

SEPTEMBER ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

Our August meeting was devoted mainly to Piero della Francesca (1415/20 -1492). But first we took a brief look at his contemporary Andrea Mantegna and his brilliant scheme of decoration for the Camera degli Sposi in the Palazzo Ducale at Mantua, full of daring *trompe l'oeil* effects and precise portrayal of members of the Gonzaga family and their court. He was known too as a master of foreshortening, so we also examined his image of the dead Christ viewed from the feet up.



Impossible to cover the genius of Piero in one session, so we concentrated on the powerful 'Resurrection' fresco in his home town of Sansepolcro, and 'The Baptism of Christ' in the National Gallery. The former was described by Aldous Huxley in a 1930s travel book as 'the greatest picture in the world', a phrase recalled by a young British artillery officer when ordered to bombard the Germans occupying Sansepolcro in 1944. He ordered the shelling to stop and so saved the painting, even though he had never seen a reproduction of it.

The 'Baptism' was briskly covered in a half-hour gallery talk by one of the National Gallery's curators, who emphasised how lucky the gallery is to possess this masterpiece *and* a 'Nativity' by Piero. Nearly all his greatest works are still held in or near their original sites in Tuscany and Le Marche: following the 'Piero trail' gives the traveller the dual satisfaction of discovering these and exploring beautiful countryside away from the main tourist hotspots.

At some future date, we will I hope make time to explore some of Piero's other masterpieces – his serene Madonnas (including the 'Madonna del Parto', the so-called 'pregnant Madonna'), the mysterious 'Flagellation' in Urbino, and his most

ambitious work, the cycle of frescoes depicting 'The Legend of the True Cross' in Arezzo.

Next up – Wednesday 4 October. 'Alone and Together: Whistler, Degas and Renoir'



Arrangement in Grey and Black
No.1 (Whistler's Mother)



Degas: In a Café