

## **ART APPRECIATION GROUP Report by Tony Seward**

The first meeting of the revived group was well attended, with 20 participants consisting of 18 former members and two new recruits (including the Convenor!) The technology worked (almost) without a hitch, coffee and tea appeared on cue and everyone enjoyed being together again.

We have acquired a course on 'The World's Greatest Paintings', presented on DVD by Professor William Kloss of the Smithsonian Institution. The first lecture was his Introduction, a short masterclass in how to look at paintings, its main message being to remain as open as possible to the unfamiliar and not to prejudge whole categories as being 'not for me', as for example, pictures of dead animals (a frequent subject of still lifes). This was followed by an explanation of the criteria he used in choosing his paintings. He emphasised that any such selection must always be subjective, a personal set of choices which will inevitably be different from someone else's.

The course comprises 24 lectures, each 30 minutes in length, ranging across the whole of Western art from Giotto to Jackson Pollock. A lecture will typically cover three artists (for example Vermeer, Velasquez and Rembrandt), focusing in each case on one of their major works. Kloss's style is affable and unshowy, but carefully considered – he has clearly thought long and hard about his subjects, and the 10 minute cameo of each artist unfailingly offers interesting insights. He also rather cleverly mixes world-famous paintings with others that may be new to the audience, so one has the feeling of discovering fresh masterpieces in his genial company.

We then showed his succinct account of Botticelli's 'Primavera', followed, after the break, with part of an hour-long BBC programme describing the painting's reception and afterlife. This included a survey of the many species of flowers depicted in it, the rediscovery of Botticelli by the Pre-Raphaelites and the gay Victorian painter Simeon Solomon, and the modern multiplication of Botticelli images appearing across all sorts of different media, from posters to tote bags to tea towels.

For the next few sessions I suggest we keep to this pattern: a lecture from William Kloss, followed by something else related to it, either on DVD or streamed online. We don't necessarily have to follow strict chronology, but can move back and forth across the centuries if so desired. It's early days, so let's just play it by ear...

Next up – Kloss on 'The Majesty of Duccio and Giotto', followed by a broader look at these and other early Italian masters in their historical and artistic context.

