

## Arty-Facts

Our November meeting was a real treat for a very good turnout of members. Three of the group made presentations on an art subject of their choosing. Jill Davis introduced the concept of Desert Island Art, suggested by the u3a's coordinator for art history, where a speaker takes 10 minutes or so to talk about a work of art that they would like to have on their desert island.

The inspiration for Jill's talk was a print left to her by her mother and identified as a Pears Soap print by the small logo in the bottom right-hand corner. Its title is "A Lively Measure", painted by John Seymour Lucas 1849 – 1923. From 1891 to 1925, Pears published prints, many by well-known artists, in order to bring art to the masses as well as advertise their product. The painting of Bubbles by John Everett Millais is probably the most recognised of these works. Jill didn't know how her mother



came to acquire the print but she lived only a few miles from the village Seymour Lucas retired to and where he is buried..... A Fake or Fortune topic worthy of Philip Mould perhaps?

Lesley Trebbick's talk was titled "The Artist and the Impresario" and considered the collaboration between German artist Johan Joseph Zoffany (1789 – 1862) and the English actor and playwright David Garrick (1717 – 1779). Zoffany came to London as a young man and initially painted "draperies", i.e. backcloths, for the theatre.



Some portraits of his landlords attracted the attention of Garrick who commissioned 61 paintings by Zoffany to use as publicity for his theatre productions, and Lesley showed us several paintings of scenes demonstrating the style of theatre at that time. Eleven of the 61 showed Garrick himself on the stage. He brought a sweeping change to the manner of acting, from florid, booming performance to more nuanced characters described as bright, lively and luminous. Not a lot is known about Johan Zoffany as many of his documents were burned during a cholera epidemic in London, but

we learned something new and very interesting about an artist who became a founder member of the Royal Academy of Arts.

Margi Blunden's inspiration for her talk was a watercolour painting she inherited from her father titled "Scene near Rewley Abbey, Oxford" by "the other Turner" – William Turner of Oxford, 1789 – 1862. Raised in Oxford by an uncle after the deaths of his parents, William Turner moved to London to study under John Varley during what was a golden age of watercolour artists. He was quickly successful and was exhibited at the Royal Academy at only 19 years of age. He returned to Oxford to



teach but never achieved similar success again. John Ruskin commented that he was underrated. His paintings show landscapes from all over Britain and his skies are especially dramatic with cloud formations and rays of light that illuminate the scenery. Margi described the paintings as “tender”, showing a true appreciation of nature. This Turner also designed a new church for Shipton-on-Cherwell where he is buried.

All of these presentations came from a love of the subject that was eloquently transmitted to the group, making for a fun and interesting afternoon.

Report and photos by Carolyn McDermid