

Art Appreciation Meeting 11-01-18

Painting 1 (Elaine Evans). John Collier (1850 - 1934): 'Lady Godiva' (1897). Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry.



(Public Domain)

Elaine talked about the history of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, named after Sir Alfred Herbert (1866 - 1957) an English industrialist and museum benefactor. The foundation stone of the Art Gallery and Museum was laid in 1954 and the Gallery has had a recent extension, including Archives storage and a Café. Lady Godiva was an 11th Century noblewoman, who is mentioned in the Domesday Survey. She owned land in her own right. She was just, fair, pious, proud, in strong contrast to her husband, The Earl Leofric who was a tyrant who levied an oppressive tax on his people. Elaine told the story of Lady Godiva's ride through Coventry, naked, to shame her unpopular husband. In 1949 a statue of her was erected in Coventry. Collier was a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the painting measures 4'8" x 6'. There are many paintings of Lady Godiva in the gallery. There is a sense of rich colour and heightened brush strokes in this painting. Among the many details in this painting are the richly ornamented horse cloth and the ornate column behind Lady Godiva. There is also an anomaly on the building to the right, which is not in keeping with period.

Links: [John Collier Lady Godiva](#), [Herbert Art Gallery and Museum](#).

Painting 2 (Anne Williams) Jan Asselijn (1610 - 1652). 'The Threatened Swan' (1650, oil) Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Asselijn was a Dutch Golden Age painter and this painting is in the same gallery as 'The Night Watch' by Rembrandt. It is a huge painting, measuring 57" h x 67" w. It was the first acquisition of the Rijksmuseum. Transparent wing feathers and soft tactile down on the breast of the swan make this an outstanding painting, which is also muscular and powerful. There are early examples of graffiti on this painting. One can see writing on the painting: 'de Raad Pensionaris' - 'The Great Pensionary', alluding to Johann de Witt, an

unpopular but key figure in Dutch politics in the mid-17th century, The symbol of his family was a swan. On the egg can be seen: 'Holland', on the dog is written: 'de Viand van de Staat' - 'the enemy of the country', alluding to William of Orange. De Witt came to power in 1653, after the painting was completed and Asselijn had died, so the propaganda was added later. As an extra note of interest, the doll's house in the Rijksmuseum inspired the novel 'The Miniaturist'.

Links: Jan Asselijn artist, the threatened swan, Rijksmuseum.

Painting 3 (Linda Averill) Louis Welden Hawkins (1849 - 1910). 'Les Preludes' (oil on canvas) viewed at Christies Fine Arts Auctioneers, now in a private collection.

Linda gave us Hawkins' biography. His style, as a detailed symbolist painter, who was greatly influenced by the Barbizon School. He himself lived not far from Barbizon at Grez-sur-Loing. The barrow loaded with hay and the watering can appear in paintings by other artists of the same time, and school at Grez. There is an exquisite treatment of space and light in this painting, Hawkins represents full sunlight on his figures; the short shadows indicate midday; the trees in leaf indicate late spring. The boy is shown as a troubadour, who often visited rural communities in France and his costume indicates he is a shepherd. His companion with a shy, admiring gaze and clasped hands recalls the piety of a communicant. Has she received a knot of flowers as a love token? In reality the model appears in a number of Hawkins' paintings and it was said by one of the writers living in Grez at the time: "that the girl tagged about after Hawkins carrying his kit and posing whenever he needed her as a model. She was a little girl and we wondered what would happen when she reached the age of indiscretion. Not one of us guessed that our Great Man would marry her - which he did".

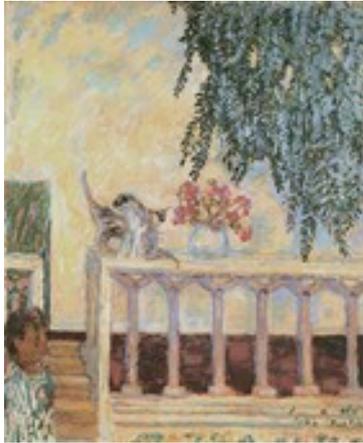
Links: Louis Welden Hawkins artist Les Preludes

Painting 4 (George Gladden). Pierre Bonnard (1867 - 1947). 'The Bath' (1925, oil on canvas). The Tate Gallery.

George recounted the story of Bonnard's life. Bonnard was a Post Impressionist, part of the avant-garde group 'Les Nabis'. He painted this painting in his studio, giving it a warmth and dream-like quality. He painted many domestic scenes and was a prolific painter. The model was Bonnard's wife (died 1942) and his muse. He often painted her in the bath.

Links: Louis Welden Hawkins [Tate > Art and Artists > Pierre Bonnard > The Bath](#)

Painting 5 (George Gladden). Pierre Bonnard (1867 - 1947). 'Cats on the Railing' (1909, oil on canvas). Ohara Museum of Art.



Public domain.

There is a warmth and a whimsical sense of humour in this painting. It appears to have a Mediterranean setting, which is emphasised by the tree, the flowers and the colour of the wall, as well as the bright light reflecting off the wall. The child, on the bottom left hand side seems out of place in this charming painting.

Links: Louis Welden Hawkins [cats on the railing](#)

Painting 6: (Peter Wright) Diego Velasquez (1599 - 1660). 'The Toilet of Venus (The Rokesby Venus)' (oil on canvas, 1647 - 1651) National Gallery, London.

This is the only remaining nude painting by Velasquez, the leading artist of the Spanish Golden Age. A number of changes were made during its composition. It was damaged in 1914 by a Suffragette. There is quite a lot of symbolism in the painting. Venus was the Roman goddess of love (Aphrodite in ancient Greece) and the mother of Cupid, who is often included in paintings of Venus. According to Hesiod, Venus was born from the foam of the sea and carried to land on a scallop shell, as in Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' in the Uffizi, Florence. Venus, the goddess of Love, was the most beautiful of the goddesses, and was regarded as a personification of female beauty. She is shown here with her son Cupid, who holds up a mirror for her to look both at herself and at the viewer.

Links: Velasquez > Rokeby Venus.

**Painting 7 (Heidy Hague) Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472 - 1553).
Wittenberg Altarpiece aka Wittenberg Triptych aka Reformation Altar
(1547), Church of St. Marien, Wittenberg, Germany.**

Heidy put the painting into its historical context, which is set during the early Reformation period in Germany. She outlined a brief biography of Cranach, who was a close friend of the German Reformer, Martin Luther. There is a lot of symbolism in the painting, which represents the new order of Christian belief, although all three of the traditional Sacraments are depicted. For example: Melancthon, a lay person and colleague of Luther's is baptising in the left panel. In the centre panel, Jesus presides at the Last Supper with John's head at his breast, and Judas to his right. But notice that Luther is one of the 12 disciples. He is shown here offering the cup to Cranach. The right panel depicts a Wittenberg minister leading the Sacrament of Confession. The three panels are harmonised by subject matter, colour and repeated shapes. There is a round baptismal font, a round table, and rounded arches which frame and embrace the tops of all the panels. These tie separate events and times into one graceful scene. In the bottom panel, Luther is shown presenting the crucified Christ to a group of followers. This metaphorically shows Luther as the teacher and leader of the new church. He places one hand on a book of scripture, driving home the message of scriptural authority.

Links: [Wittenberg Altarpiece](#), [Wittenberg Triptych](#), [Lucas Cranach](#),

Heidy Hague