

November 22

The studio was full for the final talk of 2022, **Alan Dordoy on “The Purpose of Portraits”**. Alan brought a clear structure to this very wide topic, distinguishing between commissioned portraits and those chosen by the artist. Early commissions began in pursuit of immortality and later became tools of power, from the emperor’s head on the coinage to the compulsory dictator’s portrait hanging in every office and schoolroom. By the 1600s, wealthy people commissioned portraits to proclaim their own social status, and society had begun to commission works to honour heroes and worthies.

Alan proposed that when the artist chooses and poses the subject they might have one of three objectives: to create an honest depiction of the subject; to show emotion beyond the surface appearance to a psychological state; or, to make a social comment. Alternatively, he suggested, the artist might simply paint because they want to, posing the question “Does a portrait need a purpose?”.

Illustrating his talk with examples covering 27,000 years of portraiture, Alan selected beautiful examples of the diversity of approaches, styles and techniques, from the tranquility of Tutankhamen’s death mask to the angst of Lucien Freud’s mother (The Painter’s Mother II, 1972).



October 22

18 members attended Lyn George’s talk which introduced most of us to the **Norwegian artist Harriet Backer**, 1845 - 1932. From a wealthy family, she studied art for nine years in Oslo, Berlin and Munich, before a further two years of study in Paris. From 1880 to 1888, she stayed in Paris, where she shared a studio with a fellow Norwegian artist. She first exhibited in Paris in 1880.

Backer produced around 180 paintings mostly based upon local interiors. Her work was slow and thorough, frequently using strong side lighting. Influenced by Impressionism, Backer worked in the tradition of realism. She never acknowledged belonging to any school but she is regarded as both a naturalist and an early Impressionist.

In 1888, Backer moved back to Norway and settled in Sandvika, outside of Christiania. From 1889 until 1912, she ran an art school and was an influence on a number of successful Norwegian painters.



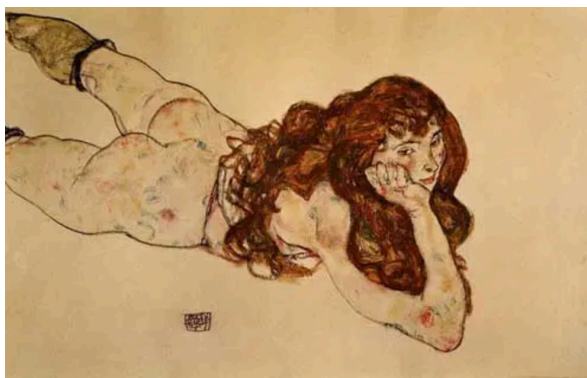
September 22

Sixteen members turned up for Judy Appleby's thought provoking talk last Thursday on the subject of 'Abstracted Landscapes'. Judy began by proposing a spectrum of work from photorealism to total abstraction, illustrated by Malevich's "Black Square" and then illustrated how various approaches to abstraction fitted onto that spectrum, grouping work into Imaginary Landscapes, Abstracted Landscapes and Abstract Landscapes and Landscape Abstraction.

The essence of an abstracted landscape is shown in these examples from Judy's talk. On the left is her representational painting of Cullernose Point on the Northumberland Coastal Path. On the right, the same view is distilled into its essential geometries, emphasising the character of the geology and the patterns in the cliff edges. The objective of abstracting the landscape is to explore beyond the visual qualities, perhaps to show the underlying structure, as in this example or, as Judy explained, interpretations could reflect historical aspects, change over time, erosion or the artist's personal emotional response to the subject. Judy used the work of Barbara Rae and Jeremy Gardiner to show the breadth of possibilities. (Wilhelmina Barnes-Graham was unavailable due to a technical hitch.) Judy will send the Keynote slides to members on request.



July 2022 Bruce McNiven gave his talk on life studies (rescheduled from May) in which he defined his purpose as covering Art History, Sociology, Experience and Advice. A bold objective that he carried off with considerable success. The audience of fifteen members was kept engaged and involved throughout. As Bruce explained, the life classes at the Academy Royal in Paris, beginning in 1745, were restricted to male artists only. The Royal Academy, a little later, imposed the same restrictions. It was over a hundred years before a talented female artist was allowed to participate. Historically, the objective of life studies was to portray the perfect male body, as exemplified by Michelangelo's "David". Fortunately, society moved on, and in later examples Bruce showed studies of female nudes gazing confidently at the viewer, examples of the human form that reflect our changing values and perceptions of beauty.



Egon Schiele, Female Nude Lying on Her Stomach, 1917

Michelangelo, David, 1501 - 1504

Our Thursday Talks for April continued with "Seascapes" presented by Ian Davison. Ian illustrated the diversity of challenges in painting the sea, ranging from depicting the power and movement of storms and waves, to expressing the vast scale of the open sea. About twenty members attended. The new venue in the

main studio has good ventilation but we need to achieve better blackout. If you want to see the paintings shown, and can use WeTransfer, please email the club and we will send you the material.



Towards Bass Rock John Houston.



Bathers. Joachim Sorolla 1916

Our Thursday Talks began again on **10 March 2022** after a two year Covid enforced break. Monica Shaw brought the series back to life with a talk on "Food in Art", two years after it was first programmed! Sixteen members turned up to listen, in the main studio to allow for some social distancing and better ventilation.

Monica structured her talk around paintings that were used to illustrate everyday life, social change, and culture, beginning with the Dutch golden age of still life painting in the 1600s. These lavish compositions of luxurious food were declarations of the wealth of the patron but, as Monica explained, were also full of symbols, often related to mortality and moral standards. The artists of the time sought maximum realism in the detail of the food and also in using perspective to create an image in which the viewer could almost believe the food to be real.

Spanning over 300 years, Monica's examples showed shifts from such luxury to depictions of everyday food for workers and middle classes in a gradual transition towards a more egalitarian society. She moved from realism, through Impressionism, to Warhol's Campbells Soup Cans and Lichtenstein's Hot Dog, a shift not only in artistic approach but a social comment in the move from lobsters and asparagus to convenience food.

In a clever illustration of life going in circles, Monica ended with examples of the realism of Wayne Thiebaud's cakes and pies and finally the hyper-realism of Tjalf Sparnaay with his gigantic representations of a fried egg and an American "Sandwich". An absorbing and thought provoking presentation that generated some lively discussion.



Joris van Son "Still Life with Lobster



Tjalf Sparnaay "Sandwich"