

NEWSLETTER

The Arts Society of West Suffolk



Next Meeting: Tuesday 2nd November 2021

A Design Revolution: Jewellery and Metalwork 1855-1940 **Helen Ritchie**

An overview of the work of this dynamic period of design, featuring key historicist, neo-Gothic, Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau and Modern jewellery and metalwork, beautifully illustrated with works from the Fitzwilliam Museum. Helen Ritchie is responsible for researching, interpreting and curating modern and contemporary Applied Arts at the Fitzwilliam Museum. She was the sole curator of the exhibition *Designers and Jewellery 1850-1940: Jewellery and Metalwork from the Fitzwilliam Museum* and author of the accompanying catalogue. Previously, Helen worked with a broad range of applied arts at the Royal Collection Trust, Christie's, Harrogate Museums and the British Museum. She studied at Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge and the University of Arts, London. Helen is a Trustee of the North West Essex Collection Trust (on display at the Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden) and an accredited Arts Society lecturer.

Our **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** was held immediately before this month's meeting when the following officers were elected:

Vice President: Sue Barrett

Chairman: Tony Callender

Vice Chairman/ Membership Secretary: Diana Hollins

Hon. Treasurer: Jeremy Barrett

Details of the whole committee may be found on the back of this year's programme.

VISITS: The **BLETCHLEY PARK** visit on 12th October was well worth the wait! Postponed twice because of Covid, this trip was still well attended and much enjoyed by all participants. Many thanks to Julia Eeles for organising such an interesting visit.

VISIT TO THE GUILDHALL, BURY ST EDMUNDS
TUESDAY 30th NOVEMBER 2021

Cost £12 to include cream tea
Contact Julia Eeles on 01359 240838 for further details

Artists' Illness and Creativity: Dr James Grant, our speaker this month, presented some interesting examples of illness affecting artists' work. His perception is that illness may cause cortical neurons, which carry information and signals to the brain, to bifurcate. One branch seems to engender the creation of art strangely dissimilar to the norm, while the other may continue in a more familiar style.

Albrecht Durer was proud of being a great engraver, carefully signing and dating his work. These dates make it possible for us to track the effects of health on his art. His early work includes handsome self portraits and beautiful depictions of Christ, but a year-long illness in 1503 resulted in portraits of suffering and atypically delicate watercolours of medicinal plants. By 1520, still in ill health, his gaunt self portrait showed him pointing to his enlarged spleen.

Francisco de Goya was a confident artist in Madrid, commissioned in 1780 to create royal tapestries depicting popular pastoral scenes. He aspired to become a portrait painter, but when an undiagnosed illness, possibly syphilis, weakened and deafened him, his art changed dramatically often depicting horror and demons. However, he was still capable of producing classical art, as evidenced by his two contrasting portraits of the Duchess of Alba. Later, when he barely survived yellow fever, his art became even darker with disturbing images.

URGENTLY NEEDED!

Honorary Secretary
or someone to take minutes of committee meetings
Please contact **Tony Callender on 01379 651259**
for further information.

Frida Kahlo, considered to be the greatest symbolist of the 20C, suffered an horrific bus accident in 1925, breaking her back in several places. Confined to bed for many months she painted numerous self-portraits focussing on her pain and suffering. Pain continued throughout her life, bleakly affecting her paintings, but she also depicted herself more joyfully in her colourful Mexican background surrounded by folk lore, flowers and monkeys.

Richard Dadd, a potentially great painter, was admitted to the Royal Academy of Arts in 1837 at the age of 20. Mainly painting classic Victorian beauties, he also had a great interest in fairies. In 1843, having developed paranoid schizophrenia, he stabbed his father to death and fled to France where he stabbed a Frenchman. He was brought back to England and confined in a mental hospital. He continued to produce talented portraits but also obsessively created strange minutely detailed fairyland scenes, possibly attempting to bring order into the chaos of his psychotic state.



Louis Wain, possibly the greatest cat artist, created prolific anthropomorphic portrayals of animals. After the death of his mother in 1918 he became paranoid and was admitted to a mental hospital for the rest of his life. Early cat paintings were lifelike and exact but, as his mental state deteriorated, the cats became more distorted, strangely coloured and surreal. Minuscule details in these fantastic paintings suggest a resilient effort to retain order.

Physical or mental illness undoubtedly resulted in a new creative direction for all the above artists.