

Teesdale u3a

The opening of the Spanish Gallery in Bishop Auckland has raised the profile of Spanish Art in the region. The Gallery is housed on four floors in two impressive Grade ii listed buildings. Morlin Ellis, Curatorial and Research Associate from the Gallery was the speaker at the June meeting. The Spanish Gallery is centred around Francisco de Zubarán's masterpieces, Jacob and His Twelve Sons that have hung in Auckland Palace since 1756. It is hoped that it will complement the extensive collection of Spanish paintings at the Bowes Museum and other sites in the region

Morlin referred to significant historical events which influenced the development of Spanish art. Early distinctive characteristics were derived from Moorish heritage, whereas parts of Spain remaining Christian were prominent in Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque art. The unification of Spain in 1469 led to a growth of churches, which led to a demand for artists and sculptors. The Habsburg dynasty ruled from about 1500 to 1700 and invested heavily in the visual arts. Encouraged by the monarchy, the already strong traditions in painting and sculpture began to benefit from imported Italian artists. Also, following the gold rush in North America, there was lavish spending on the arts, particularly of a religious nature. Centres in Naples and Flanders had a great influence and attracted artists from other centres

Morlin displayed images of paintings and sculptures currently housed in museums and private houses throughout the world. Some of this work is rarely seen. These included portraits of early European leaders eg Henry VIII, Catherine of Aragon, Maximilian I with his wife and family, Las Meninas by Velázquez and pictures of still life. The decline of the Habsburgs brought this period to an end. Notable artists illustrating Spanish art are Velázquez, Titian, Ribera, Zuberán, Murillo and El Greco

Generally, the 18th and 19th century were less exciting, perhaps with the exception of Goya. Picasso dominated Modernism but Gris, Dalí, and Miró are leading figures.

This was a detailed and comprehensive talk, and it is hoped that The Spanish Gallery will become one of the international hubs for Spanish art.

The next meeting is on 25th July, when Richard Annis will be speaking on 'Finds on the Palace Green'.

Ian Reid

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