

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

Our meeting on 7 June was after the deadline for **Forum**, hence no report in the June issue.

At that meeting we explored the early Italian masters with Professor Kloss, focusing on two great 'composite' works by Duccio and Giotto. Duccio's massive 'Maesta' altarpiece was commissioned for the Cathedral in Siena and can still be seen there. It consists of many pictures and wooden architectural features assembled in one construction: the central grand depiction of the Virgin and Child surrounded by saints, with narrative scenes along the base (predella) and on the back. Over the centuries many of its components have been dispersed or lost, and the back has been sawn off from the front so both can now be displayed side by side.

The narrative panels tell the story of the childhood of Christ on the predella, with the life of the Virgin, and Christ's life and death, in 43 scenes on the back. Many are deeply moving depictions of key moments in the cycle, such as the Annunciation and the Lamentation over the dead Christ, which can be compared with treatments of the same themes by other masters such as Giotto. Three have ended up in the National Gallery in London.

The second 'composite' is Giotto's masterpiece, the Arena Chapel in Padua. Again, the sequence follows the lives of the Virgin and Christ, outstanding for the solid modelling of the figures and a new humanism in the depiction of intense emotion. Kloss eloquently conveyed the drama of the Lamentation, and the tenderness of the meeting of Joachim and Anna, the Virgin's parents, after the ageing couple learn that they are at last to have a child.

After the break, a lecture from Dr Valerie Shrimplin gave a slightly different take on these two great painters, and covered other major figures from the Sienese School - Simone Martini, the Lorenzetti brothers – and the so-called 'Giotteschi', followers of Giotto. The Sienese were noted for grace of line, retaining elements of what art historians call the 'Gothic swing' - the curving figures and drapery seen in many medieval carvings and paintings. She also provided much useful background detail on, for example, Sienese civic life and the effects on art of the catastrophic Black Death in the mid-14th century.

The next report will cover July's meeting, on Masaccio, Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden.

Next up – August 2. Masters of the Quattrocento 1400-1500: Piero della Francesca, Andrea Mantegna.

1. Andrea Mantegna: Oculus in the Palazzo Ducale, Mantua



2. Piero della Francesca: The Resurrection

