

Art Friends Warwickshire

ARTLOOK

May 2020

Dear Art Friend

And so it continues ... This virus presents much bigger challenges throughout the world and to the galleries and museums which are our common point of interest, but the Art Friends Warwickshire committee has had to face up to the chances of a fledgling organisation surviving in the foreseeable future. We have debated the strong possibility that events as we remember them may not be possible for a long time, but within our group of six there is an appetite and energy to persevere and continue with our original *raison d'être: For lovers of art supporting art for the future*. To that end, we have contact with speakers still eager to talk to us, we plan to run the deferred summer tour to the South in 2021 and through the pages of **ARTLOOK** we shall engage with you directly. For this to work we need your support.

We are fortunate that there have been volunteers to write articles for this issue of **ARTLOOK** and your many congratulatory emails following the April issue encourage us to continue in the same vein. As long as we are unable to offer you talks and trips to places of artistic interest, we shall continue to stay in touch with you through these pages. This issue contains member, Chris Barney's experience of a visit to the Orkneys and the chapel built and decorated by Italian prisoners-of-war, a testimony to faith if ever there was. Member, Ros Masters' piece highlights a popular destination for Midlanders, Blenheim Palace.

A new strand to **ARTLOOK** which brings a different slant to our appreciation of art is a review of what one particular member hangs on her wall. See if you can work out before the end of the article who on the Committee is revealing her choice in art.

To continue **ARTLOOK**, we really need you to share your love of a piece of artwork, an experience of an art gallery or museum, or to participate in our new feature *My Art Collection*. Please send your suggested contribution to editor: dianne@artfriendswarks.uk.

Along with so many groups during these strange times, your committee has not been sitting just waiting for the good times to return. We are conscious that for any arts organisation to survive, it must engage with its members and consequently we are close to completing our own web-site. News of its launch will come shortly. **ARTLOOK** will remain our prime format for communication with you and this will continue to reach you via email. Printed versions are sent to those without computers.

Sadly, we cannot yet confirm if Strawberry Hill and the October talk at Shottery will go ahead, but they remain in the diary and of course we shall respect Government guidelines. Similarly, the *Art in the Landscape*, *Cézanne* and *Arts of Iran* talks are still on the stocks whether the related exhibitions happen or not. Any suggestions for future topics and visits, particularly by car, are welcome.

Many of you will be members of Art Fund and probably, like me, may have picked up the Spring issue of *Art Quarterly* to re-read in greater detail than usual. One can only wonder how they will fill the upcoming issues without reviews of all those excellent exhibitions which have been unable to open on time or may be shelved altogether. Fortunately for us, many galleries have produced videos of their

locked-down exhibitions or are highlighting particular artworks for us to enjoy once we feel able to return to visit and we include more links for you to follow. Countries which are gradually relaxing access restrictions are being monitored by us all to assess the viability of opening museums and controlled access to exhibitions.

On Hold

A brief reminder of the talks we hope to resurrect:

Sarah Shalgosky, Curator University of Warwick, *Art in the Landscape*.

Professor Paul Smith, University of Warwick, *Cézanne, the Mont Saint-Victoire and Bibémus Quarry*

Fuchsia Hart, art historian, *When Persia came to London: an introduction to the Arts of Iran*

Future Events (to be confirmed)

Wednesday, 23 September: travel by executive coach to Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, the home of Horace Walpole. Contact: brian@artfriendswarks.uk .

Friday 16 October: our annual Shottery afternoon tea. Our speaker will be Dr Rosie Dias from the University of Warwick. Topic together with booking details will be announced in a future **ARTLOOK**.

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Brian Phillips, the chairman of Art Friends Warwickshire, expresses our frustration not to be able to offer you what was planned but, in the meantime, he confirms that we remain determined to nurture our group of art lovers who care about art for the future. Furthermore, as a gesture of thanks for your continued support, membership fees you paid for 2020 will now run for a further 12 months.

Dianne Page, Editor

dianne@artfriendswarks.uk

Art Friends Warwickshire Committee:

Brian Phillips, *Chairman*,

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

The Italian Chapel, Lamb Holm, Orkney by member, Chris Barney

While we live in a state of 'lock-down' with the restrictions this entails, we might remember that at other times and in other places and for very different reasons many people have lived in 'lock-down', sometimes for many years.

Occasionally these limitations have led to extraordinary creative successes - John Bunyan was inspired to write Pilgrim's Progress while in Bedford Gaol - and how many people have re-opened long neglected sketch books during the last weeks. While that may be from the sublime to the ridiculous, I would like to tell the story of a remarkable achievement by a group of prisoners of war held in Britain in the 1940s.



About 500 Italian soldiers, captured in North Africa, were sent to Orkney at the beginning of 1942 to work on the 'Churchill Barriers', crude dams linking the islands and closing the gaps to prevent submarine incursion into the great fleet anchorage of Scapa Flow, the northern base of the Royal Navy.

According to the Geneva Convention, PoWs were not allowed to work on military projects so the dams were projected as causeways to link the south-eastern islands around Scapa Flow, a function they still perform today.

The prisoners set up camp on the tiny uninhabited island of Lamb Holm. Conditions were grim that cold winter in Camp 60 with fog and gales; accommodation was limited and morale was very low. To raise their spirits, in their spare time, they performed plays, followed their hobbies and even played billiards on tables made of spare concrete. One of the prisoners, Domenico Chiocchetti, fashioned the statue of St George using barbed wire offcuts and more concrete - surplus material was always available at the end of the working day.

In the summer of 1943 an Italian priest, Father Giocchino Giacobazzi, arrived at the camp and he suggested that the prisoners should be allowed to construct a chapel. This idea was supported by the camp governor, Major Thomas P Buckland, who arranged for two Nissen huts to be joined end-to-end.



Led by Chiocchetti, the project became the focus of the prisoners' lives. They lined the east end of the hut with plaster-board and, using materials donated by a local artist, Chiocchetti started to decorate the sanctuary. The result, as you can see, was magnificent. Another prisoner Giuseppe Palumbi, a blacksmith, made the wrought-iron screen from scrap; others used corned-beef tins to fabricate the lamps, while the font was made using a car exhaust. The success of this inspired the prisoners to continue and they lined the rest of the hut and then painted the walls to imitate brickwork. They covered the outside with concrete and built the west façade

complete with a belfry to effectively disguise the shape of the huts.

All this took time and the chapel, although in use, was still not quite finished when the Italians left the island in September 1944, but Chiocchetti was allowed to stay behind to complete his work. After the war the demolition team dismantling the camp refused to touch the chapel and it was left, quietly standing on its own, in its remote corner of Orkney.

By 1958, after it became increasingly sought by visitors, a preservation committee was formed and in 1960 the BBC funded a return visit by Chiocchetti to restore the paintwork. This was followed by a service of rededication attended by 200 Orcadians and broadcast on Italian radio. Domenico Chiocchetti came once more, with his wife, in 1964 and presented the 14 wooden stations of the cross. In 1992, 50 years after the Italians came to the island, there was a ceremony attended by eight of the former prisoners but unfortunately Chiocchetti was too ill to be there and he died in 1999.



At the time of the 1992 commemoration, Bruno Volpi, a former PoW wrote:

What is it that made prisoners of war work so feverishly with partial or totally inadequate means at their disposal? It was the wish to show to oneself first, and to the world then, that in spite of being trapped in a barbed wire camp, down in spirit, physically and morally deprived of many things, one could still find something inside that could be set free.

Now as many as 90,000 visitors come each year and pay a small fee to keep the chapel in immaculate condition. In 2015 a professional art restorer, Antonella Papa, offered to restore the frescoes and spent a month there, returning in 2017 to complete the work with the help of local volunteers. There is a small and discrete visitor centre but, mercifully, no tea room or shop to spoil

the wild and remote surroundings. The chapel looks out over the wide expanse of Scapa Flow with its associations of naval history during two world wars but now thankfully deserted.

When Rhondda and I visited the chapel in 2018 on, unusually for Orkney, a lovely sunny day we found it immensely moving.

My Art Collection: Part One, *Whimsy*

The reasons for buying art are many and varied but I admit to sometimes buying on a whim, or because a piece raises a smile.

One piece that I bought on a whim was when I was in Birmingham for some tedious conference in November 2015. I got bored and wandered off and found an exhibition sale organised by New Art West Midlands at the Gas Hall in the Central Museum and Art Gallery. I ended up buying two pieces, one of which is a favourite because it always makes me laugh at the sheer implausibility of the title: **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** [Chris Clinton, 2014]. Chris is a living artist who described it as 'a reclaimed dart board' and it's one of a series, including *Spiderman*, *Scarface* and *Playboy*. Chris likes to 'create artworks that refer obliquely to contemporary popular culture and our disregard for out-dated media'.



In the case of *TMNT*, the pop culture reference is its title and the 'out-dated media' is the material, duct tape, the kind you use when you're painting the skirting boards and trying to avoid splashing the adjacent wall. The tape was wound round and round to create a disk. The colours used to paint the 'dartboard' are redolent of the hues of the shells of turtles, as you see in the illustration. For those of you unfamiliar with the comic book reference, *TMNT* are four fictional teenaged anthropomorphic turtles named after Italian Renaissance artists Michelangelo, Leonardo, Donatello and Raphael. They have a catchphrase denoting surprise and pleasure: 'Cowabunga', which usefully sums up how I feel about this piece. I shall stop there as eyebrows begin to raise way beyond the traditional art-lover's fringe, but I'll also refer

you to the new advertising campaign for a well-known insurance brand that appears to have tired of Harvey Keitel and has now adopted the TMNTs. It pleases me to know my Turtle is still 'pop'.

For those of you interested in looking further: <http://www.artscouncilcollection.org.uk/artwork/spiderman>
<http://chrisclintonartist.blogspot.com/2013/12/reworked-coil-dartboards-reproduction.html>

Another piece I bought in 2017 that cheers me up is a **Michael Craig-Martin** print **Corkscrew** from his 2017 *Quotidian* series. It is one from a series of eight laser-etched black satin acrylic panels. The title is as you see, self-explanatory.

The reason the print cheers me is because it reminds me of me, as depicted in art. That is to say, there is a lot of black; it is a rudimentary female shape in profile; it is simple yet witty, and it likes a glass of wine. (*Guessed the collector yet?*)

Sir Michael Craig-Martin CBE RA is another living artist, known for his conceptual pieces that often reference current culture and everyday objects. You may have seen his work at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions, for



example, usually bright and bold backgrounds on which is etched a single item such as headphones, an easy chair, a mobile phone or an instrument.



I also have one of his seminal works on a mug. If you look closely, you can probably tell this is a well-used household object from the scratches on the paint.

<https://www.michaelcraigmartin.co.uk/prints>

The final piece I include in this review of the lighter-hearted side of my collection is a diptych entitled *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* by another living artist, **Raymond O'Daly**. I came across his work at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition 2019. Despite it being barely an hour into buyers' day at the exhibition, his works had already been hoovered up by someone quicker off the mark than I, so I had to contact him through his website and offer to buy any similar work he had for sale. Thankfully, he had several versions of the geometric diptych. I chose the blue predominant. The other variations on colour in the series were brown and yellow.

What Raymond did is deconstruct a famous artwork, namely, the Magritte (below), to create a 3D computer graphic of what he calls its 'binary code'. Segments of code are arranged into a colour chart assembled according to the flow of the original. You may be able to see the flow of a smoker's pipe in the geometry of the diptych. What initially drew me was the vibrancy of colours, familiarity of a steady pattern of those colours, and then the surprise of the title 'explaining' it all.



Raymond calls it 'art that plays with your mind'. I like the idea, and know I am drawn to off-the-wall titles that make me think: one of my pet hates is 'Untitled' against any work. If I were a more creative person I suppose the trick would be to make up a suitable name myself, but somehow I still always feel cheated, like the artist copped out at the last minute.

<http://www.raymondodaly.com/>
<http://www.raymondodaly.com/04about.htm>

Notes for this series of Raymond's work: <http://www.raymondodaly.com/05statement2.htm>

I hope you have enjoyed a short tour of my modest collection and I welcome questions or feedback. I don't mind if it's negative in the sense of horror at my weird and wonderful choices as long as you can explain what bothers you. **Sue Yeomans**

Let's Misbehave, Blenheim palace, March 2020 by Member, Ros Masters



Just before Lock-down I was fortunate to visit the 1920s exhibition at Blenheim. Comprising a series of tableaux that were set against the back-drop of the richly furnished public rooms, each one illustrated the great changes of the period. Little did I realise what lay ahead. Perhaps in time we will recognise there are comparisons to be made with the 2020s.

After the grief, sorrow and loss of the First World War, Britain saw enormous political, technical and social change. Since Edwardian times, rich American heiresses came to England captivated by the magnificent country-house estates. One such was Gladys Deacon who became the second wife of the 9th Duke of Marlborough.



A beautiful, intelligent, highly educated and charming girl, Gladys was painted by Giovanni Boldini and sculpted by Jacob Epstein. Read more in the new biography, *The Sphinx* by Hugo Vickers.



Lady Ottoline Morrell painted by her former lover Augustus John

Her circle of friends included the intelligentsia, artists and literati of her day. Her weekend house-parties were famous. Guests were entertained lavishly, changing their outfits at least five times a day.

Ottoline Morrell, a near neighbour, enjoyed much popularity. Her sitting room would see guests enjoying cocktails, often accompanied by smoking. After the emancipation that

began in the Great War, ladies were targeted by tobacco companies. To smoke using an elegant cigarette-holder became the height of sophistication.

Lytton Strachey, who was writing his *Eminent Victorians*, was a regular visitor as was Winston Churchill who had written the obituary for Rupert Brooke. A poignant telegram from Albert Brooke to his mother tells of the happy times he and Rupert had shared when in London together and explains how proud he was to have the poet as his brother, concluding: "We must look forward now, Mother and not look back."



Afternoon tea became a highlight, the exquisite china, glassware and silver enhanced by the pretty ensembles the guests wore.



Jazz became the sound-track to the 1920s and epitomised the cocktails, gaming and dance. Sedate waltzes were replaced by the Black Bottom, Shimmy and famous Charleston and these, along with card games and gambling, would be how guests concluded their evening before retiring to bed.

Sadly, Gladys Deacon did not remain at Blenheim. She and the Duke divorced and she was evicted in 1933. The only remaining signs of Gladys are two sphinxes bearing her features on the west terraces and mysterious blue eyes in the grand portico.

Sue McCallister's appeal for views on William Morris study days

'A big thank you to the members who expressed an interest in the William Morris and the Arts & Crafts Movement Study Days outlined in last month's ARTLOOK. It's good to know that post isolation there'll be opportunities to enjoy talks from experts on this fascinating subject – social distancing rules permitting. If you haven't already sent me comments on what you'd like to see on the programme, please do so now – your thoughts are important to us when developing the programme. Remember, stay alert – so only one G&T.'

Sue McAllister sm.mcallister@googlemail.com

Virtual Museums

As in our last issue, we list below some new links to exhibitions and art galleries who have produced videos to stimulate our art buds. Simply hold Control and click on the link to reach the website. In the second section we repeat those links from the last issue in case you didn't get round to seeing them.

New links

Villa Farnesina in Trastevere, Rome, is due to reopen in May but has provided us with a link to a digital view of *The Lodge of Cupid and Psyche*. Enter via www.villafarnesina.it and click on the English version. It reveals the stories of Cupid and Psyche at close range with details of the fable, the plants and the animals painted by Raphael, Giulio Romano and Giovanni da Udine.

The Herbert in Coventry offers an interesting weekly review of part of its collection – this one focuses on *Mediaeval Coventry*. https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/work-and-play-in-medieval-coventry/Agly7HxJ_SrRKg

The Royal Academy offers an hour and a half video of its 2013 exhibition *Manet Portraying Life*. Watch it over a long lunch and enjoy an excellent review of his paintings of French life.

http://email.wordfly.com/view?sid=MTYzNF82NjYyXzM0OTcwOV83MzAw&l=163e8846-6890-ea11-bd94-e61f134a8c87&utm_source=wordfly&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HD_FR_Weekly_Resilient_Art8_Manetd_Friends_070520&utm_content=version_A&sourceNumber=624355

The **Rijksmuseum's** restoration of its famous *The Night Watch* within the museum itself: follow the process online. <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/nightwatch> By clicking on the image you can enlarge to the extent you can see Rembrandt used four different colours for one eye of the Captain of the Watch. Who saw that when it was first unveiled?

In a very short video **V&A** Curator Marta Weiss introduces *Julia Margaret Cameron*, one of the most important and innovative portrait photographers of the 19th century. <https://youtu.be/IM8WuDL4TGc>

The **Barber Institute** has created an online programme, *Barber Home*, where projects will be posted each week providing a place of creativity and learning where people can engage with its collections and artists of today. www.barber.org.uk/barber-home/

A digital version of **Compton Verney's** exhibition *Fabric: Touch and Identity* features a series of short films exploring how material has influenced artists over the ages. comptonverney.org.uk

Treasures from Chatsworth is a 13-part video series produced by Sotheby's revealing the **Devonshire Collection**. High quality videos of 5 minutes or so highlight so many aspects from the Lucian Freud of the late Deborah Duchess of Devonshire to the photographic archive of Jorg Lewinski. <https://www.chatsworth.org/art-archives/treasures-from-chatsworth/sothebys-series/>

Past links

Picasso and Paper at the Royal Academy: video visit to the recent exhibition.

<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/video-exploring-picasso-and-paper-24>

Cranach at Compton Verney: overview of the postponed exhibition and conversation between contributing artists. <https://comptonverney.cmail20.com/t/r-e-jhkdlhjl-uuhuljos-g/>.

Staffordshire Hoard: short video on the display at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAAHrVsf8s&t=&utm_campaign=42472_AIYI_020420&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Art+Fund

Courtauld Gallery: a virtual tour including the splendid collection of the French Impressionists, produced prior to their closure for reconstruction. [https://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/about/3d-gallery-virtual-](https://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/about/3d-gallery-virtual-tour?utm_campaign=42472_AIYI_020420&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Art%20Fund&dm_i=5L9B,WRS,BDGLJ,35Q3,1)

[tour?utm_campaign=42472_AIYI_020420&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Art%20Fund&dm_i=5L9B,WRS,BDGLJ,35Q3,1](https://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/about/3d-gallery-virtual-tour?utm_campaign=42472_AIYI_020420&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Art%20Fund&dm_i=5L9B,WRS,BDGLJ,35Q3,1)

Restoration of self-portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi: a series of short National Gallery videos recounting the process. [https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/behind-the-scenes/film-series-restoring-artemisia-gentileschis-self-](https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/behind-the-scenes/film-series-restoring-artemisia-gentileschis-self-portrait?utm_campaign=42472_AIYI_020420&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Art%20Fund&dm_i=5L9B,WRS,BDGLJ,35QI,1)

[portrait?utm_campaign=42472_AIYI_020420&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Art%20Fund&dm_i=5L9B,WRS,BDGLJ,35QI,1](https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/behind-the-scenes/film-series-restoring-artemisia-gentileschis-self-portrait?utm_campaign=42472_AIYI_020420&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Art%20Fund&dm_i=5L9B,WRS,BDGLJ,35QI,1)

Kettles Yard: an image and text-based tour of a unique house and art collection in Cambridge.

http://tour.kettlesyard.co.uk/?utm_campaign=42472_AIYI_020420&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Art%20Fund&dm_i=5L9B%2CWRS%2CBDGLJ%2C36LB%2C1

The Ghent Altarpiece: an opportunity to see close-up the work undertaken on Van Eyck's masterpiece. <http://clostovaneyck.kikirpa.be/ghentaltarpiece/#home/sub=videos>

Google Art Project: virtual tours of many top galleries around the world; zoom-in on paintings; loads of information. <https://artsandculture.google.com/>

The Metropolitan Museum, New York: an extensive site presenting the wealth of this important collection. <http://metmuseum.org/>

The Herbert, Coventry: Sign up to receive regular *News from the Archives*.

<https://www.theherbert.org/news>

Leamington Museum & Art Gallery: *Making Histories* – the curator takes us through the responses of modern ceramics artists to items in their collection. A 16 minute video of an exhibition that cannot be visited.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIOJATvgaEI&feature=youtu.be>

Museums of Venice: Particularly look out for the Mocenigo museum of costume and perfume, a jewel of a palazzo close to San Stae vaporetto stop. <https://www.visitmuve.it/it/virtual-tour/>