

## Monthly Meeting Report – January 2025

David Phillips' topic at the January meeting was "Paintings that pose Questions - a Personal Choice". David chose several paintings to illustrate symbolism and hidden meaning and three of these are briefly summarised here.

THE SWING, painted about 1767 is Fragonard's best-known work. It depicts an elegantly dressed young woman on a swing. A smiling young man hides in the bushes below. A smiling older man, hidden in the shadows, propels the swing, as a small white dog barks nearby. The lady wears a shepherdess hat as she flings her shoe with an outstretched left foot. A statue on the left watches with his finger on his lips. What could all this mean? The lady is actually the mistress of the gentleman who commissioned the painting.

Fragonard was originally asked to paint a bishop pushing the swing, but he declined. The smiling gentlemen and the discarding of the shoe implies a carefree attitude, and the scene has suggestions of sexual connotations. The presence of the dog suggests fidelity.

THE BAR AT THE FOLIES BERGERE was painted by Manet in 1882. The central figure is a barmaid based on Suzon, who worked in the Folies Bergères in the early 1880s. Behind her is an enormous mirror, showing reflections of what might be going on in front of her, except critics have suggested that what she is looking at is not accurately reflected by the mirror. Is this deliberate distortion of the proper perspective? On the bar is a bowl of oranges which has implications of prostitution. The barmaid is depicted as a salesperson, and she is also, a commodity, to be purchased along with a drink.

LAS MENINAS (ladies in waiting) was painted by Velasquez in 1656. It shows a large room in the Madrid palace of King Phillip IV of Spain. There are several people in the painting, mainly from the Spanish court. Some are looking at one another and others are looking out from the painting at the viewer (the person who is looking at the painting). There is a mirror in the room reflecting the upper bodies of the King and Queen. Who are the figures in the painting looking at and why they are standing there?

David gave a fascinating presentation, recognising that there were other interpretations apart from his. The audience were left thinking that in future they would be looking at paintings in a new and more analytical light.

Ian Reid. 31/01/2025