

Art Friends Warwickshire

ARTLOOK

late March 2020

Dear Art Friend

This really is not the season of events we had planned. Like all of you, we are now adapting to a different mode and pace of life where things once considered set are changing at short notice. That was the situation with our AGM arranged for 17 March at Kineton, a sell-out event with popular speaker, Sarah Shalgosky. Following the Government's announcement on the previous evening, we had no option but to postpone the meeting. We are conscious of our demographic profile and although few of us feel old, we are deemed to be at risk and have to act responsibly.

Sadly, the situation with many of our art colleagues is equally challenging and we have heard from Dr Avery at The Fitzwilliam that the museum has closed and therefore our 23 April event has been cancelled. As the *Feast and Fast* exhibition closes soon afterwards, it cannot be rescheduled. One must feel sorry for the Fitzwilliam team who put so much work into the show. Sadly, this is being replicated across the world, bad news for already financially challenged museums and galleries.

Our 15 May talk on Cézanne has been cancelled but, as the Royal Academy exhibition runs from July to October, Professor Paul Smith is willing to talk to us later in the year, once restrictions are lifted. The 10 June *Art of Iran* talk will also be shelved but if it can be run subsequently, we shall do so.

As yet, no decision has been taken whether to cancel our five-day trip to the south of England later in June as the timing is just beyond the end of the 12-week restriction period for those over seventy, starting 21 March. As soon as we decide, we shall inform those who have booked

Refunds for recent events cancelled or postponed

Thank you for your patience as we sort this out. The following is what we're suggesting for the short term until the timescales for the virus containment become clearer:

AGM Landscape, 17 March 2020 - Postponed

Cheque payments for this event have been processed already. As the event is likely to be simply postponed, we propose to keep your payment for now. Should you wish it, however, refunds are available from the Treasurer, Susan Yeomans. Please contact her with your bank details and she will transfer payment in the next week or two. We will not be issuing cheques as members in isolation would be unable to cash these promptly. You may alternately prefer to offer the original payment as a donation to Art Friends Warwickshire as some have already done (thank you) – if so, let Susan know by email.

Fitzwilliam, 23 April - Cancelled

As this event is cancelled, those who paid online have been contacted and will be refunded to their bank accounts. Cheques have been destroyed.

Cézanne, 15 May 2020 - Postponed

We have received a number of online payments already. The same conditions apply as above and Susan will sort out an immediate refund back into your bank account. Anyone who set a post-dated payment may wish to contact their bank to cancel the payment on 20 May. Cheques will not be processed until we have a firm date for the revised event and you confirm your attendance.

Persia and the Art of Iran, 12 June 2020- TBC

We will advise about this once we know whether it will be postponed or cancelled. Again, let Susan know if you have already transferred monies and would prefer a refund now.

FUTURE EVENTS

We have no idea for how long this situation will last but we are keen to be positive and continue to plan for the future. After all, we shall be hungry for opportunities to socialise with friends and have the mind stretched. Events still in the diary, unless we inform you otherwise, include:

Wednesday, 23 September: travel by executive coach to the home of Horace Walpole.

Diary Date: Friday 16 October: our annual Shottery afternoon tea. Our speaker will be Dr Rosie Dias from the University of Warwick, topic to be announced in a future **ARTLOOK**.

ARTLOOK

In the meantime, it is not our intention to just sit back and wait. Instead, we plan to use **ARTLOOK** as our platform for articles on art-related subjects. We are approaching art history professionals to contribute but we also invite you, our supporters to write for us.

Did you manage to see the *Picasso and Paper* exhibition which many of us will not get the chance to visit? In this issue, Sue Yeomans has written about her perception of the show. Have you visited the art galleries of Winterthur in Switzerland? Not many of us have, but one of our supporters, John Cole has written about a visit to these little-known galleries as well as the Abbey Library in St Gallen.

Now, we turn to you, our supporters. We know that you are an active and articulate bunch who travel not only in the UK but abroad to visit museums, galleries, places of art interest. Will you write a piece for **ARTLOOK**? Once these travel restrictions are lifted, we know that you will be off again and we intend to stimulate that appetite for art. What better than to read the reviews of like-minded people?

Do you have in-depth knowledge of a particular art history sector? Could you write a thousand words and provide a couple of images to illustrate your feature? One of our members has promised a future article on *Oriental carpets in Renaissance Venetian paintings*. What could you write for us?

It is essential that we remain engaged. Art Friends Warwickshire is still in its infancy and we really want it to build upon its strong beginning, already well received by you, our supporters.

Brian Phillips, *Chairman of Art Friends Warwickshire*

Committee: Gill Ashley-Smith, Sandra Clowes, Alex Corrin, Dianne Page, Susan Yeomans

Picasso and Paper, Royal Academy from 25 January 13 April 2020 (currently closed)

Visit: 25 February 2020 from our intrepid reporter and treasurer, Susan Yeomans



Photo © David Parry/Royal Academy of Arts © Succession Picasso/DACS 2020

An exhibition of more than 300 pieces displayed through eight large rooms each one moving through the chronology of Picasso's life, from the Blue Period of the early 1900s through to the man himself. In *Le Mystère Picasso* [1956, downloadable from YouTube] he is filmed in his studio wielding a felt tip pen. I found this short film particularly engrossing as one picture evolved from a fish to a farm animal to a futuristic vision, shown in development, through a transparent screen.

My own appreciation of the art of Picasso stems from a visit to the small museum in Malaga that contains his teenage sketchbook. His drawing skills were clear, precise and utterly unlike the work we may recognise as familiar from his Cubist period, such as *Les Femmes D'Alger* [1907], or the Surrealist vision of horror, war and bulls that is *Guernica* [1937].



As a ballet lover, I also enjoyed the short film showing his absurdist costume creations for the Ballets Russes and others from the early 20th century. They have stood the test of time in my opinion. The dancing technique on display, less in vogue in the 21st century. Aspects of Picasso's personal life, including that with his many lovers, came through in his paintings of Marie-Therese Walter and Fernande Olivier.



Pablo Picasso, *La Vie (Life)*, Barcelona, 1903. The Cleveland Museum of Art Photo © David Parry/Royal Academy of Arts © Succession Picasso/DACS 2020

In summary, the exhibition was possibly under-sold as '*and Paper*' because the collages, cut-outs and sample scraps of work on paper were but a small part of the whole. For me, I found a sense of the man himself, in all his life stages and different styles of creating memorable work across numerous media, using oil, ink, felt tip pens, bronze, wood and Japanese paper, to show the wealth of his imagination.

Cultural Switzerland

A few years ago, John Cole achieved a Masters in Art History as a mature student at Birkbeck, University of London, and has written the following report specially for Art Friends Warwickshire.

For years, I have mused about visiting the monastery of St Gall on the eastern edge of Switzerland. Umberto Eco had modelled his medieval abbey in *The Name of the Rose* on the original monastic complex.

My first surprise last year was how easy (in normal times) it is to visit. After a Birmingham flight to Zurich, a train transfer to St Gallen takes only an hour. A well signposted, if meandering, pedestrian route takes the visitor up towards the hill-top historic centre. This is now a UNESCO world heritage site. It's truly impressive.

A second surprise was to discover that the medieval remnants of the monastery are now cocooned inside an array of late Baroque buildings. A Carolingian crypt can be visited. By the doorway, an enlarged photographic replica reveals the abbey's most important manuscript: an idealised layout plan of the many monastic buildings. The unique surviving document from the early 9th century - in red and black ink on calf vellum - can also sometimes be viewed. St Gall, the founder, was an Irish missionary monk living c. 630 and the library hall displays rare Irish, Carolingian and Ottonian manuscripts in finely crafted wooden cases.



The hall is, however, an exuberantly Rococo style interior dating from the 1760's, designed by the architect, Peter Thumb. Burnished woodwork, fluid balconies and ceiling frescoes make a memorable setting for the library that has a Greek inscription: 'apothecary of the soul'.

Likewise, the abbey church has been completely re-built. Peter Thumb, a member of a German master-mason dynasty, led a team in the 1760s that built the twin-towered cathedral in a swirling, Baroque ensemble. Architecture, sculpture, stucco-work and ceiling paintings blend together to impress the beholder.



Structurally, it is a wall-pillar church in which the thrust of the vaulting is taken by tongues of wall that jut out into the building. (The wall-pillars function like the buttresses of Gothic cathedrals.) The form allowed relatively large, wide areas to be built cheaply and quickly from brick and rubble. Such new spatial forms were popular in Southern Germany and Switzerland.

It was an intriguing discovery, if unexpected. It's also worth staying a little longer and nearby is Winterthur, which used to flourish as a textile and machinery hub and is now largely a university town. The wealth accumulated early in the 20th century led to two distinctive collections.



An hourly museum bus takes the visitor to and from the Museum Oskar Reinhart. It is found atop a local hill in a villa-residence once owned by Reinhart. His father made a fortune in cotton trade with India. From 1924 onwards, the son chose to spend the money on building an exceptional collection of European art. Passionate about French Impressionists' celebration of colour and light, he regarded this art as the gold standard but liked to buy works from any artist with whom he sensed similar connections, regardless of historical context. He listened to experts but made

his own decisions. It makes for an eclectic collection. From a few early Renaissance works, the galleries move on, via Goya, through to the late 19th century with masterpieces by Cézanne, Van Gogh and Manet. The villa makes a very civilised setting for enjoying great paintings (with a memorable parkland café).

One oil sketch, in particular, caught the eye. The French Realist, Gustave Courbet, is represented by *The Stonebreakers*; but it did not seem quite right. Some later Internet research confirmed that the 1849 work was indeed by Courbet, being a preliminary version of the famously dignified depiction of two impoverished rural labourers (missing from Dresden since 1945). There is no narrative connection between the younger man and his older colleague. Both their faces are obscured and there are other hints of alienation. The difference between sketch and painting lies in the angle of the two protagonists, here looking to the left not the right, as in the final version.

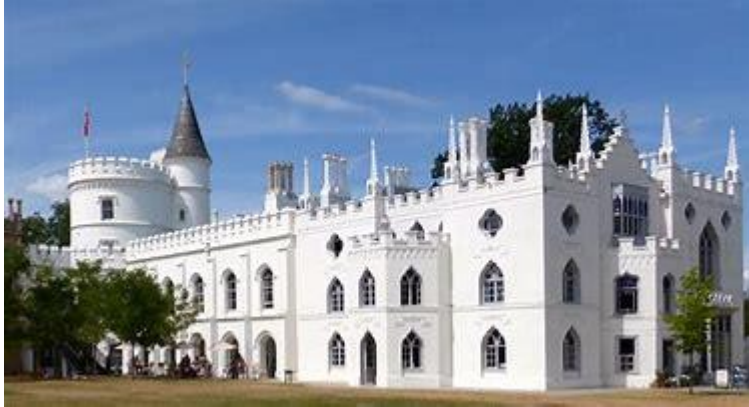


In the centre of Winterthur, the Kunstmuseum is housed in two dominant civic buildings, one neo-classical. Much of the art was, similarly, donated by local industrial magnates. The emphasis is different but equally enthralling. Their group of early romantic paintings of Caspar David Friedrich forms the most important collection outside Germany. There is the realism of Adolph Menzel and the imaginary world of Arnold Böcklin. Post-Impressionist and Nabis painters are well represented. More modern art features some fine Minimalist works and the museum continues to collect contemporary art, which clearly has the involvement of the local community and the new breed of successful service and IT businesses, based in a city proud of its artistic patronage.

STRAWBERRY HILL, TWICKENHAM

Travel by Executive Coach to the home of Horace Walpole

Wednesday 23 September 2020



Horace Walpole took a lease on a small cottage in 1747 with fine views over the River Thames. Having bought the lease in 1749, he later adopted the name Strawberry Hill for his property and spent the next 50 years purchasing more land and developing his vision of a Gothic castle and estate of 46 acres. Strawberry Hill was the first house since medieval times to be built in the Gothic style, and

can claim to be the starting point of the Gothic Revival. Walpole was a great collector acquiring a host of objects to fill his home. Many of these objects were sold in the Great Sale of 1842 because of ... but that's a story you'll hear at the house. Suffice to say that the current trustees have been scouring the world in efforts to have many of the original objects returned. After a £9 million, two-year long restoration, Strawberry Hill House reopened to the public in 2010.

There will be a refreshments and comfort break en route. On arrival, we begin with a talk about the house and its founder then we will have the opportunity to tour the house viewing the many objects from Walpole's time. Also, there will be the chance to view the gardens (Walpole was a great proponent of the "modern English Garden. Details of the optional lunch will be sent to bookers in August together with final information.