

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

IMPORTANT! Please note change of date for our next meeting, from Wednesday 6th to Tuesday 5 September.

At our July meeting we looked at Masaccio, Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden. Howard Coutts joined us briefly to talk about the Bowes Museum's painting of 'St Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child' by Diereck Bouts, a composition echoing van der Weyden's treatment of the same subject. This was illustrated by a short film analysing the painting's technique. One of its most interesting features is a view of the artist's studio, with easel, palette and freshly prepared paints contained in mussel shells, tucked away to the right of the central scene.

Howard also outlined the museum's 'Curiosity' project and invited members of the group to participate in a workshop on it, to be held on 26 July in the Jubilee Room at the museum.

Professor Kloss grouped our three painters under the heading 'Acts of Faith'. Masaccio's powerful depiction of 'The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise' in the Brancacci Chapel, Florence, marked a further leap forward in the movement towards greater realism begun by Giotto. You can feel the despair in the figures of the protagonists. He also showed us the extraordinary scene of St Peter's shadow curing the sick as it passed over them.

Moving on to Northern Europe, Van Eyck's 'Madonna with Canon van der Paele' is all about dazzling technique - jewel-like colours, beautifully rendered drapery, clever reflections (as in his famous Arnolfini Portrait). But the main focus was on the moving portrait of the sick and aging Canon holding a pair of spectacles, with one side of his face showing clearly the ravages of an arterial disease.

Lastly, the wonderful 'Descent from the Cross' of van der Weyden, in the Prado, where the figures are so crammed into the constrained space of the composition that they are forced forward towards the viewer, in poses that are a dramatic departure from earlier versions of the same subject. The effect is claustrophobic, tragic, intense, expressed finally in the body language of the mourners over Christ's body – see especially the woman to the left in her white headdress, holding a cloth to her weeping eyes.



Next up – Tuesday 5 September: Sargent, Manet and Seurat.



Georges Seurat *Bathers at Asnières*