

Lectures on British Art of the 19th and 20th Centuries by Jo Walton

How to be Good. Storytelling and Morality in Victorian Narrative Painting

Victorian Britain saw the rise of the affluent middle classes, a stratum of society that expected all things to have a purpose and, preferably, a moral message. In the era of Dickens, Trollope and George Eliot, painters also became fascinated by narrative and morality. Here we see the results; cads, bounders and fallen women jostle with gamblers, philosophers and honest workmen in the wonderfully detailed canvases of mid-nineteenth century artists. This lecture looks at the development of such paintings – initially considered profoundly shocking, but soon relished with a delight that mirrors our fascination with the TV soap opera.

(Available in both digital and slide formats)

Traveller's Tales – Italian Art Through the Eyes of Victorian Visitors.

Italy, in the mid nineteenth century, may have been a collection of poor, fragmented states, but it was also the destination for many English travellers. Byron, Ruskin, the Brownings and Dickens all visited, along with many others, and wrote of the art and culture they discovered. In this talk we'll explore the history of Italian painting through the eyes of such visitors, discovering how they reacted to the early Renaissance beauty of Fra Angelico or the turbulent exuberance of Tintoretto. We'll also hear what they thought of Italy in general, in an age when crossing the Alps was a major - and possibly dangerous - undertaking. This sort of cultural travel was not for the faint-hearted!

(Only available as a digital presentation)

The Artist as Reporter – British Artists and the First World War

With the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914, the nations of Europe were set on a collision course. Newly mechanised armies, with undreamed of power to maim and destroy, transformed the world's notions about war. This lecture looks at the work of a group of young British War Artists and considers the ways in which they recorded their own experiences of a new and terrifying form of war, in a body of work still remarkable for its ability to move and shock.

(Available in both digital and slide formats)

Landscape, Poetry and Power – British Neo-Romantic Painters and the Second World War

The British Neo-Romantic painters of the mid twentieth century, including such artists as John Piper, Graham Sutherland and John Craxton, form a bridge between the landscape traditions of the eighteenth century and the art of today. Looking at their rediscovery of the works of Blake, Palmer and the Pre-Raphaelites, we explore their creation of a vision of the British landscape that became vitally important to Britain's self image during the Second World War.

(Available in both digital and slide formats)

Eric Ravilious and the Lure of the Everyday

Eric Ravilious has been described as the greatest English watercolourist of the twentieth century and his images of the landscape and of everyday objects attract passionate devotees. He was an artist who combined a love of the landscape with a fascination for different types of transport – from trains, old cars and gypsy caravans to the aircraft and destroyers he depicted as an Official War Artist in his precise, dry watercolours. Despite his short life, (he was killed, aged 39, in 1942) he was a prolific painter, printmaker and designer and his work reflects a deep delight in the world in which he lived. This lecture considers Ravilious alongside other artists working on the Home Front – and shows their remarkably powerful images of Britain at war.

(Only available as a digital presentation)

The Not-so-Still Lives of Ben Nicholson

Ben Nicholson was born into a very creative family and became one of Britain's leading abstract artists in the years before the Second World War. Best known for his beautiful still life and landscape paintings, which combine representational and abstract elements in a disciplined harmony, he was a great champion of Modernism. His personal life, however, was not always so harmonious. Married first to the painter Winifred Nicholson, and later to the sculptor Barbara Hepworth, his art challenged that of his father, the highly successful Edwardian painter Sir William Nicholson. What was it about their relationship that drove Ben? And how does Ben's career reflect the wider conflicts between abstract and traditional art forms in the mid twentieth century? This lecture explores the development of Nicholson's beautiful images, set against a background of conflict – personal, international and artistic.

(Only available as a digital presentation)

Henry Moore – A Revolution in British Sculpture

Today, Henry Moore is considered as the 'Grand Old Man' of British twentieth century sculpture, and his works can be seen in prestigious locations around the world. But his career spans an era of remarkable artistic change in Britain, with public sculpture moving from the formal academic style of the nineteenth century to the abstraction and modernism of the Swinging Sixties and beyond. This talk considers his career against the turbulent backdrop of the mid-twentieth century, showing how he explored the art of other ages and cultures alongside the work of Renaissance masters such as Masaccio and Michelangelo. The popularity of his Shelter Sketchbooks and mining drawings during World War Two helped bring about a wider appreciation of modern art in Britain, while his sculptures – influenced by his profound love of landscape – have become some of the most popular in the country.

(Only available as a digital presentation)

Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth

Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth are two of the most popular and important British sculptors of the twentieth century. Between them they revolutionised the way people thought about the human figure and sculpture, each being inspired by the art of the past and of other cultures, as well as by the landscape of Britain. At the same time, they were at the forefront of modernism – creating a new language of sculpture, full of abstract shapes, holes and magisterial forms.

This talk looks at their lives and works, but also explores the vibrant artistic world in which they moved. We'll look at Moore's remarkable Shelter Sketchbooks from World War Two, and see how Hepworth's marriage to the painter Ben Nicholson changed both her sculpture and his

painting. The legacy of these two great sculptors is a body of work that may be abstract, but is filled with a deep humanity and is rooted in the landscapes they loved.

(Only available as a digital presentation)

From Coalbrookdale to the Crystal Palace; Art, Design and the Industrial Revolution

In 1709, in a small riverside town in Shropshire, a Quaker industrialist called Abraham Darby set up the Coalbrookdale Iron Foundry. His revolutionary new method of smelting iron ore would make him a pioneer of the Industrial Revolution. From the beautiful Iron Bridge across the river Severn, built by his grandson in 1776, to the majesty of the Crystal Palace, opened by Queen Victoria in 1851, new forms of technology created a world of factories, railways and mass production.

In this talk we'll meet some of the inventors, industrialists and designers like Josiah Wedgwood, Matthew Boulton, Thomas Telford and the Stephensons, whose products married design and modernity and became renowned across Europe. Through the paintings of the 18th and 19th centuries, we'll see how new techniques affected design, and consider how mass production and the changing landscape affected life for rich and poor.

The apogee of this industrial age was the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851. We'll look at the building, its contents and the huge success of the Great Exhibition, as well as its legacy for art, design and architecture through the nineteenth century and beyond.

“Don't Make Fun of the Festival!” - Art, Design and Entertainment at the Festival of Britain.

When the Festival of Britain opened to the public on May 3rd, 1951, it was intended to offer 'A Tonic to the Nation'. In the midst of the worst weather since 1815, with strikes, disputes and a plague of rats bedevilling the site on London's South Bank, the press and the public were surprised and delighted to find an exhibition filled with ingenuity, whimsy and startling modernity.

In this talk we'll explore the origins of the Festival, including the 1851 Great Exhibition and the 1900 Paris World Fair. We'll hear what people and politicians really thought of the plans as they were being made, and discover how the authorities catered for thousands of visitors in the difficulties of post-war London. We'll explore the works created for the Festival by artists such as Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and many others, and consider the lasting legacies of the Festival, in the fields of architecture and design.

(Only available as a digital presentation)

Contact Jo Walton through her web site at www.jowalton.com or by phone on 0207 586 2272

Jo Walton © 2011