

Art Friends Warwickshire

ARTLOOK

July 2020



Flow by Neil Canning

Dear Art Friend

We ought not be surprised that art has featured so much in the media over the last three months. Apart from what galleries are offering on-line, television has presented a variety, from the more off-beat Grayson Perry's *Art Club* through to the recent *Art in Persia* series on BBC4, from the opportunity to learn life drawing in real time to documentaries on museums in lockdown. Now comes the excellent news that museums and galleries are allowed to open and already a few exhibitions are re-opening, some briefly, some extended significantly. The promise of Government money to support the arts is also welcome news but the devil is in the detail and sadly some organisations will not survive.

What does a visit to a museum entail today? Booked time-slots to avoid crowding; maybe exit time slots too. One-way viewing paths and 2 metre distancing. So, no more bunching in front of 'must-see' paintings but equally a gentle encouragement from gallery staff to keep us flowing. No more audio guides – a pity as they can add so much to the experience. Perhaps more people will buy the guide in advance to read at home before the visit. Waldemar Januszczak's enthusiastic review of a recent visit to the re-opened National Gallery explains how each half-hour route takes you through one of three collections with plenty of time to enjoy the art in peace. He highly recommends the rejuvenated central gallery with its roof opened up and decoratively restored. The Royal Academy has opened up again but only Thursday to Sunday with timed tickets.

The Herbert in Coventry will re-open on 3 August and Compton Verney has already done so. Art Friends Warwickshire is already in conversation with galleries and currently discussing with Compton Verney the possibility of organising an event with lectures, linked to the extended Cranach and Fabric exhibitions, for some time in October. This would replace the planned tea at Shottery as social distancing would not be possible at the church hall. For next spring, Brian is exploring a visit to Perrycroft, a splendid Arts and Crafts house and garden set amidst the Malvern Hills. More on both once details are known.

Visit to Strawberry Hill House - 23 September 2020

This trip is still scheduled to take place but yet to be confirmed. I have heard from Johnsons, the coach company who would provide the transport for our party. They have devised restricted seating plans and conditions of travel complying with current Government requirements. We would use a 63-seater executive coach, ensuring that individuals can be seated appropriately. Passengers will be expected to wear face masks which will be available from the driver. Government rules now allow museums to open, but Strawberry Hill House have not informed me of the arrangements they will have in place. As soon as they have replied to my enquiry, I will notify all applicants directly, well before 9 August.

Brian Phillips

The following potential events are still live but await Government advice on distancing which will determine venues. Whatever we suggest, it will be with the safety of our members and gallery staff at the forefront of our mind.

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*

ARTLOOK continues to stimulate response and this issue contains a follow-up to Chris Barney's article on the Italian chapel on Orkney from our Belgian member, Odette Himpe, who many of you know from our annual holidays.

'Art tours remembered' is a theme for two contributions: Ken Hope recalls a 1970s visit to Soviet-era Leningrad to see the Matisse in the Hermitage; more recently in 2019 John Cole commemorated the 500th anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci with a tour that straddled Italy and France. Do you have an exhibition experience to share?

Following Sue Yeomans' home gallery, David and Sally Howells were encouraged to reveal their own fascinating collection of art from paintings to ceramics.

Finally, despite our frustrated efforts to organise fund-raising events, you have been so generous and we would like to thank those members and supporters who have waived ticket fees and offered other donations in anticipation of future events, amounting to some £600 for the year to date, which is 50% more in donations than we received in the whole of 2019 under the auspices of Art Fund. Thank you and we look forward to delivering those events as soon as we can.

Dianne Page, Editor

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Art Friends Warwickshire Committee:

Brian Phillips, *Chairman*,

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

Matisse Memory by member, Ken Hope

It was in the second half of the 1970s and, of course, still in the time of the Soviet Union.

'You took your first wife to Leningrad so now you can take me?'

'But I was buying a new car at that time and the Jules Verne holiday was on special offer.'

'So?'

'OK, we'll go to Leningrad.'

'You'll need to take a hat. It gets very cold there.'

'I never wear a hat!'

Leningrad looked magical when we arrived. Everywhere was white and covered with snow but the temperature was minus 29 degrees C. So, I bought a fur hat. As it was a nice evening, Ann and I opted to look around the city centre, walking distance from the hotel. The roads were quiet and the route was through an area of high-rise workers' dwellings, all looking alike - as did the roads. After over half an hour, I thought it was possible that I had missed the turning to the city centre!

Interestingly, we could hear no footsteps of a person assigned to follow us – not a soul anywhere around. So, no one who we could ask for directions - even if they understood English. Fortunately, my sense of direction returned and I managed to find our way back. As far as the Soviets keeping watch on us, if we didn't go out with the group, a phone call was made to our room to ensure we were there!

On one day, our Jules Verne rep offered a 90-minute guided tour around the Hermitage and its wonderful galleries. When I was there before, I had the frustrating experience of being shown only what the guide wanted us to see and only for as long as the guide wanted to spend. Enquiries established that we could visit it independently and stay as long as we wanted. So, we took a local bus and got in easily for a lot less money. Returning to the hotel in rush-hour by bus was a totally different experience and another story!

There is an unbelievable amount of wonderful art in there – it must be one of the largest single display areas in the world. After quite a few hours around many of the galleries, we were getting tired when we found a small staircase leading to an attic area. It wasn't clear what was up there as there were no English language signs but having come all that way, we didn't want to miss anything so up we went.



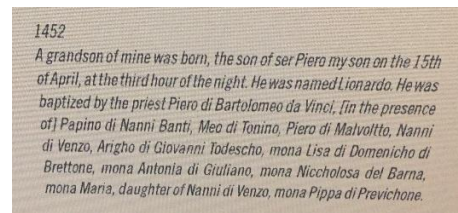
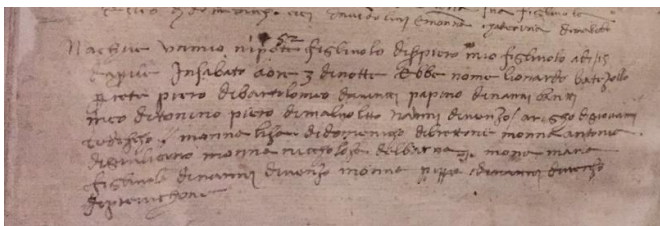
Matisse *The Dance* and *Music* (socially distanced players), 1910

It turned out to be a special room devoted to Matisse and included two very large and breath-taking panels, one titled *The Dance* and the other *Music*, both painted 1910. To use a theatrical term, the impact of the 'reveal' of seeing these two paintings each over 12 x 8 feet in such a small room stopped us in our tracks. They, above all else, made that whole Russian visit truly memorable for us. However, that impact couldn't be reproduced by the images here. Looking at The Hermitage website, it appears that they are now in a larger room which we think would reduce the impact. So glad we didn't miss that opportunity over forty years ago.

Celebrating Leonardo by supporter, John Cole

In 2019 Italy and France marked the 500th year since Leonardo da Vinci died. Martin Randall Travel organised a rather special itinerary: tracing the Renaissance artist's life by dashing from Tuscany, Milan, and Paris (for the Louvre mega-exhibition) to the tranquil Loire valley, where the 67-year old died in a handsome château in Amboise, a prized guest of King Francis I.

We started outside the small hill town of Vinci, in a house (the supposed birthplace) that once **was** owned by his family – but, unfortunately, only decades after his rural childhood! A permanent exhibition in the castellated medieval town hall, the Museo Leonardiano, houses a large collection of convincing replicas of Leonardo's technical designs. Temporarily, it also displayed the original baptismal document - discovered by a Florentine researcher in the 1930s - that recorded details of his date of birth in 1452; he was born out of wedlock. One snippet of the display suggested that the high-status of his lawyer father enabled Leonardo as a child to wander at leisure through the undulating Tuscan landscape, drawing natural phenomena. Otherwise, the peasant mother, Caterina, would have employed him in the fields.



In Florence, we toured the Uffizi: one 'psychological' variation from the usual narrative account hinted that Leonardo, now a young and extraordinarily talented painter (trained in Verrocchio's studio) still begrudged the absence in his childhood years of his father, Ser Piero da Vinci. So, nowhere in Leonardo's biblical paintings or cartoon drawings does Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, appear with any prominence. Also in our Florence stay, a brief dip into the Medici's Palazzo Vecchio focused just on the 'lost' and never completed 1503 murals painted by Leonardo (Battle of Anghiari) in competition with the younger Michelangelo (Battle of Cascina). Are they still there behind Mannerist Vasari's later giant frescoes? A notice left by Vasari encourages us: 'seek and ye may find', *Cerca Trova*.

On to Milan, where Leonardo had enjoyed the aristocratic court life more than the hard-nosed commerciality of Florence. In the ruling family's castle, the Castello Sforzesco, Leonardo was entrusted (despite his infuriating slow pace) with decorating a ducal private apartment, now rediscovered and partly renovated. A very nifty but temporary high-tech audio-visual treatment completed a convincing transformation of the *Sala delle Asse*, an intricate decoration of intertwined trees.



In contrast, the refectory of Sta. Maria delle Grazie is pared back to the surviving essentials. The main insight gained in front of the huge unfinished *Last Supper* mural was that, while everyone goes straight to the front for a close-up, by far the best view is at the back of the long dining room. Here sat the Dominican Abbot and his weekly Milanese guest, Duke Ludovico il Moro, enjoying the best perspective view and the most convincing illusion of space in the fresco that is framed by a painted coffered ceiling and painted tapestries. Sadly, Leonardo's experimental mix of tempera and oil had started to disintegrate soon after completion. One vignette: in the adjacent mausoleum church, the architect Bramante would brainstorm with Leonardo the merits of centralised churches, recorded on doodles in his notebooks.

Paris was the inevitable place to hold the most ambitious exhibition. The Louvre has the largest single holding of Leonardo's panel paintings while the biggest collection of his surviving notebooks is at the Institut de France. *Léonard de Vinci* included four of the Louvre's paintings while the *Mona Lisa* remained in her bomb-proof, glass-fronted box facing the crowds. Also present were *St Jerome* from the Vatican, *The Musician* from the Ambrosiana in Milan, the *Benois Madonna* from St. Petersburg and two versions of the *Madonna of the Yarnwinder* (one from the Scottish National Gallery, the other privately owned). An innovation was that each painting was matched by a product of the latest technology: an infrared reflectogram. Ghostly images revealed the under-drawing beneath the painted surface and established details that were changed or removed in the final painting. The *Yarnwinder* under-drawings showed traces of a much busier composition.



The whole exhibition was exhilarating. The sensational quality, especially of his drawings, will linger in the memory. But the show's layout was complex and bewildering. The visitor started with Verrocchio's imposing larger-than-life sculpture, *Christ and Doubting Thomas* from Orsanmichele in Florence. This was surrounded by ten stunning drapery drawings, some by young Leonardo, some by his teacher. The extensive opening sections were labelled 'Light, Shade, Relief'. They mixed paintings, drawings and the small notebooks, hard-worked objects in which he explored his scientific and visual analyses across an astonishing range of interests. The core of the show – housed in the Hall Napoléon – was entitled 'Liberty' and focused on Leonardo's revolutionary 'brainstorm' drawing style, including studies for the entrancing, so-called *Madonna of the Cat* and the maelstrom-like studies for the *Battle of Anghiari*. He superimposed different versions of his subject, in his unique approach to '*componimento inculto*', an intuitive (or untidy) composition. The exhibition wall-panels attempted to explain this innovation in drawing technique but the visitor could not dwell long in the jostling crowd.



Transferring to the Loire valley proved a welcome period of calm in the week-long tour. Leonardo's last residence, the Château du Clos Lucé just outside Amboise, now features a recreated bedroom where he died and a well-equipped workshop that he and his assistants used. It also houses some of the machines he invented. But the setting somehow does not feel authentic. In contrast, the Château Royal d'Amboise, the hub of the town, exudes Valois might and legitimacy. A small chapel has survived, where Leonardo rests and the visitor can ponder on the nature of genius. However, I couldn't get out of my head an inconsequential memory of the young French king, Charles VIII, who (a little earlier) had had the Italian peninsula at his feet, but who suddenly died after bumping his head on a low beam in the royal fortress.

The tour was led by Dr Michael Douglas-Scott who offered many insights, delivered with panache.

Our Art Collection by Members David and Sally Howells

We have a collection of art, I suppose. By that I mean that we have acquired various 'artistic' objects over the years. There has been no special plan, something that applies to almost all of us. What we have reflects our changing tastes, of course, but also the opportunities that presented themselves, the journeys we have taken, and of course what we felt able to afford.

For convenience let us divide what we have into sections: prints, pictures, glass and ceramics, and some oriental items.



Prints are great. They enable us all to enjoy good art, sometimes by great artists, at affordable prices. The oldest item we have is also the earliest acquired, in 1972. It is a seventeenth century etching of a man in profile by the Dutch artist Jan Lievens. Fast-forwarding, we have an amusing and mildly suggestive etching by Gilray, *The Graces in a High Wind*. With those two exceptions all the other prints are modern, starting with a 1979 slightly surrealist screenprint *Leaning on a Landscape* (below) by Patrick Hughes, which is very much of its time. This and other works were bought when we lived in London. After moving first to Sheffield and then to Warwickshire we bought from various sources, especially the much-loved Stour Gallery, then owned by Sarah Stoten. The prints are in various styles, but mostly abstract. The artists include Bridget Riley (*Fête* below), Sandra Blow, Donald Hamilton Fraser (*Beachscape*, left), Bruce McLean, Neil Canning (three works – see *Flow* front page) and local hero

Terry Frost (two works). They vary in size but most are brightly coloured. We love them.

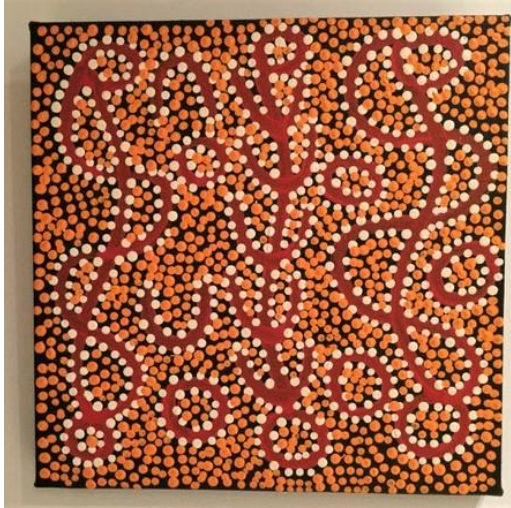


Leaning on a Landscape by Patrick Hughes



Fête by Bridget Riley

They are complemented by a small number of original paintings, of which I highlight three. Our current favourite is *High Summer, Radnorshire* by Seren Bell, bought from the Fosse Gallery in Stow on the Wold. Mostly but not completely black and white in pen and ink and pastel, it features a group of sheep who have turned to look at the viewer. Positioned near the front door, it attracts a lot of interest from visitors. In the same position before a re-hang was *Still Pool, Brittany* by John Hammond, bought at the Montpelier Gallery in Stratford. This is a quiet work in acrylic paint which was, again, much liked when hung prominently. Most people feel more comfortable in commenting on figurative than on abstract work. That is, when they comment at all.



The third painting is one we bought in Fremantle in Western Australia. It is a small native Australian work, *Mina Mina Dreaming* (left) which we bought after visiting the impressive Art Gallery of Western Australia, which has an outstanding collection of native Australian art. An abstract, it consists of spots, circles and lines on a black background and depicts journeys and meetings of the aboriginal community.

The collection of glass is quite varied. The oldest is a simple eighteenth century drinking glass with a twist in the stem. There are several examples of modern studio glass, including one by Peter Layton, possibly the leading exponent. That was also sold by The Montpellier Gallery. Prominent on our dining table is a large contemporary dish bought from a dealer opposite

the Art Institute in Chicago and brought back very carefully on the flight home. A small but beautiful orange pot was bought in the Chelsea Arts Fair and is by Gillies Jones, who still produce in Pickering, Yorkshire.



One of our favourites is a striking Danish floor vase, standing 30cm high (left) which beautifully illustrates Danish taste of the 1960s. This was also bought in Stow in the Wold. Hanging on the wall is an unusual and striking glasswork, long and thin, by Will Shakespeare (no spelling error). This is a crowd-pleaser. As in most households there is also a long tail of smaller glass items bought or inherited.

Complementing the glass are a number of ceramics. Several are contemporary, including one by John Leach, grandson of Bernard. There are also a few antiques, including a Royal Doulton tobacco jar of 1907 and a collection of cups and saucers going back to early nineteenth century. That collection is displayed in an Edwardian cabinet, once worth something but now not.

Lastly, the oriental pieces. The most obvious is a Japanese woodblock print by Hiroshige, one of the best-known nineteenth century exponents of a style which influenced Van Gogh and others. It is 'Mount Fuji and Mount Ashigara viewed from Numazu Station in Clearing Weather following a Snowfall', published in 1855. I well remember buying it on my only trip to Japan. The wooden frame is curved and distinctive. Although one of the most interesting works we have, it passes quite unnoticed. The other three oriental pieces are Chinese. The first was bought from the Art Gallery in Shanghai, put together in its present form with advice from the New York Met. It is a modern reproduction of a deep blue Xing monochrome vase, striking in its simplicity. The second is a late 19th century pot with characteristic blue artwork, possibly for use by a mandarin. Last but not least is a crude but well-preserved utilitarian pot. Its claim to fame is that it spent about three hundred years under the waves, being part of the cargo of a Dutch East Indiaman which sank in the South China Sea.

We have some pieces of sculpture, indoors and in the garden, but they can await another occasion.

One final thought. We all want to support art and artists, especially at times like these. Support for museums, art education and aspiring artists is worthwhile, of course. The key thing, however, is simply to buy the work of established artists. At the high end we have the rich. At the opposite end we have the many who buy inexpensively. Both are important. Even more important is buying in the middle, say in the range £1000 to £10,000. That is what enables artists to make a living and art to thrive.

From Antwerp ... to Orkney and Genoa by Brian Phillips

I have received an email from Odette Himpe, an AFW supporter in Antwerp who some of you will have met on our Art Fund summer tours, concerning the chapel built by Italian PoWs which member, Chris Barney introduced to us in **ARTLOOK 6**, (<https://artfriendsworks.uk/ARTLOOK/>). Odette studies Italian and she mentioned the article to her class. You may recall from Chris's article that the chapel has a painting above the altar featuring the Madonna holding baby Jesus clutching an olive twig, known as the *Madonna of the Olives*. A fellow student had seen a blog about the original *Madonna of the Olives*. (<https://dearmissfletcher.wordpress.com/2018/10/09/la-madonna-dellolivo/>)

From the blog we learn that the original painting was created by Nicolò Barabino. (1831–1891) and is quite a tourist attraction in the church of Santa Maria della Cella in Samperdarena, a suburb of Genoa. Barabino was an academic painter of religious and historical subjects, active in Florence and Genoa. The great-grandfather of a correspondent on the blog was Nicolo Armanino, a lithographer who knew Barbarino well and reproduced many of the artist's works. Domenico Chiocetti, the Italian PoW, would have had one of his memoriam cards with the printed image. However, the Orkney artist made some changes to the original: he did not paint a mass of olive branches but did include the small twig in Jesus' hand. Also, he added some *putti*. Barbarino could never have anticipated a presence in Britain's northern isles.



Madonna of the Olives in Orkney



Madonna of the Olives in Genoa

Artistic Links

Some new links to sites to interest and amuse. For computers, simply hold Control and click on the link to reach the website. For tablets, just click. In the second section we repeat some of the links from the last issue in case you didn't get round to seeing them.

Six films on making art: Practical tips from Royal Academicians including Anne Desmet whose work I admire showing how to turn one of her superb line drawings into a woodblock. Something I would never attempt but a fascinating six-minute video to watch. And watercolourist, Christopher Le Brun's instruction: don't be frightened, just do it. And if it doesn't work, tear it up and do another. If only it were that simple.

https://artsandculture.google.com/story/1wVB3igIOTCI_Q?sourcenummer=624630

If active participation is what you miss, the Royal Academy's **Life Drawing** class could be for you. In just over an hour and a half, the class is hosted by Artistic Director Tim Marlow and the artist, writer and broadcaster Dr Sarah Simblet, a specialist tutor of anatomy. You hear from experts on how artists such as Leonardo da Vinci honed their drawing skills through studying the human body – and, as an extra feature, they also take a look at the art of equine anatomy... with a special four-legged guest. [https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/watch-life-drawing-live-anatomy-](https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/watch-life-drawing-live-anatomy-class?utm_source=wordfly&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HD_FR_Weekly_Resilient_Art10_d_Friends_270520&utm_content=version_A&sourceNumber=624469)

[class?utm_source=wordfly&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HD_FR_Weekly_Resilient_Art10_d_Friends_270520&utm_content=version_A&sourceNumber=624469](https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/watch-life-drawing-live-anatomy-class?utm_source=wordfly&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HD_FR_Weekly_Resilient_Art10_d_Friends_270520&utm_content=version_A&sourceNumber=624469)

I shall miss the Royal Academy's **Summer Exhibition** this year but was amused by Grayson Perry's whistle-stop tour of the 250th show. Enjoyable 8 minutes of highlights. https://artsandculture.google.com/project/meet-the-royal-academy/step-inside?e_sheets=meet-the-royal-academy:og3xaxk

The **Courtauld** closed temporarily in 2018 for a major overhaul and fortuitously set up a virtual tour of its galleries. Spend a moment to learn how to navigate the rooms and then enjoy this wonderful collection. <https://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/about/3d-gallery-virtual-tour>

The Times gave Compton Verney's Cranach show a double-page feature. I hope this link works as I am a subscriber and it may not work for all.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ec1c2ae2-bafc-11ea-84a6-a03a9956ea0a?shareToken=27d9c08dac57b9305100c107dde030a9>

The exhibition I really want to visit this year is at the V&A, **Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk**. It has been postponed but if you search YouTube V&A Kimono exhibition, there is a series of five 6-minute curator videos depicting these luscious garments and explaining their evolution.

Past links

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?

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/

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/>