

Art Appreciation Group Report – July 2017

'Lovers Listening to Music' (1894) by **Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal** (1829 – 1862), pen and ink on paper.



Elizabeth Siddal was more famously known as 'Lizzie Siddal', the wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one of the major artists in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The pen and ink drawing is in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. As 'Lizzie Siddal' she was often used as a muse and a model by many other artists. When she met Rossetti, he told her she must be exclusive to him. It is said that this is a self-portrait of the artist, with her husband's brother as the male model. The child in the drawing represents 'Love' and is similar to an angel in Rossetti's 'Girlhood of Mary the Virgin'. Lizzie Siddal had a tragically short life and the cause of her death is uncertain. Some attribute it to her lying in a bath of cold water as she posed for Millais' painting 'The Drowning of Ophelia', and contracting pneumonia as a result. Others attribute her death to intestinal illness and some to her habit of taking laudanum. Rossetti made many images of her, even after her death.

'Prince Frederick in St James' Park' (c1745) by **Joseph Nickolls** (active 1726 – 1755), oil on canvas.

This painting is in the Royal Collection, owned by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. It depicts a scene in St James' Park, with a lot of interesting contemporary details. All levels of society are represented as are many nationalities: the British military and the Navy; 'ladies of the night'; Hungarian Hussars; priests; Middle-Eastern people and a lady from Africa. The 'Beau Monde' are dressed in the height of fashion and their mannerisms and affectations are vividly portrayed in the painting. The focus of the painting is Frederick, Prince of Wales, who is demonstrating 'the common touch' by mingling with his subjects. Before him, Royalty had kept itself aloof from its subjects. Not much is known about the artist, Joseph Nickolls, but his topographical eye for detail is evident in the features of the Park and distant buildings.

'Squares with Concentric Circles' (1913) by **Wassily Kandinsky (1866 – 1944)**
Watercolor, gouache and crayon on paper.

This striking image is found in The Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus Munich, Germany. Kandinsky was a Russian painter and the Father of abstract art, although he initially studied Law. The painting was composed as a small study and as a support material on how different colour combinations are perceived that the painter could use in his creative process. This painting influenced Andy Warhol, and became the forerunner of 'Consecutive Art' as typified by Warhol. The apex of Kandinsky's Pre-WW1 work is 'Composition VII', completed in 1913. Kandinsky considered himself a synaesthete, i.e. he could 'hear colours' and 'see sounds.' As an example of this, he was inspired to create the artwork 'Pictures at an Exhibition' after hearing the music composed by Modest Mussorgsky (1839 – 1881). Kandinsky is quoted as saying 'Of all the arts, abstract painting is the most difficult. It demands that you know how to draw well, that you have a heightened sensitivity for composition and for colour, and that you be a true poet. This last is essential'. He is also quoted as saying: 'The artist must train not only his eye but also his soul'.

'Self Portrait 1986' aka **'Fright Wig'** by **Andy Warhol (1928 – 1987)**. Acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen.

This image is one of a series of self-portraits, completed in a range of colours and is a screenprint taken from a photograph. The technique was explained to the group. It is an intense work, with a sense of foreboding, serious and sombre. Warhol became aware of his own mortality after an abortive murder attempt.

'The Blunt Children' (1765) by **Johann Zoffany (1733 – 1810)**. Oil on canvas.

This charming painting shows the two Blunt brothers, Robert (born 1760) and William (born 1761) on a representation of the estate they will inherit when they grow up. During the C18, boys dressed like girls until they were 'breeched' at the age of about seven or eight years. Zoffany became fashionable as a painter of family groups, so this picture is unusual as it only includes the children and not the parents. The painting emphasises the radical idea, put forward by the Frenchman, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that children could learn by playing. Thus the two young boys are seen handling miniature rustic tools. The painting is divided by a tree, placed in the centre of the picture. On one side of the tree is a civilized, ordered, organized scene, while on the other side is rather oppressive, threatening, dangerous vegetation. The tree represents the Tree of Life, and the painting shows that in life one may have light, organized, calm seasons and also dark, turbulent times. The painting can be seen in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.