

[For the October issue]

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

After a month off in August, we reassembled on 4 September to begin looking at British art over the centuries. This will be a thread to be picked up from time to time over the coming year.

In many ways William Hogarth (1697-1764) could claim to be the first great, fully home-grown, English artist. Most of the major painters working here in preceding centuries had been Europeans: think Holbein, Rubens, Van Dyck. Hogarth created his own distinctive style and content, looking for inspiration to contemporary English popular theatre and literature. Thus, for example, he painted scenes from John Gay's smash hit *The Beggar's Opera*, championing its English songs and actors over the current fashion for imported Italian opera and singers. His best-known works, *A Harlot's Progress*, *The Rake's Progress* and *Marriage à la Mode*, dealt with 'modern moral subjects' in sequences of paintings telling a story, and packed with incidental detail reflecting the rise and fall of the central characters.



The Tête à Tête (*Marriage à la Mode* no.2)

An illustrated lecture presented by Alan Bennett took us through the six scenes of *Marriage à la Mode*, depicting the loveless union and grim decline of a young couple married off by their fathers for money and position. Many of us were familiar with these, but had not fully appreciated the significance of detail in underlining the moral message – such as the black spot on the young viscount's neck indicating 'the pox', and the initials 'F.C.' (meaning 'female convict') tattooed on a brothel madam's breast.

After the break we turned to Grayson Perry's modern take on *The Rake's Progress*. *The Vanity of Small Differences* is a series of six tapestries following the progress of Tom Rakewell, from humble beginnings in Sunderland to success, a rich upper-middle-class wife, and his inevitable decline and fall. On the way Perry combines much loving detail of working-class life in the North-East with oblique comment on class, taste and aspiration in Britain today. He elaborates on these themes in an amusing and perceptive interview for NADFAS, where he speaks also of the artistic challenges posed by moving from his usual medium, pottery, to tapestry, and the special effects that can be achieved through it.



The Agony in the Car Park

A full report of October's meeting, on 'Anatomy: Science and Art,' will follow in the November issue.

At our next session, on 6 November at Enterprise House, Colin Dunnigan will take us through the lives and works of American artist Georgia O'Keeffe and her photographer husband Alfred Stieglitz.