

ART APPRECIATION 2025

January 2025: PORTRAITURE IN ART

We each chose a portrait that we liked or thought interesting. We began the meeting with a discussion on what constituted a portrait. Was it simply an image of one person or could it be a large group of people. Also, we talked about the purpose of a portrait: is it simply to provide a record of that person, or is it a way of showing something extra, either in terms of their character or their status.

We began by looking at the artist Holbein, a Dutch artist that moved to England in the 1530s and worked as a painter in the court of Henry V111. Besides the king, other famous sitters were Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Moore. We discussed how Holbein managed to show something of the men behind the pure image.

A portrait of Queen Elizabeth 1 was next, called the Ditchley Portrait and painted in 1592 by Marcus Gheeraerts. This is not an attempt at a likeness, but rather a piece of flattery commissioned by Sir Henry Lee. It was an attempt by Lee to atone for having left the services of the queen, and in effect ask for her forgiveness. The painting shows her standing on a map of England, demonstrating her position of power, while her wealth is evident in her robe of white satin encrusted with jewels.

We then saw three portraits of Alessandro de Medici, each done by a different Italian painter. His mother was a black serving woman and his father was the Duke of Florence. Despite being illegitimate he rose to be a powerful member of the Medici family. We compared how he was shown in the different portraits.

Our next subject was Rembrandt, a Baroque painter of the Golden Age of Dutch painting. He was well known for his paintings of wealthy merchants, and one of his most famous is *The Night Parade*, a group portrait where he makes great use of light and shade.

The last painted was a female Italian Renaissance artist, Artemisia Gentile. It was very unusual at this time for women to be allowed to paint, but she was encouraged by her father who was himself an artist. It was a self- portrait in which the Artemisia portrays herself as Saint Catherine.



Artemisia Gentile



The Ditchley Portrait



Rembrandt Self Portrait

March 2025: PORTRAITURE IN ART

In March the group did our second session on portraiture in art.

These are the artists we discussed:

We began with **Salvador Dali**, who, although known for his surrealist paintings, painted in a variety of styles.

His *Portrait of Doctor Brian Mercer*, (right) done in 1973, is a fusion of Realism and Surrealism.



Our next artist was **Goya**, who again experimented with various styles. His self-portraits from around 1795 are conventional in style. However from around 1820 he entered his 'Black Paintings' era when his work became very intense, reflecting his growing insanity.

The American artist **Whistler** was next. He was born in 1834, so his work was just prior to the Impressionists. He was born in Massachusetts, but lived most of his life in England.

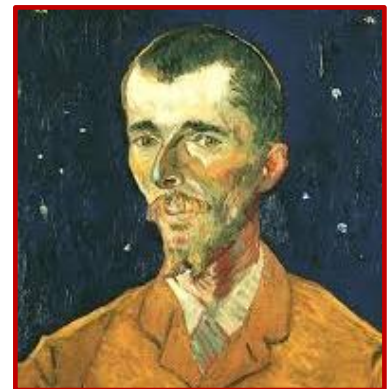
He rejected sentimentality and moral illusion in his painting, and preferred instead a realistic style. His most famous painting is *Arrangement in Grey and Black No 1*, commonly known as *Whistler's Mother* (1871).

Vincent Van Gogh was born in 1853 and died at the age of 37.

He is known to have done 35 self-portraits, one reason being that he could not afford to pay for a model.

So it is these portraits that he is best known for. His style was to emphasise certain hues and use vigorous brushstrokes.

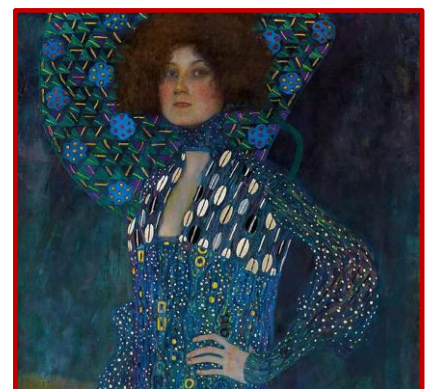
He did this to achieve his aim of showing his own feelings and his own involvement with the subject.



Gustav Klimt lived from 1862 to 1918. His early portraits were done for wealthy Austrian clients and were realistic in style.

By the 1900s though he had abandoned this and became more decorative in style. His models were shown dressed in clothes of geometric shapes painted in gold and vibrant colours.

He became part of the Art Nouveau movement and his figures became marked by an overt eroticism.



Another artist that was attracted to a decorative style of painting was **Tamara de Lempicka**. Born in Poland in 1898 she had a varied and exotic life. She became a well-known portrait painter, popular with patrons, but not accepted by the critics. She assumed a distinctive Art Deco style, and her *Young Lady with Gloves*, 1929, was perhaps her most famous painting.

Our final artist was Darren Brown, known more for his magic tricks than his paintings. We suggested that some of his works were as much caricatures as works of art, although he is obviously a skilled painter.

MAY & JUNE 2025: ARCHITECTURE IN ART

During May and June our meetings have been concerned with the topic of architecture in works of art. We have covered a wide variety of artists and here is a selection of those we covered.

In our first meeting we looked at artists that portrayed a subject matter in a realistic manner compared to those that brought in a strong element of stylisation and altered the view to suit their artistic ends. We discussed how the renaissance artists Crivelli and Duccio presented different versions of the Annunciation by changing the architectural surroundings around the Virgin and the Angel Gabriel. Compared to this, Vermeer's *Little Street* and Canaletto's *Grand Canal* were a largely true representation of contemporary life at their time.



We also looked at Paul Klee, Pissarro, and a Nottingham artist that was new to us all, George Hyde Pownall.

In our second meeting we discussed paintings by the artists Lowry, Paul Sandby, Hundertwasser, Escher, Georgia O'Keeffe and Edward Hopper. All had different styles and approaches when painting buildings. For example Escher had a very linear and geometric style, whereas Hundertwasser worked in curves and disliked straight edges.

JULY & AUGUST 2025: PUBLIC ART

During July and August the group have been looking at the subject of Public Art. This is defined as art that is displayed in public spaces, for the enjoyment and engagement of everyone. It is a diverse field that includes monuments, sculptures, paintings, installations and more. The works we talked about raised some of the controversy that can accompany this form of art, which at times can be both politically and aesthetically challenging.

The subjects and artists we covered were wide ranging. We began with Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* and how it symbolises the historical industry of the north-east.

We also looked at the work of sculptors in the '50s and '60s, with Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, both of whom created a new abstract movement in British sculpture.



Angel of the North



Hepworth

Contemporary artists we discussed included Juan Plensa, whose *Dream* is an elongated head located at the site of a former colliery in St Helens, Andy Scott's *The Kelpies*, two huge horses heads in Falkirk, and Andy Galsworthy's *Serpentine Wall*. All were controversial in their way. The installation *Field of Poppies* by Paul Cummins and Tom Piper, shown at the Tower of London, had the emotional impact it was intended to.

On a local level we looked at works of art scattered around Nottingham, which surprisingly few of us had seen. We ended with one of the most iconic public structures of all, the *Statue of Liberty*. This seemed to symbolise, at the time of its construction, the message that America was sending to the rest of the world. It appears to show that public sculpture can be very effective in sending a message which everyone can share.

SEPTEMBER 2025: PUBLIC ART, ARCHITECTURE, ANIMATED CLOCKS

At our September meeting we began by finishing our topic of Public Art.

We looked at the work of Anish Kapoor, who specialises in large pieces of public sculpture.

One of these was commissioned by the Nottingham Playhouse, and is situated outside the theatre in Wellington Circus. Its title is *Sky Mirror*.

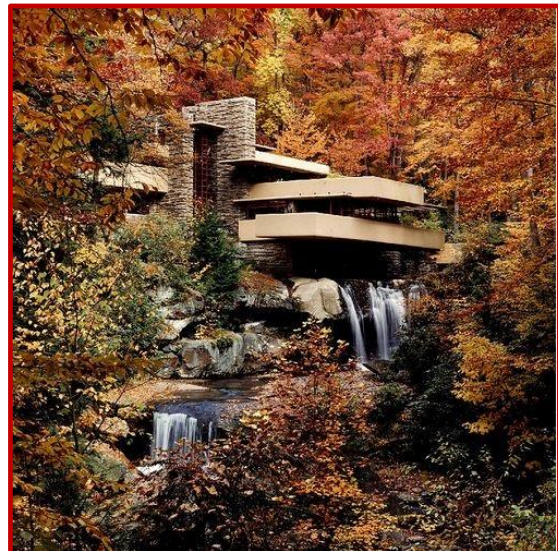
He made several identical copies of this, but the one in Nottingham was his first. It is a six metre wide concave disk made of polished steel, and its surface reflects the constantly changing environment around it.



We then went on to our next subject, Architecture. We first looked at the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, an American architect who lived from 1867 to 1959. He was one of the people that revolutionised architectural styles in the early twentieth century.

One of his most famous buildings is *Falling Water*, a beautifully designed house surrounded by woodland.

The house has strong horizontal lines made possible by the use of cantilevers, which extend beyond the building into the environment. It was known as 'organic architecture' as it appeared to grow out of and enhance its surroundings.



Our next subject was animated clocks. These feature moving figures that represent humans and animals, and also make music when the clock strikes. A large number of these clocks are in northern and central Europe. One of the most famous is the astronomical clock on the old town hall in Prague, first built in 1410 with the wooden statues added in 1629. It is now a popular tourist attraction.

X Our final talk was on Zaha Hadid, an Iraqi architect who studied and worked in Britain, and became known for her imaginative and controversial designs.

Among many other buildings she designed the Riverside Museum Glasgow, which featured her signature a-symmetrical design.



OCTOBER 2025: ARCHITECTURE, part 1

In October we continued with our theme of Architecture. We began with a talk on the Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 1868 to 1928. Much of his work was done in Glasgow, and included the city's School of Art and the Willow Tearooms. He worked closely with his wife, Margaret, and together they developed a distinctive decorative style that blended Art Nouveau with simple Japanese forms.

From Mackintosh we went on to another artist whose work was fashioned on Art Nouveau, Josep Maria Jujol. He was a Catalan architect who worked alongside the more famous Gaudi. He also though worked on his own behalf and one of his best works is a building in a small town outside Barcelona, called the Can Negre. Another of his buildings is the Casa Bofarull in Tarragona, the Roman capital of Spain.

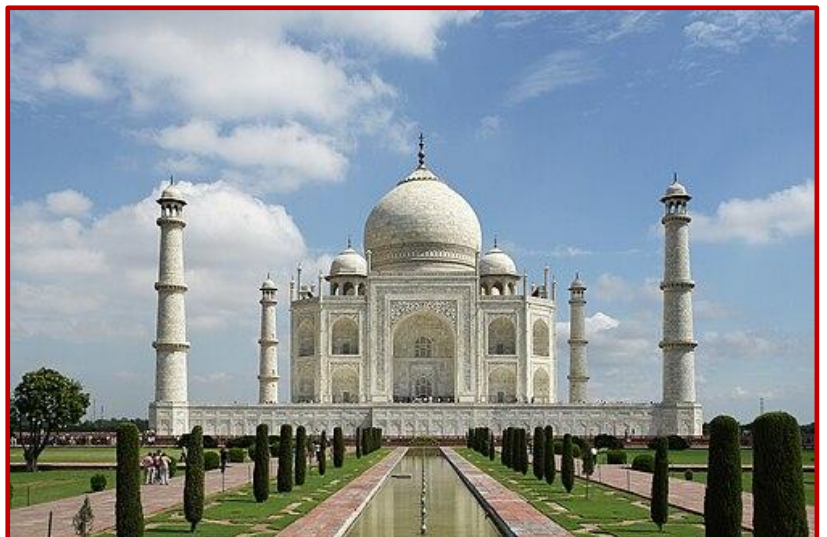
Next we had a visual tour of various Islamic buildings, showing how the architecture is based on Islamic beliefs. We looked at a number of iconic sites, including the Taj Mahal, The Blue Mosque in Istanbul and the Alhambra in Granada.

From traditional Islamic architecture we jumped to Sir Norman Foster and his modernist buildings. His works include the Great Court in the British Museum, the Gherkin and the Millennium Bridge over the Thames. He aims to make his buildings innovative as well as environmentally sustainable, using contemporary technology to achieve this.

We finished by comparing the two opposing styles of buildings that have followed each other through history - Classical architecture and Gothic. We looked at the origins of both and carried that through to current buildings. Classical architecture became a blue-print for government buildings as it implied authority and stability. The Gothic was intended to reference a more spiritual origin in medieval Gothic churches. We looked at several buildings by Fothergill Watson, a local architect, whose work was very much in this style.



The Gherkin



The Taj Mahal

NOVEMBER 2025: ARCHITECTURE, part 2

In November our group continued with our topic of Architecture.

Our first talk was on the architect Thomas Heatherwick, who was born in London in 1991, and now works there. All his designs are very individual and innovative. His first building that we looked at was East Bridge cafe in Littlehampton, a sea-side cafe built in 2007. It is a shell-like design and quite unlike the usual sea-side architecture

. Next was his Seed Pavilion, built for the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. This is a dandelion-like structure with over 60,000 transparent acrylic rods each encasing a different seed from Kew Gardens.

We then looked at one of his structures built in London, on Regent's canal. This is called Coal Drops Yard, near to King's Cross station. When built it was used as a coal distribution and storage facility and is now a range of offices and restaurants.



We then moved to Gaudi, a Catalan architect who lived from 1852 to 1926, his most famous building being the Sagrada Familia church in Barcelona.

Gaudi took his inspiration from nature, resulting in all his buildings consisting of curves. Although he died a century ago, his famous building continues to have additions made to it.



Our final subject was the influence of the German Third Reich on the architecture of its time. We had looked at neo- classical buildings at a previous session, and now we discussed how the Nazis appropriated the style in order to take on the attributes associated with it.

We also looked at the Bauhaus, a German art school founded by Walter Gropius. This was very much associated with Modernism. The school and its products were greatly disliked by the German government, both for its functional approach to design, the antithesis of neo-classicism, and the freedom of thought that it implied.

