

## ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

Our October meeting opened with Professor Kloss's thoughts on Whistler and Degas. James Abbott McNeill Whistler (there's a name to conjure with!) was, like Sargent, an American who spent most of his life in France and England. He was at the forefront of new developments in art, especially the discovery by European painters of the liberating effect of Japanese prints; also an accomplished etcher, bearing comparison with the greatest in the genre, including Rembrandt.

### Black Lion Wharf



Kloss focused on the portrait of his mother, which is as much an abstract composition as a likeness of the sitter – indeed, his preferred title for it was 'Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1'.

Degas' painting 'In a Café' – also known as 'Absinthe' – is often mistakenly seen as a picture of the misery resulting from alcohol addiction. If it has a 'message' it is more to do with the isolation of the figures from each other, emphasised by the strange geometry of the table in the foreground, which distances the figures from the viewer and introduces a hard abstract edginess into the composition.

Sheila Kilgarrieff then shared with us her longstanding love of Renoir's paintings. She presented it as a personal journey: from first being attracted to his gorgeous colours and skilful rendering of flesh tones, through working on an embroidered version of one of his paintings, to deepening her knowledge of the man and his work over the years. She ended by giving us a detailed analysis of 'Luncheon of the Boating Party' identifying all the

characters portrayed in it: friends, lovers, patrons and prominent figures from the Parisian art world.



We ended the session with some discussion of possible future directions for the group. We agreed to look at the contribution of women artists over the centuries, and that we should use the holdings of the Bowes Museum as much as possible to illustrate the topics we discuss. The group would also enjoy occasional outings to museums and galleries in the region, and it is suggested that we start in Spring 2024 by catching up on the latest developments at the Auckland Project – the Spanish Art Gallery and Mining Art Museum, plus the newly opened Faith Museum.

**Next up** - Wednesday 6 December. Nativity scenes? – or any other ideas to celebrate the season...

The first meeting of the New Year will take place on Wednesday 3 January.