Prior to the rise of Hinduism in the 5th century, Buddhism was the main religion in India. Buddhist monks settled in these caves built into the rock face, and covered the walls and ceiling with pictures of the Buddha in his various incarnations. Around him there are a variety of figures bustling with activity.



October 2022: EDWARD HOPPER

We group broke from our usual format of meeting in a member's house. Instead we went to the Broadway cinema to view one of their visual art films on the artist Edward Hopper.

Hopper was an American realist painter who became very well known and admired during his lifetime.

He was born in New York in 1882, and died there in 1967. His paintings have a quality of isolation and stillness that makes his work immediately recognisable. His wife was Josephine Hopper. She also was an artist, but it was clear from the film that she gave up her work to concentrate on developing her husband's career.

Hopper began as a print maker and graphic designer, and his work has the clarity of an illustration.

His most famous painting is *Nighthawks*, painted in 1942. It is an enigmatic image of figures in an American diner, seated around a bar. The sense of their disconnectedness is palpable. The figures also evoke images from films of the same period.



As well as his scenes of New York, much of his work concentrates on scenes from the coast of New England. Here he shows his love of the American landscape, with sweeping, empty vistas. Also, there are the paintings of traditional American houses, painted with great detail.

Hopper himself claimed that he did not read this sense of isolation into his paintings, and that it was simply the way in which they were interpreted by the viewer. It seems to most people though that that was the message inherent in his work.