



Friends of York Art Gallery

NEWSLETTER - SUMMER 2019

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

I am pleased to report that membership of the Friends is remaining steady, with losses through relocations and mortality being offset by people moving to York. The increase in memberships from people living in the surrounding communities in the past year is particularly noteworthy. When you meet someone who is new to this region please introduce the Friends - we need all the Friends we can get!



The website www.friendsofyorkartgallery.co.uk is for many members a point of introduction and reference for what is happening, be it Gallery exhibitions, lectures or trips. The website is (while remaining live) currently undergoing its first updating in four years to make it more relevant and current in respect of user-accessibility and information.

We are also doing our best to create awareness for the activities of the Friends, both in support of York Art Gallery, the increasingly popular Lunchtime Talks on Wednesdays and in events such as the trips to Glyndeboune, Dublin and the quarterly Gallery Dines Out luncheons (with speaker). The next Events Schedule in September is looking forward to March 2020, providing more specific details of the speakers, their subjects, exhibitions and visits (such as to Bath) than we may have achieved in the past. Attendance at talks is well up in numbers as are the subscriptions for chargeable events, so to avoid disappointment please respond to the booking notices at your earliest convenience. Moreover, the introduction of on-line payments earlier this year has gone smoothly, making participation easier for those who don't normally use cheques.

You may wish to share your email address with us. It helps keep the Friends' operating costs low, and an exchange of messages can usually be timely for both parties. Compliance with current data protection regulation is assured. Since late 2018 this information is requested at the time of becoming a member, but as an existing Friend you are invited to communicate your email address to the membershipsecretary@friendsofyorkartgallery.co.uk

As you will read in this Newsletter 'conservation' has been the most significant contribution in financial terms made by the Friends to the Gallery in recent years, resulting in a material increase in the number of works of art that can be on display. If there are any suggestions that you may have for display, please do contact the Committee. Your Committee members meet regularly with the Curators, and we are always looking to projects for the future.

When you receive this Newsletter I will have six months left to serve on the Committee. I retire in line with the Constitution at the next AGM. It will be seven personally very rewarding years of experience in a subject where I had no professional background, and I have learned a great deal about art and this community. Please give some thought to getting involved; the Committee will be inviting new members to apply early in 2020. In the interim please don't hesitate to contact me for an introductory chat!

PETER GIBBARD

RUSKIN, TURNER AND THE STORM CLOUD

York Art Gallery, 29 March - 23 June 2019

Suzanne Fagence Cooper and Richard Johns are to be congratulated on an absorbing and distinguished exhibition which marks the bicentenary of Ruskin's birth in 1819. It has garnered laudatory reviews in the UK and around the world and has also been a popular success, boosting attendance figures for the Gallery. It was over three years in the making and the quality of the show was testimony to the care taken with every aspect of its makeup.

John Ruskin was a complicated and many-sided figure. He was the only child of wealthy parents, his father being the largest importer of sherry into Victorian England, as one of the two partners of Domecq Sherry. His mother was a fervent Christian and by the time he was in his teens Ruskin knew the bible



J.M.W. Turner, *The Dormitory and Transept of Fountains Abbey - Evening*, from the York Art Gallery Collection, on show at the Exhibition following conservation treatment funded by the Friends.

by heart. He came to national prominence in 1843 with the publication of *Modern Painters* in which he presented Turner as a greater and more truthful interpreter of landscape than his much-admired forbears in the Western tradition like Claude Lorraine. This immediately established him, at the age of 24, as the foremost art critic of his generation. He went on to promote the young pre-Raphaelite painters, applauding their meticulous observation of nature and wrote four more volumes of *Modern Painters* over the next seventeen years, *Volume 5* appearing in 1860.

The exhibition examined in detail Turner's influence on Ruskin. Ruskin never knew Turner well but was a keen collector of his work. Of his *Constance*, a beautiful watercolour now in the York Art Gallery collection, Ruskin wrote:

.... the day I bought that drawing home to Denmark Hill was one of the happiest in my life.

Ruskin kept it until the day he died in 1900 and it hung in his bedroom above his bed.

But from the 1870s Ruskin's world entered a darker phase. He was probably what today would be called 'bipolar' and endured periods of depression and psychotic episodes. His first seriously disabling attack was in 1878 and the exhibition opened with Hubert von Herkomer's sensitive watercolour portrait of 1879 of Ruskin's drawn face after enduring this first extended period of psychotic illness. He had, in addition, become fundamentally opposed to Victorian capitalist greed and the Manchester School of Free Trade and Liberal Economics. He hated the way that people's lives were diminished and made miserable by the quest for profit. His powerful writings of the 1860s and 70s like *Unto This Last* and *Fors Clavigera* were a major influence on the development of the early Labour movement.

Today his influence is on the rise as an ecologist and early observer of climate change. He was one of the first to realise how industrialisation was damaging our environment and was able to observe this through changes to sunsets as he looked westward from Brantwood, his home in the Lake District. *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, a late work published in 1884, was a passionate polemic against the damage that industrialisation was doing to our planet.

These themes were explored throughout the exhibition which underlined the continued relevance of Ruskin's ideas for the modern world. It also showed how his influence extended to other artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this being illustrated by examples from the York Art Gallery collection. The Curators had commissioned three magnificent large pictures by Emma Stibbon RA of Alpine mountains at Aiguilles which complemented Ruskin's lifelong fascination with geology and the structure of mountains.

Altogether a thoughtful, stimulating and beautiful show which has now transferred to The Abbot Hall Gallery, Kendal where it will continue to 5 October this year.

PETER MILLER

President of the Friends

DUBLIN IN MAY 2019



After an uneventful journey to Holyhead and smooth crossing over the Irish Sea, we reached our centrally placed Academy Plaza Hotel just off O'Connell Street, Dublin.

On Monday, we met our guide, Clodagh who took us to Dublin Castle. King John ordered the construction of the castle in 1204, and it became the most important fortification in Ireland and functioned as the seat of colonial

rule for the next eight centuries. As a symbol of English rule, Dublin Castle was a key target during the Easter Rising of 1916. Following the end of the Irish War of Independence, Dublin Castle was handed over to Michael Collins as representative of the Irish Free State, and the castle has hosted many of the most important Irish state events ever since.

We continued to the nearby Chester Beatty Library which contains a rich collection of manuscripts, prints, paintings and early printed books. The Library is one of the premier sources for scholarship in both the Old and New Testaments and is home to one of the most significant collections of Islamic and Far Eastern artefacts.

During the afternoon, some of us went to the National Botanic Gardens and, as we were blessed with amazing weather, enjoyed strolling around the twenty thousand species and cultivars on show.

Some of us went to the Archaeology Museum exploring fifteen centuries of Irish artistic achievement. The central area of this museum contains one of the finest collections of Bronze Age gold objects in Europe ranging in date between 2200 BC and 500 BC.



On Tuesday, we set out to see Russborough House, near the Blessington Lakes in County Wicklow, and the tour was given by a very knowledgeable friend of Lord and Lady Beit, the last owners of the house. Built between 1740 and 1750, the house is Palladian in style. It was designed by Richard Castle and contains displays of fine plasterwork, a magnificent mahogany staircase

and stucco ceilings by the Lafranchini brothers.

Following Russborough, we travelled through the Wicklow Mountains to visit the wonderful gardens at Powerscourt in the afternoon.



Wednesday morning was spent at the Hugh Lane Gallery where we saw Francis Bacon's faithfully recreated studio, Sean Scully's works and a memorable collection of impressionist masterpieces; the star painting being *Les Parapluies* by Renoir. The Hugh Lane is home to *The Eve of St Agnes* Harry Clarke's renowned twentieth-century stained glass masterpiece. *The Eve of St Agnes* is a stunning example of the technical skill and visual imagination of this extraordinarily talented stained-glass artist.

Mid-morning, we crossed the city centre to Trinity College to see the Book of Kells and the wonderful Trinity Library. The Book of Kells is one of the most beautiful manuscripts in the world believed to have been created circa 800 AD.

The afternoon was spent at the National Gallery which is home to some thirteen thousand works of art including a Caravaggio, paintings by Lavery, Yeats and an extensive representative collection of European paintings. After our tour we were invited by the Friends of the National Gallery to have refreshments in their members room. Everyone agreed that we did not have enough time in the Gallery and another trip is in order.

On our final morning, we visited the newly opened Irish Emigration Museum depicting the history of the Irish diaspora and emigration to numerous countries throughout the world. It was illuminating to learn that so many famous inventors, politicians, scientists and medical researchers have Irish roots.

While the formal visiting was thoroughly enjoyable, the fun did not stop in the evenings as several of our group discovered a live Irish music venue in a nearby Castle Hotel vaults and spent their evening enjoying live music and classic Irish crack.

LINDA DOWNEY

THE FRIENDS OF YORK ART GALLERY VISIT THE LAING ART GALLERY NEWCASTLE

Arriving at the Laing Gallery in Newcastle on 4 April, it was difficult not to get diverted by the tempting offerings in the shop - two levels of books, cards, ceramics, silk scarves and handcrafted jewellery. Nevertheless, we were ushered gently by a helpful Friend of the Laing into the warmth of the café, beguiled by coffee, cake and two full-length stunning Burne-Jones stained glass panels and our tour began.

We had - sensibly - been divided into two groups by Sue Greenhow; one setting out with Barbara Hazeldine, a Friend both of York Art Gallery and the Laing, the other with Rebecca Gee, a recent addition to the curatorial staff at York Art Gallery. In the tour of the *Northern Spirit* exhibition Barbara concentrated on three striking views of Newcastle itself by William Daniel, John Carmichael and O'Rourke Dickey, spanning two centuries, before treating us to a realistic animation of John Martin's *Sodom and Gomorrah*. This latter brought to mind the Great East Window at York Minster with its treatment of the Apocalypse, not to mention brother Jonathan Martin's attempt to burn the cathedral to the ground. We were struck by the wide range of paintings and sculpture on display, from a delicate limewood sculpture to works by Norman Cornish, William Bell Scott, Lawrence Gowing (known to one of our Friends) and Anne Redpath. Barbara finished with a discussion of the Cullercoats Colony and in particular, *The Women*, the arresting 1910 painting by John Charlton of women pulling the lifeboat following a wreck off Whitley Bay.

Our second tour was of *Watercolours at War*, a fascinating exposition exploring how artists used watercolours to depict war and wartime subjects out of necessity and when materials were scarce. Familiar artists, including John Piper, Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash, Eric Ravilious and Edward Burra were shown in a new light before we were introduced to York born Ruth Adams' beautifully worked representation of tea-towels alongside Louisa Hodgson's truncated *Mother and Child: Study for the Nativity*. Rebecca finished off with the display of the Artists International Association and their left-wing Art for All programme, a wonderful selection of ordinary yet intimate scenes redolent of war conditions.

And so to Whistler. Here we were free to roam through the galleries at our leisure and to take in the breadth of the experience. What stood out was

the number of influences which could be seen from the works on display, from Rembrandt as exemplified in Whistler's tiny print of *Little Arthur*, to his collection of Japanese prints, from York artist, Albert Moore to John Ruskin, images drawn from Whistler's engineering background and his love of nature. As Patricia de Montfort wrote in the excellent accompanying catalogue, Whistler clearly operated within a complex network of family and artistic friends. His images of the Pool of London resonated beautifully with the paintings of the Tyne seen earlier in *Northern Spirit*. The focus on prints - as enjoyed by the Friends of York Art Gallery at our recent trip to the Rembrandt exhibition in Edinburgh, and currently on show at *Alle Rembrandt* in Amsterdam - is a welcome development, allowing for a more intimate appreciation of the artist's skill. In this, Whistler was no exception.

The Friends of York Art Gallery owe a debt to the Friends of the Laing and have taken home an appreciation of a wide-ranging gallery, a well-stocked shop, a warm reception and a great day out, the latest in our public transport excursions.

DOROTHY NOTT

CHAMBER MUSIC LUNCHTIME CONCERTS

Friends of York Art Gallery are collaborating with the Department of Music at the University of York to showcase postgraduate musical students in a series that commemorates Hans Hess, Director of the Art Gallery from 1947 to 1967. Our archives show that Hess instituted chamber music concerts in the gallery and that these were particularly popular with the public. We have revived the tradition and aim to put on three lunchtime concerts each year, as part of our fundraising programme for York Art Gallery.

The sixth of March saw the second of these concerts, held in the intimate Georgian surroundings of the York Medical Society rooms in Stonegate. Quintet *York YaYue Fang* played contemporary and traditional Chinese music on instruments such as the *guzheng* (a kind of horizontal dulcimer) and the *erhu* (akin to a violin). Two of the six pieces featured a singer, Wenjun Li. The programme was coordinated by Ling Ding, doctoral student in Music and Management and International Liaison Officer in the Department of Music.

Between pieces Ling told us about the instruments and, fascinatingly, that traditional Chinese music gives no indication about dynamics, leaving the piece to be freely interpreted by the players. This means that one piece might have thousands of different interpretations, all of which would be legitimate performances.



Image: Dorothy Nott

As FYAG President Peter Miller said when thanking the musicians at the end of the concert, the audience had been transported for an hour from a rather rainy and gloomy York to a land of sunsets, rivers, forests and moonlight.

Do come along – it's a great way to spend a lunchtime!

JUDITH GLOVER

FYAG Secretary and lunchtime concert organiser

GILLIAN LOWNDES: AT THE EDGE

Gillian Lowndes (1936-2010) was at the forefront of a new abstract expressionist style of ceramics which emerged in the 1970s in London. Bridging the gap between Craft and Art, Lowndes' works, often referred to as *collages*, were completely different from anything seen before, neither vessel nor conventional sculpture. Lowndes created sculptures out of found objects and materials, clay and glazes. The kiln was a tool that she used to create elements she later joined or collaged together to form finished works. Titles emerged when the works were complete, providing lyrical hints as to her thoughts. Her work referenced archaeology, material culture, recycling and the ephemeral.

Included in the exhibition are previously unseen items such as a large group of work that was in progress in her studio when she died, consisting of unfired

clay, ball cocks and other found detritus. There is also a group of Christmas cards she made and sent to collector Anthony Shaw, which appear as works of art. Thanks to support from the Friends, we have conserved *Hanging Loofah* a wall-mounted work given to the gallery by Henry Rothschild and it will be on display for the first time in this exhibition.



YORAG : SHAW. 811
Monument to a Spoon, 1980
The Anthony Shaw Collection/York Museums Trust
(York Art Gallery)

In recent years Lowndes' reputation has grown and her importance is now recognised by the wider Art world. Her work has inspired new generations of artists interested in ceramic materials and processes. There are very few examples of Lowndes' work in public collections, but we are fortunate at York Art Gallery to have over fifty works by Lowndes. They comprise of gifts from the collectors W.A. Ismay and Henry Rothschild and loans from Anthony Shaw. This new exhibition taken entirely from our collections will be the largest presentation of her work in recent years. *Gillian Lowndes: At The Edge* opens 15 November 2019.

DR HELEN WALSH
Curator of Ceramics

ACQUISITIONS AND CONSERVATION FUNDED IN THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS

The '70 Years of Giving Art' exhibition at the Gallery in 2018 provided us with an opportunity to view many of the works of art that the Friends have contributed to in our seventy - year history. In this article I am bringing you up to date on what the Committee has agreed to fund since that exhibition, and also to highlight 'work-in-progress'.

On the advice of Dr. Helen Walsh, Curator of Ceramics, we purchased three dark glazed pots by the late Patrick Reed and a ceramic dish by Robert Brumby; both Yorkshire artists and educators who were not previously

represented in the CoCA collection. A grant of £825 from the Friends' Collection Fund made these acquisitions possible.

Later in 2018 at the conclusion of 'The Sea is the Limit' exhibition, Dr. Beatrice Bertram proposed the purchasing of the painting *British American Scarecrow* by the Iraqi-born artist Mohammed Sami. It is currently hanging in the Burton Gallery. The expenditure was £5,000. There has not been an acquisition to date in 2019.

Your Committee has been very actively supporting conservation. Age, handling, poor storage, and the sometimes doubtful techniques employed by artists in creating their works means that artworks require the attention of skilled conservators from time to time. Additionally, bringing more works of art out of storage and increasing the frequency and diversity of art on display has been a priority for the Committee and Curators since the Gallery re-opened in 2015.

Rembrandt's Studio by Sir John Gilbert, a gift from John Burton to the Gallery in 1882, was re-framed at a cost of £1,350, with 50% being contributed by the Friends. It has been on loan to National Gallery of Scotland.

Hopefully many of you will have seen the eighteenth - century Automaton Clock in operation in the Burton Gallery. The restoration, maintenance and a new interpretive digital display are being funded by a grant of £16,500 from the Malden-Owen bequest which the Friends received in 2017. This work is expected to be completed in March 2020.

The Friends funded the restoration of *Red Plot* by Peter Donnelly and *Flickering Grid II* by Oliver Bevan at a cost of £1,302 so that they could be returned to public display during the Kaiser Chiefs-curated exhibition. These two paintings were originally purchased with a grant of £120 from the Friends in 1965 on the advice of Hans Hess, Curator 1947-1967.

Early in 2019 Henry Moore's *Calm Before a Storm* was glazed at a cost of £900 so that it could be displayed in the Project Room, which coincided with the Ruskin/Turner exhibition in the Madsen Galleries. At this time J.M.W. Turner's *Constance* was the subject of conservation, mounting and re-framing for the Ruskin Turner exhibition at a cost of £1,184, and a further £628 was spent to mount and frame his *Fountains Abbey* for that exhibition.

The Committee has agreed to provide a grant of £200 for the repair of *Hanging Loofah*, a ceramic by Gillian Lowndes which is destined for display in the CoCA Gallery later in this year, and a further £250 to repair the drawer movement in the free-standing CoCA display cabinet.

Approved for conservation at our Committee meeting on 13 July were:

1. *River Scene* by Jan van Goyen (1627) at a cost of £1,200 for the Bouts exhibition which opens in October and an upcoming Gainsborough exhibition in 2021.
2. *Peasants and Horsemen at an Inn*, also by Jan van Goyen (1632) at a cost of £3,375 for the Bouts and Gainsborough exhibitions.
3. The two wings of a Triptych (Dutch School: 1500-1549), *David Carrying Goliath's Head on His Sword* and *Samson Striding out of Gaza with the City Gates in his Hands*. The estimated cost is £1,650. This work is destined for both the Poussin and Bouts exhibitions.
4. Varnishing and re-framing *Ribera and his Family*, by Bernard Weiser (1861) at a cost of £970 for the Bouts exhibition and later for display in the Burton Gallery
5. The *Portrait of Albert de Ligne, Prince of Barbancon and Arenburg* by Anthony van Dyke (1628-1632) is to be cleaned, re-touched and consolidated at a cost of £3,900 for inclusion in the Bouts exhibition.

There was an itemised list of acquisitions and conservation work (1948-2017) circulated in the mailing to Friends in 2018. To receive the list updated to 2019: email petergibbard@btinternet.com ; telephone 07802 216079.

PETER GIBBARD

*This newsletter is edited by Jim Sharpe. Please send items for the next newsletter to
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