



Synopsis of lectures 2013-2014

6 September 2013

But is it Art?

If this question gives you food for thought you have plenty in common with artists, thinkers and educators, not just in our present time but throughout Western Art History. Plato was one of the first to agonise over the question. It can seem particularly pressing now that anything, and everything, seems to go. We agree that a Raphael Madonna is art, but argue about Tracy Emin's *My Bed*. Can they both be art, and, if so, what do they have in common? Is *My Bed* conceptual art or just a 'con'? Can we agree on a definition of art, or are we at the mercy of Nicholas Penny, Nick Serota and Charles Saatchi? Join **Lyn Gibson** to shake up some preconceptions and face up to some prejudices; to ask: "But...is it art?"

11 October 2013

Are You Sitting Comfortably: The History of the Chair from Ancient to Modern

This lecture traces the development of the chair in terms of its construction and style from ancient times through to the 19th century and will hopefully surprise you with just how much there is to reveal about such a common item of furniture. The role of the chair as a symbol of power and authority in both religious and courtly ritual will be examined, as well as its social significance in a more vernacular setting. **Janusz Karczewski-Slowikowski's** lecture seeks to explain furniture in terms of the skills and materials employed in its design and construction and also its socio-economic significance. Have you ever wondered what the phrase "sitting on your money" refers to? This lecture will tell you!

8 November 2013

Windsor Castle: Fire, Restoration and the Queen

The fire at Windsor Castle in 1992 is described and illustrated, together with the remarkable restoration which was completed five years later. The Queen commissioned watercolour paintings of the Castle after the fire and after the restoration. Many of these are shown. **Oliver Everett** illustrates the way that the Queen and Prince Philip use Windsor Castle, including Garter Day processions and the visits of foreign Heads of State.

13 December 2013

The Twelve Days of Christmas

Peter Medhurst will show how the celebration of the period following Christmas can be traced back several millennia, and to at least two cultures - neither of them Christian. One of them is southern, the Roman feast of Kalends on 1st January, the other northern, the Nordic festivals of Yuletide surrounding the celebrations of the winter solstice. However, Pope Julius 1 decided to subvert the gluttony, drunkenness and sun worship to Christian purposes and, by choosing 25th December to celebrate the birth of Christ, neatly bridged these cultures and paved the way for future Christmas jollifications. And so it is that some of our modern Christmas customs and carols bear reference to traditions that have little to do with the birth of Christ.

10 January 2014

'A Child of Six could do It!' Cartoonist on Modern Art

Ever since the mid-nineteenth century modern art has been a popular subject for satire. Constantly changing and often seemingly bizarre, it is an irresistible target for a host of cartoonists, humourous writers and wise-guys. Some artists, such as Gustave Courbet, welcomed their attention in the belief that there was no such thing as bad publicity; others, like Jackson Pollock, were hurt by what they took to be an attack on their integrity. **Barry Venning** shows how the cartoonists themselves could be funny, cruel and, at times, extremely perceptive. From the French humourist, Cham, through the work of the gifted staff on the *New Yorker*, to the Daily Telegraph's brilliant cartoonist Matt, they provide an absorbing, illuminating and, above all, a funny, revealing and sidelong view of 150 years of modern art.

14 February 2014

Out of the Blue: The Story of Blue in Art

Have you ever wondered where the blue in medieval illuminated manuscripts came from, or how glaziers of our Gothic cathedrals made their blue glass? The Ancient Britons tattooed their bodies in blue dye, and two thousand years later in a Parisian art gallery Yves Kline, in a public



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performance, painted his nude models blue and dragged them across the canvasses. Why doesn't the Virgin Mary wear green? Why is Krishna painted blue? These are some of the questions **Alexandra Drysdale** will be addressing. The story of blue takes us to lapis lazuli mines in Afghanistan, the indigo dyers in Africa, and the studios of Titian, Vermeer and Chagall. As a professional artist Lexa pays special attention to contemporary artists who use blue, such as James Turrell's "Skyspaces" in an inactive volcano, Bill Viola's videos in Durham Cathedral and Ann Hamilton's "Blue Jeans" installation. Join Lexa in an hour of blue-sky thinking.

14 March 2014

The Cult of the South Pacific: From Cook to Gauguin

Leslie Primo will look at the enduring Western obsession with (and invention of) the so called 'exotic' or 'noble savage', starting with the first discovery of the Island of Tahiti in 1767. It charts the impact, through painted images of the island and its people, of the English and European influence in this part of the world. Looking through the eyes not only of Captain Cook and those who came before him, but also through the eyes of the artists that accompanied these pioneering voyages, from the 18th, through the 19th and into the early 20th century with the images of Gauguin, the lecture will look at how romanticised depictions of the island and its peoples by artists such as William Hodges, Benjamin West, John Webber, John Cleveley and Paul Gauguin not only bolstered these views in the minds of Europeans but helped to invent and to perpetuate the Western notion of the exotic and the myth of paradise.

11 April 2014

Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe

Relics, the bodily or physical remnants of saints, were at the centre of medieval religious activity. **Anna Harnden** explores the dazzling and mysterious reliquaries that were made to contain them. Precious metals such as gold, enamel, gemstones and rare textiles were used to announce the relics' importance to the faithful. Tracing the evolution of the practice from early Christianity to the Reformation, the lecture focuses on the medieval period, considering the materials and techniques and the variety of forms and purposes as well as the craftsmen, the patrons and the devout. Drawing from examples that the lecturer has had the privilege to handle and work with, this lecture aims to provide an insight into these objects.

9 May 2014

Art and Architecture along the Silk Road

In the 1st century BC, the Chinese Han began to extend their trade with the West. The trading routes that opened across Central Asia, later known as The Silk Road, led to the development of cities and allowed the transmission of goods such as glassware and ceramics, as well as ideas and religious beliefs. **Angela Smith** begins with an explanation of The Silk Road as an historical phenomenon; and will consider who the traders were and the type of commodities they carried, including glassware and ceramics. A survey will follow as we consider some of the sites along the Silk Road including Sogdian earth-built cities, Persian carved petroglyphs and the Mogao caves at Dunhuang.

13 June 2014

Wonder Works and the Art of the Illusionist

From the beginning of time the fascination with magic and the impossible has been widespread. Egypt was the cradle of magic. Sorcerer Priests used scientific principles to create illusions for the edification of worship and to hold power over the people. Where there was power there was magic. Magicians were known as 'Jongleurs' lest they be sentenced to death for 'witchcraft and conjuration' under the edicts of Henry VIII. With the emergence of the Music Hall, magic gained a new respectability and audiences flocked in their thousands to watch the extraordinary feats of the Great Illusionists, giving birth to legendary tricks – 'pulling a rabbit from a hat' and 'sawing a lady in half'. And if magicians guarded their secrets with their lives, how was the Magic Circle ever formed? **Bertie Pearce's** 'Wonder Workers and the Art of the Illusionist' is a whistle stop tour of the history of mystery from 3000 BC to the 21st century and be careful! – You might be amazed and bewitched.

The Committee hope you will enjoy the lectures planned for you in the year