

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

We devoted the whole of our June meeting to the ever-popular Dame Laura Knight (1877-1970). Many of us are familiar with paintings from different stages of her long career, but it was good to have the opportunity to survey the whole of her output.

Some of the best-loved are her early landscapes, painted in Cornwall. They have a bracing freshness, recalling clifftop walks in a stiff breeze, sunny Spring days in the countryside, or summery beach scenes.



Spring (Tate)

She trained at Nottingham School of Art, where her superb talent for drawing was recognised, and where she met her future husband Harold. Following extended stays at Staithes and an artists' colony in the Netherlands, they gravitated to Cornwall, joining established artists like Munnings and Lamorna Birch near Newlyn.

From the impressionism of her Cornish landscapes she moved on to develop a powerful body of work in portraiture. Perhaps the most outstanding example was her *Self-Portrait with Nude*, a pioneering work for a woman, showing herself painting, with her friend Ella Naper as the model. It is surely one of the most striking and memorable works in the National Portrait Gallery. This was a direct challenge to the male-dominated art establishment, which still refused to allow women students to sketch from the nude.



Self Portrait with Nude

Between 1911 and 1929 she often painted scenes from the ballet, and the stars of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. It was a natural development for her then to move on to studies of circus performers and gypsies, both of which communities she came to know well. From 1940 she was an official war artist, bringing her own special realism and immediacy to the depiction of munitions workers, service personnel and new phenomena such as barrage balloons.



A Balloon Site, Coventry (Imperial War Museum)

Next up – On Wednesday 3 July, we will visit the Auckland Project, which comprises the Faith Museum, Museum of Spanish Art, Museum of Mining Art, Castle and the newly reopened Walled Garden.

THERE WILL BE NO MEETING IN AUGUST, but we will resume on 4 September at 2 p.m. in Enterprise House, when we will begin to explore British art.