

Art Appreciation Meeting – 14-09-17

Anne Williams talked about '**Art Installation**' as her contribution. She had seen a superyacht in the harbour at Hydra, Greece and discovered it was the '**Guilty**', owned by Dakios Joannou, a wealthy collector of modern art. The ship's sides appear to represent pyramids, reflected in the sea, but are actually bold geometric designs – alternating yellow rhombuses, pink triangles and blue polygons – which were inspired by British naval camouflage from World War I. The design was curated by Jeff Koons and was influenced by Roy Liechtenstein.

To Joannou, one of the world's most important contemporary art collectors, what matters most about 'Guilty' is that it provokes a reaction. "We did what we wanted; style was irrelevant," he says of his maritime masterpiece. "We designed a boat in an antistyle method. We have no rules, no programs, no plans." 'Razzle Dazzle', as the exterior pattern is called, "was a technique used during World War I as a camouflage not to conceal an object but to confuse the viewer," Koons explains. "The process was extremely complex," Joannou adds, noting that Guilty was painted by hand.

Viewed from the top, a huge image of Iggy Pop performing on-stage stares back. "Iggy is there as a contemporary Dionysus figure," Koons says of the rock god as Greek god.

The yacht's interior takes on a completely different aesthetic. The walls and ceilings are all chillingly white, with enormous windows to maximize natural light. And much like experiencing the installations of American artist James Turrell, being inside Guilty during the day is like walking onto the set of a science fiction film, with a central staircase that turns from pinkish violet to galactic blue and finally warm yellow.

The living quarters are also designed around specific works of art. The main cabin encompasses the top deck, generally reserved for the bridge. With 180-degree views and the word "Feelings" hanging in neon lights above the bed (a piece by British artist and musician Martin Creed), the master bedroom also has a private terrace. The four guest cabins, equally luxurious, feature museum-worthy works, while the largest portion of the main deck has a living room decorated with Italian Radical Design furniture.

Anne also mentioned Art Installations outside the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, such as 'Puppy' and 'Tulips'. 'Guilty' can be viewed on Google. **(Anne Williams)**

Leonardo da Vinci – 'Virgin and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John'.(1499 – 1500) National Gallery. (Black chalk with touches of white chalk on brownish paper. Full size cartoon.) The response to this cartoon was that it was calm and peaceful. Mary's serene face was noted, as was the fact that St Anne's face appears slightly masculine, Leonardo da Vinci

sometimes using male models for female subjects. The cartoon was compared to a painting by Giovanni Bellini, on a similar subject. The colours in the cartoon are muted and there is an unfinished look, noticeable especially in St Anne's left hand pointing upwards. The figures are lifesize or more and the cartoon has a 'smoky' appearance.

In this cartoon, da Vinci uses '*Chiaroscuro*', an Italian term which literally means 'light-dark'. In paintings the description refers to clear tonal contrasts which are often used to suggest the volume and modelling of the subjects depicted. Leonardo da Vinci was famed for the use of *chiaroscuro* as was Caravaggio. Leonardo employed it to give a vivid impression of the three-dimensionality of his figures, and in this cartoon a sense of stability and of a monument.

There is an intimacy between Mary and St Anne, and between Christ and St John. Anne turns to Mary, who sits on Anne's lap. Mary gazes at the Christ-Child, who is blessing St John, who in turn gazes at Him. (**Stan Bonas**).

The Harris Art Gallery and Museum, Preston was the next topic. This Grade I neo-classical building, with a stunning interior was built between 1882 – 1893 with a bequest of £300,000 by Edmund Harris, in memory of his father, a local vicar. The gilded panels in the interior are plaster copies of 'The Gates of Paradise' in Florence. The building is four storeys high, with galleries around an open central space on each floor. The central lantern is 120 ft high, with the galleries surrounding it. It contains a fascinating collection of 3000 perfume bottles. A visit to the Art Gallery is highly recommended.

Four Laura Knight paintings are on display, and also a painting by **Alfred Munnings: 'Whitsuntide – A Gala Day' (1903)**. This painting depicts a country fair and is painted in a confident style, with beautiful, jewel bright colours. 'Pops' of red paint coming through bring the painting to life. It was explained that this is an artist's 'trick'. The viewer is 'right in the moment'. A farm labourer is the subject in the centre of the painting. The man with a pipe next to him is this man's son and the two children are the children of the man with the pipe. The man by the cartwheel is a self portrait of Alfred Munnings. This exquisite painting was painted in the studio from sketches made in situ at the fair. Alfred Munnings introduced Laura Knight to gypsies, one of her favourite subjects. (**Linda Averill**)

'Boyar Wedding Feast' by Constantin Nakovsky (1839 – 1915). (Oil on canvas, 93" x 154") (Hillwood Estate and Gardens, Washington DC, USA) Nakovsky was a Russian artist, who studied art in Moscow and died in St Petersburg. This painting of 1883 depicts one of the most important social

and political events of old Russia, a wedding uniting two families of the powerful Boyar class that dominated Muscovite politics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Boyars were aristocrats, who advised the Tsar, and were very powerful and influential. Peter the Great abolished the rank.

In the painting, the guests are about to toast the bridal couple. This will be the first time the groom will have seen the bride without her veil. The 'body language' of the bride shows her reticence, modesty and embarrassment. The lady to the left of the bride is the Marriage Broker.

The painting is full of symbolism, some of which is a bit obscure today. The ladies are wearing ornate headdresses, as superstition dictated that to be bare-headed was to attract evil spirits. The lavish headdresses consist of gold, gold thread, pearls and appliqué. The men all wear beards, as being bare-faced was considered a sin in those days. The clothing too is very rich, with gold, pearls and appliqué. The décor is very rich, and the painting is very detailed, especially the bride's dress. Naturalistic lighting throws the faces of those assembled into relief. A swan motif recurring in the painting is very symbolic. The painting won a Gold Medal at the World Fair in Antwerp in 1885. **(Kay Pagett)** NB This painting is in the public domain.



'A Boy aged Two' by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (1561/2-1636).
1608 – oil on wood panel, Compton Verney, Warwicks.

This painting shows a young boy dressed conventionally in a farthingale-framed dress. Boys of that time were dressed like this until they were 'breeched' at the age of seven years. 'The Blunt Brothers' by Zoffany in the Birmingham Art Gallery (a painting reviewed at the last meeting) shows similar attire. The boy holds a string attached to a robin. The robin represents the human soul, which flies away at death. The boy also holds a posy of pansies, which signify innocence and transience.

'Oliver Cromwell' (1657), by Samuel Cooper, watercolour on vellum, miniature, H 10.4cm. Compton Verney.

This 'Warts and All' miniature is painted in an honest style, in the year that Oliver Cromwell declined Parliament's offer of the English Crown. **(Both reviewed by Margaret Robinson).**

The Pitmen Painters. (Woodhorn Museum, Ashington, Northumberland). This group of painters was a small society of artists from Ashington, Northumberland, which met regularly between 1934 – 1984. They acquired their name as they were largely made up of coal miners (or pitmen as they are known), who first came together in 1934 in the middle of the Great Depression years, through the Workers Education Association to study 'something different' - art appreciation, having already studied evolution. In an effort to understand what it was all about, their tutor Robert Lyon encouraged them to learn by doing it themselves.

Also known as 'The Ashington Group', they captured every aspect of life in and around their mining community, above and below ground, from the scenes around the kitchen table and in the allotment to the dangerous and dirty world of the coal face. Their style varied, from 'lino-cut' images to 'naive' pictures. With a great thirst for learning, they documented life in mining communities in a unique way. They discussed their paintings weekly and were given a theme weekly. This is a wonderful historical record of community life. Art took them out of their hard lives as pitmen.

A very wealthy lady named Christine Sutherland paid for them to go to London to the National Gallery. They loved van Gogh's very simple style, and his experience of hardship and suffering resonated with them. The spirit of art and culture flowed through their lives, offering an alternative to the bleak existence of the mines.

'The Pitman Painters' a play by Lee Hall, may come to Malvern or Wolverhampton. It has been recommended. **(Elaine Yates).**

The Artist Robert K Calver. Robert K Calver paints nostalgic views of Birmingham and the Black Country, often with trams, steam trains and

omnibuses. He documents the area – the markets, High Streets and corner shops. Often in his work can be found a 'leitmotif' – a girl in a yellow jumper.

Among his paintings are views of The Jewellery Quarter, The Bull Ring and St Martin's, Wolverhampton Market, and Moor Street. The style is affectionate and reminiscent of a bygone age. **(Beryl Buckley).**

Report by Heidi Hague.