

## ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

At our December meeting we viewed a made-for-cinema film on Goya (1746-1828). The Exhibition on Screen films are created by Seventh Art Productions and generally use the occasion of a major exhibition to explore the life and work of an artist, featuring location footage, interviews with leading experts, and a look at the work of conservators and museum curators behind the scenes.

In this case the exhibition was from the National Gallery and focused on Goya's portraits, set within the narrative of his life, from birth in a small town in Aragon, through his training in Madrid and career as a court painter, responses to the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, and final years in France. His portraits of the aristocracy, royal family and intellectual elite are notable for their realism and refusal to become formulaic, unlike the work of so many portrait painters. A very fine example is that of his friend the poet and lawyer Juan Meléndez Valdés in the Bowes Museum.



His darker side was briefly sketched in – studies of madness, savage satirical etchings of the vices of society and the horrors of war and, in his last years, isolated and profoundly deaf, nightmare visions of conflict, witches and monsters.

*(left) Portrait of the Duchess of Alba, 1797 (The Hispanic Society of America, New York). She is pointing to the ground, where the words 'solo Goya' appear, and wearing two rings, one engraved with the word 'Alba', the other with 'Goya'.*

In January we began to look at the art of Northern Europe – Germany, the Austro-Hungarian empire, and Russia. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) from Nuremberg was a true Renaissance man, the greatest north of the Alps, and Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) the leading German painter of the Romantic era.



Durer was a pioneer of the intimate self-portrait, and the first artist to fully exploit the new medium of print through his astonishingly detailed, often mysterious, wood engravings. He saw the potential of what we would nowadays call 'branding', inserting his distinctive 'AD' monogram on all his works and fiercely protecting his intellectual property (copyright had not yet been invented), His work was distributed all over Europe and became a dominant influence on generations of artists who came after him.

*A Young Hare, 1502, (Albertina, Vienna)*



Friedrich grew up on the Baltic coast and later settled in Dresden. His landscapes explored the power of nature to stimulate the imagination, and as a manifestation of the divine. They often foreground solitary figures gazing out over the sea or mountains, viewed from behind so that we contemplate the scene through their eyes. There are overtones of German nationalism, and of a Gothic religious mysticism harking back to the middle ages.

*Wanderer above the Sea of Fog, 1815, Kunsthalle, Hamburg*