



Art in Isolation - a new page for strange times

Part 2: Paintings

Many thanks to those of you who offered a painting that you would like to share with other members. Your selections are shown below.

I have included small reproductions of the paintings (inevitably of varying quality but I hope adequate to give you some idea or remind you of the original) and of course your comments on your selections.

I think these form an interesting and widely eclectic group covering many centuries and many different genres.

There is only one original work, this time from Lucy Winter with her lovely painting of a lotus flower using a Chinese brush-stroke technique; this has justly earned pride of place. The others are listed in no particular order except for the last one. The entry from Helen Ross rather cheekily ignored the rules of the exercise by including three paintings and adding a longer exposition! Nonetheless, it is such a fine contribution that I exercised organiser's privilege and included it as submitted. I hope that others will not feel they were deprived of the chance to express themselves more fully (complaints to the society Vice Chairman please!).

I've much enjoyed your selections and I've been stimulated to learn more about some of these artists and look at some of their other paintings. I was especially pleased to be introduced to the Skagen painters, thank you Robert. I hope that you will equally enjoy looking through the collection and perhaps following up some of the paintings and painters.



I would like to promote the Chinese brush painting technique and my “lotus” would be a nice model. This is a very popular subject by Chinese brush painters because the lotus in Chinese culture symbolizes the holy seat of Buddha. Because the flower rises from the mud and blooms in exquisite beauty it symbolizes perfection and purity of both the heart and mind. It also represents long life and honour.

You can find this in my gallery in www.painters-online.co.uk/artists/lucywinter

Lucy Winter



Portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan, c 1501, Giovanni Bellini, the National Gallery

As an impressionable and gawkily serious 15-year-old, I first saw this picture on Kenneth Clark's BBC *Civilisation* series. Looking at it now I love the way the head of this wily but seemingly kindly old man looks like a walnut perched on top of a luscious damask cake-stand – the sheen of the fabric, with its beautifully rendered shadows and highlights, could not be more of a textural contrast with the wrinkles of his skin. Deliciously, we might struggle to find a word to name the colour of the astonishing gradations of the summer-dawn-blue of the background as it recedes into yet another separate visual plane, while the delicacy of the meaningless laces from the weird hat are an inspired *coup de théâtre* that emphasizes disconnection rather than literally/figuratively tying these different components together. Yet more play-seriousness is the faux-boxwood frame at the bottom – what happened to the

rest of it? – and the self-aggrandizing *trompe-l'oeil* signature, apparently on parchment, folded twice and stuck down. What does this *mean*? Was the doge really the way he appears? How much further can a painter go both to tell us about his subject and show us everything about the artifice of his art?

David Williams

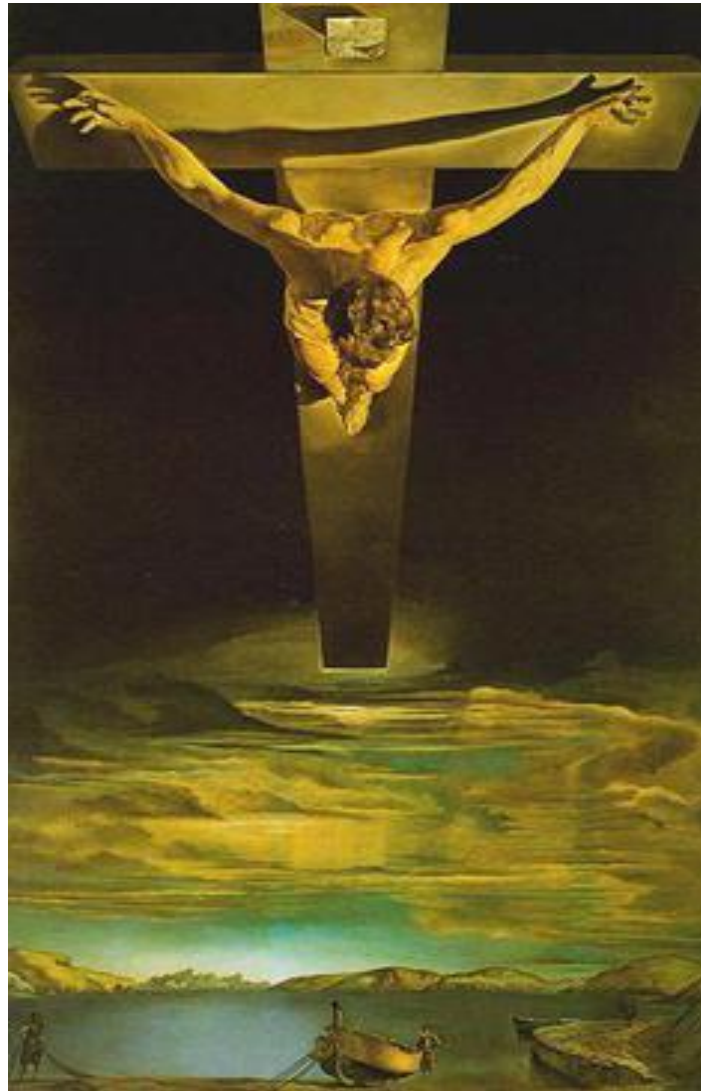


"Landscape with the Fall of Icarus", 1560, Pieter Bruegel, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels

At an early age I was attracted by the paintings of Pieter Bruegel, especially those that seemed full of fun, but this one has always had me in particular thrall. To a large measure, this was because I had always been entranced by the story of Daedalus kept prisoner with his son Icarus on Crete by King Minos. Daedalus, a skilful architect and craftsman, enables Icarus and himself to escape by devising for each of them a set of wings made of wax. Icarus, being a wilful boy, does not heed his father and flies too near the sun with the inevitable result. A dreadful tragedy. But where was Icarus in the painting I was looking at? He was small and insignificant with the main emphasis being on the landscape and the peasants working in the fields. Then I came across Auden's poem "Musee des Beaux Arts". Appalling tragedies occur yet 'life goes on' - the humdrum, the everyday busy world around us which is sometimes associated with indifference. All this is illustrated in Bruegel's painting. The

same theme has been taken up in a recent book: "If nobody speaks of remarkable things" by Jon McGregor which the author explains was related to the death of Princess Diana.

Chris Flower



Christ of St John of the Cross, Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow

During a peaceful minute away from the media and other personal problems and uncertain times, I would like everyone to put their own quiet thoughts to this painting for reflection.

Gisela Hayworth



Automat, Edward Hopper, 1927, de Moines Art Centre

We are hearing the word isolation all the time. Hopper knew about this as shown in his paintings of tense lonely people where there seems something silently happening or about to happen. I found it hard to choose, 'Night Hawks' is the famous one but 'Automat' fascinates me too. It shows a well-dressed young woman sitting at a cafe table. No-one is near. A large window is behind her darkened by night but reflecting the rows of interior lights. A bowl of fruit & her hat bring some colour. Her eyes are downcast. We can imagine all sorts of scenarios, mostly depressing! I find the work compelling. One critic writes "this is flat pack art you need to assemble yourself...like a horoscope it is vague enough for you to insert your own life"

Enid Turner



The Annunciation, Albertinelli, 1503, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

I saw this painting in the Uffizi many years ago and it moved me very much indeed. The framing by the arch of the two inclined figures suggests a feeling of intimacy, through which compassion, tenderness and understanding shine through.

Jane Cursiter



The Girl with a Pearl Ear-Ring, Johannes Vermeer, c 1665, Mauritshaus, Amsterdam

Vermeer, a painter with a very small output and very modest success, died in 1675 leaving his wife and 11 children in debt. How would he react if he knew that this little picture (17 x 15in in size) is probably the most famous painting in the world? It has spawned many books, a film and a play, Banksy has painted a parody and recently a large group of art historians and scientists have worked together for two years to understand every aspect of its composition and history. When I had the chance to see the picture in the Mauritshaus there was a crowd around it and I nearly passed on because I thought I knew it too well. But the impact of the original was remarkable. I was absolutely spellbound by this young girl and very moved.

Jo Barnes



Le Printemps, Claude Monet, 1886, the Fitzwilliam Museum (Gallery 5)

This best-seller can be bought as a print, a canvas or even a framed canvas. I have always owned a postcard. It's portable and easily replaced from the Fitzwilliam gift shop. It's my altarpiece. The painting is pure sensation. I recall the delicious shock of seeing it for the first time in my early teens. Two figures sit at ease in the dappled shade of an orchard. But the shade is astonishing hues of purple, green and pink - no black. The figures are encircled by blossom and fresh green leaves about to burst open with a vibrancy only Spring confers but which I can tap into any time I look at this painting.

Chris Kavanagh



Peder Severin Kroyer, The Artist's Wife in the Garden at Skagen, 1893, Skagens Museum

I would like to put forward this painting, not because it's my absolute favourite but because it is an example of a lesser known group of artists who deserve to be better known. Coinciding roughly with the Impressionists, three other groups were active in Cornwall, Brittany & Skagen (in the very northern tip of Jutland). Just how much contact there was between the three I have not been able to discover though they were all painting coastal activity, fishing & community life. Of the Danish group, Peder Severin Kroyer (strictly the o has a line through it) also painted rather dreamy pictures of people walking on the beach in moonlight but my choice is for "Roses" and you'll find it under Skagen Painters Artworks. It shows a woman reading in a deckchair with an enormous rose tree in full bloom. I find it quite enchanting and would like to share it.

Robert Hill



'Sunflowers', Jacob Epstein, 1933, watercolour and gouache.

I saw this picture at the Tate last year in the 'Van Gogh and Britain' show. It was placed near to a well-known Vincent Van Gogh sunflowers picture, and I thought made Van Gogh seem rather 'dowdy' by comparison. I loved the vibrant yellow of Epstein's version and thought it may be an uplifting ray of sunshine for present times.

Gill Davidson



"Les Raboteurs de Parquet", Gustave Caillebotte, 1875, Musee D'Orsay

I saw this painting several years ago in the Musee d'Orsay, and I always look for it again when we're lucky enough to be in Paris. The subject matter is decidedly urban working class, yet the image manages to be both romantic and heroic in its depiction of three semi-naked men, sinewy and strong, labouring in harmony in a naturally lit room.

The quite intense shading on the muscular torsos reminds me of Caravaggio (another of my favourite artists), and the patina on the wood, and the realism of the wood shavings are almost tactile. There is an honesty in this painting which I find both beautiful and oddly calming: it never fails to engage me.

Gloria Reed



The Jewish Bride, Rembrandt van Rijn, 1669, the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Although aware of his genius, I was not particularly entranced with Rembrandt's rather gloomy paintings when, on the Arts Society trip, I arrived in front of this painting in the Rijksmuseum. I found myself completely blown away. An older man stands close to a young girl, both richly dressed, she also wears a lot of jewellery. He looks down at her with the greatest tenderness, she looks dreamily forward. His hand rests on her front and her fingers rest lightly on his. This painting was named the Jewish Bride in the early 19th century but I have not a shadow of doubt that this is not the bride and groom but a father and daughter on her wedding day. I think this is the most moving visible expression of paternal tenderness and filial confidence that I have ever seen.

Nick Barnes



The Stonebreaker, 1857, John Brett, the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

We used to visit the Walker Art Gallery when I was a boy and this picture particularly caught my attention. I thought that the wonderfully clear landscape captured the essence of a bright spring morning. The feeling is optimistic, despite the nature of the boy's task - knapping flints for road making, a job often given to paupers. I did not realise that then. I certainly didn't know what a Pre-Raphaelite was, nor did I realise that the plants tell us this is August or September, not spring.

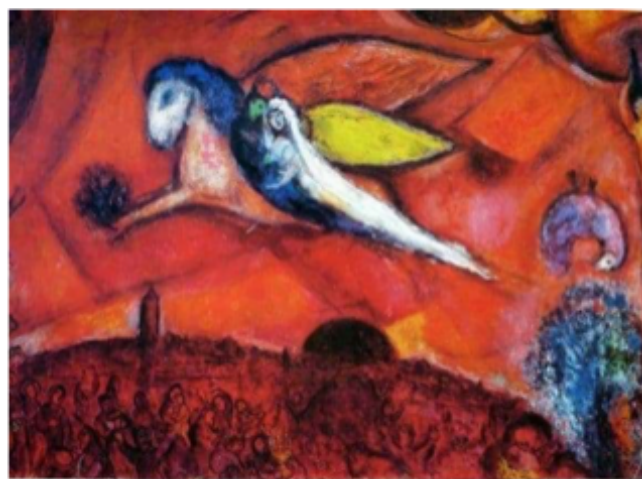
Chris Verity

“If all life moves inevitably towards its end, then we must, during our own, colour it with our colours of love and hope.”

This quote from Marc Chagall, in his speech at the inauguration in Nice of the Musée Biblique Chagall (later renamed the Musée National Marc Chagall) in 1973, speaks volumes about his character and his work. Chagall refers to the love that lies in the social logic of life as an essential part of each religion. Where a poet uses words to illustrate his works, Chagall creates paintings. Seeing his original paintings for the first time I was amazed at the vibrancy of the colour in his grand-scale work. Each of Chagall's paintings has its own dominant tone, as the artist moves from a luminous yellow to deep blues and greens to give life and meaning to the biblical scenes of many of his works. The shades of red and pink that we see in ***Abraham and the Three Angels***



and again in ***The Song of Songs*** (dedicated “to Viva, my joy and delight”) evoke the softness of the flesh but also evoke the blood and violence of the biblical narrative.



Chagall creates paintings based on the Old Testament texts, illustrating a belief in God alongside the sufferings of the Jewish people. Chagall was Jewish and his depiction of the Cross in ***The Creation of Man*** refers to Christ as the sacrificed Jew and not as the Christian Messiah.



What I have shared with you today is just a glimpse into the work of Chagall. He was influenced by tragic events in his life but also by the sheer beauty and essence of the natural world around him. For me Chagall is a true story teller.

Helen Ross

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