
Art Appreciation 2026

January 2026: Paintings that show Another Art Form (1)

In our meeting in January we looked at how artists had portrayed various art forms.

We began by looking at **early art**, and a rock painting from El Cogul in Catalonia of women appearing to dance in a circle.

Then we looked at an **Egyptian wall painting** where dancers accompanied a funeral service, which was intended to connect the dead person with the gods, and ensure harmony for them in the netherworld.



Another form of dance that was common in medieval times was the **Dance Macabre**. In the late Middle Ages the Black Death killed between 30% and 50% of the population. Death was therefore an ever-present reality and these portrayals of the dance showed how rich and poor were susceptible. We then went on to look at images by artists of the 19th century. **John Singer-Sargent** was an American painter who lived most of his life in Europe.

He painted largely in the Impressionist style but also experimented with others. He painted straight onto the canvas, and used other artists for many of his paintings.

An exception to this is his painting of a Spanish dancer done in 1882, which is dark and atmospheric.



Picasso was our next subject.

He was born in Spain but spent most of his life in France. He painted many musicians and dancers. In 1901 he painted the Guitar Player, which is in his Blue Period, when he focused on social outcasts.

In 1921 he painted The Three Musicians, which were in his cubist style.



The last painter we looked at was **Degas**, who lived from 1834 to 1917.

He was famous for his painting of ballet dancers at the theatre, especially seen from behind the scenes of the ballet.

We learnt that Degas also showed the seedier side of the dance by pointing out at the sidelines the 'abonne', or men who preyed on the young dancers in the troupe.



February 2026: Paintings that show Another Art Form (2)

In February we had our second meeting on the subject of paintings that show another art form.

We began with **Kandinsky**, a Russian artist that lived from 1866 to 1944. He was an abstract painter who was concerned primarily with evoking a spiritual response to his art.

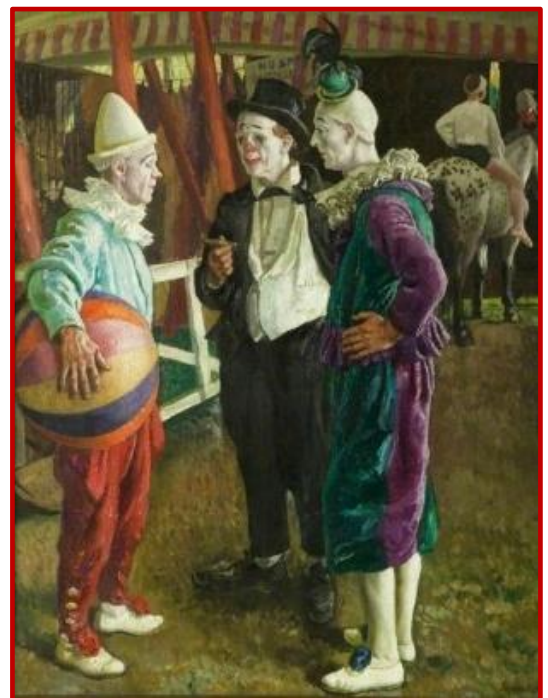
He believed in a process called synaesthesia, which meant he could translate tones and chords into his paintings. He expressed these ideas in his painting Composition VI, painted in 1913



Our second painter was the local artist **Laura Knight**, born in Long Eaton in 1877. She spent some years living in Staithes in Yorkshire, and then in Cornwall.

She also spent six months travelling with a circus. This led to a series of paintings of clowns, which she did in 1929.

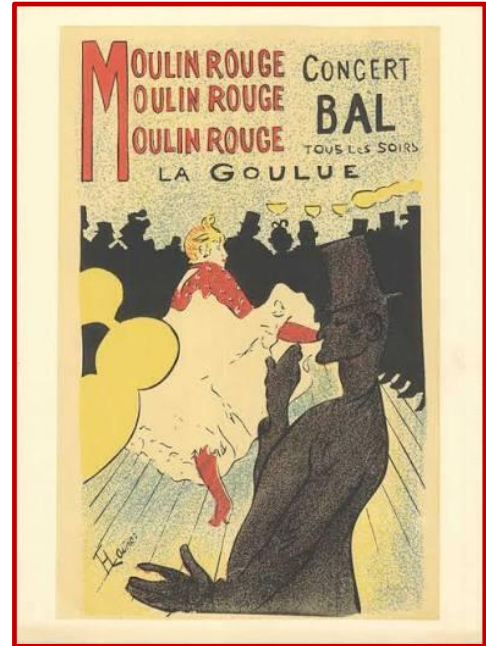
Laura Knight was a painter in the figurative, realist tradition, and was known for painting among the world of theatre and ballet, as well as being a war artist in the Second World War. She died in 1970 at the age of 92.



Our last artist was **Henri Toulouse-Lautrec**, 1864-1901. He was a French painter and illustrator, who specialised in depicting the colourful life of Paris in the late 19th century. An accident when young left Lautrec short in stature.

He was treated as an outcast during his adolescence and this gave him an empathy for those outside acceptable society.

He is well-known for his posters advertising events at various theatres, including the Moulin Rouge. His style of painting was influenced by Japanese prints and Art Nouveau. His poster for the theatre is of 'La Goulue', or Louise Weber, its star performer.



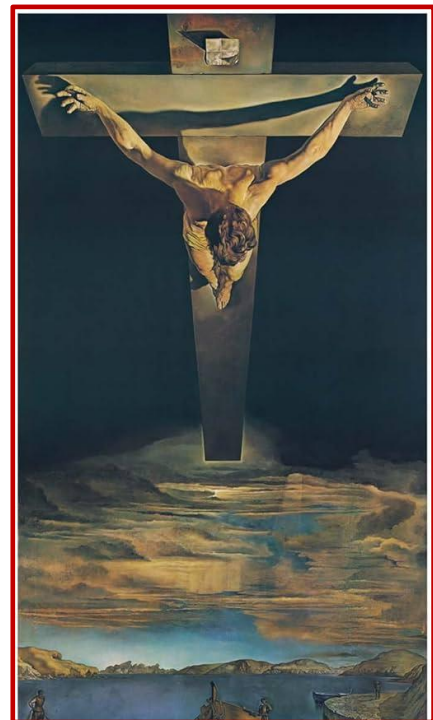
March 2026: Spring and Easter

In March we chose the topical theme of Spring and Easter.

We began with the Greek mythological explanation for the season, and talked about the story of **Persephone's kidnap by Hades** into the underworld, to reemerge into what we know as spring.

We looked at the interpretation of this on Greek vessels, and how the story was interpreted by Victorian artists.

We then went on to the Christian imagery of Easter, and discussed Salvador Dali's painting of the crucifixion, painted in 1951. The work is done from an interesting perspective, looking down on the crucified figure.



The association with spring with the land and the sowing of seeds was represented by the French artist Jean Millet, and his painting The Angelus. Two peasants are seen working in the fields, with the church in the background calling them to prayers.

The theme of eggs was taken up in The Waterhole, by a native Australian artist. The painting was in the shape of an egg, and within it the artist had created a pattern that represented a period of drought. It had spiritual significance for the artist.

David Hockney was our next subject. We looked at the computer generated images he produced over five months in 2011. In all there are 64 drawings of the same road, and the result is an interesting and colourful series of art works.

The Renaissance artist Guiseppi Arcimboldo was our next subject. He had a totally unique style of painting, producing an image of spring that is entirely composed of fruit, flowers and vegetables. It was very popular, and appealed to the taste of the time.

We were then introduced to an artist unknown to use. **Boris Kustodiev**, was a Russian artist, born in 1878. His work was different in style to other European artists, especially his style of portraiture.

Finally we looked at a selection of Impressionist paintings whose subjects were spring. Their style of course lends itself very much to the subject.



Van Gogh

August 2026: British Artists

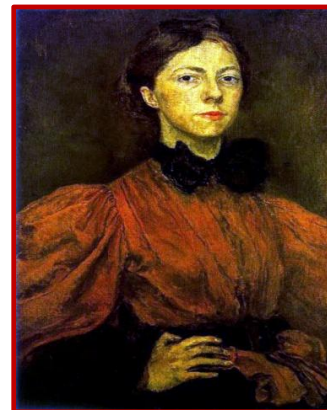
In August we continued our subject of British Artists. We began by looking at an artist previously unknown to us called **Caroline Walker**. She is a contemporary artist, born in 1982, and her work shows life as lived by ordinary workers, many of whom have domestic employment. One of her best-known works is a series featuring workers in a nail bar, painted in 2006. Her paintings show a tender depiction of her subjects, empathetic but not sentimental.



We then went on to **Walter Sickert**, 1860-1942, a German born painter that moved to England and worked for a while with the artist Whistler. He was influenced by Impressionism, but unlike others in the group he worked exclusively indoors. He has a penchant for slightly sordid subjects, and in 1908 painted a series of subjects related to the Camden murders of that year. He painted in heavy impasto, a style later adopted by Stephen Fry and Francis Bacon.



Our next subject was **Gwen John**, sister of the perhaps better known, Augustus John, both of whom attended together the Slade school of Art. She famously became the sculptor Rodin's lover. Later in her life she was largely a recluse. She became very religious, which influenced the subject matter of her paintings.



Finally, we looked at the paintings of **John Atkinson Grimshaw**, a Victorian artist who was very successful in his time. He was born in Leeds in 1836 and became a clerk at the Great Northern Railway before becoming a painter. He was influenced by Romanticism and the Gothic movement. He was fascinated by light and shade in painting, and used his artistic skill to paint, among many other things, atmospheric scenes of Whitby harbour and the gas-lit streets of the industrial north



Christine Russell