

2024 LECTURE PROGRAMME

23 January 2024 – Nicola Moorby

Murder and Modernism: Walter Richard Sickert and the Camden Town Group

The Camden Town Group was an innovative circle of painters united by the desire to paint works of a modern character. They combined the techniques and visions of European Post-Impressionism with the changing modernity of Edwardian London. This lecture introduces the core members of the group, led by Walter Richard Sickert, and tells the story of their brief but significant association. We will examine the key themes addressed within their work: urban life, popular entertainment and the lower social classes, as well as Sickert's infamous series of paintings inspired by the notorious Camden Town murder.

27 February 2024 – Chloe Sayer

British Travellers in Mexico: Lost Cities and Surreal Worlds

With its mosaic of cultures, Mexico has long been a magnet for British travellers. In the nineteenth century, the 'lost' rainforest cities of the Maya were revealed by artist Frederick Catherwood and archaeologist Alfred Percival Maudslay. Eminent twentieth-century literary visitors included D. H. Lawrence and Graham Greene. Mexico holds an especial fascination for Surrealists. Edward James created a vast sculpture garden, with towering concrete forms, in subtropical rainforest. After a spell in an asylum, painter Leonora Carrington found the freedom she needed in Mexico. In our own century, the photographs of Martin Parr focus on street culture, while the fashion designs of Zandra Rhodes echo the vibrant colours and patterns of modern Mexico.

26 March 2024 – Helen Rufus-Ward

Bringing India to Britain: Queen Victoria's Indian Portraits and the Durbar Hall

This lecture will focus on Victorian encounters with India and will begin by focusing on the Indian portraits decorating the corridors of Queen Victoria's favourite palace, Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Austrian artist Rudolf Swoboda was commissioned by Queen Victoria to paint authentic portraits of her Indian subjects to represent 'various types of the different nationalities' of India. Swoboda produced some extraordinary paintings during his two visits to India and the Queen was thrilled, calling them her 'Beautiful Things!' If Queen Victoria couldn't travel to India – India had to come to her! Swoboda's royal commission was inspired by the success of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 when Swoboda had painted the portraits of some of the Indian artisans who had been brought to London from India to be 'live exhibits' in the show. The final part of this lecture will look at an exquisitely carved Durbar Hall, created and shipped over from India to serve as a backdrop for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition. It is now the centre piece of Hastings Museum and Art Gallery having been gifted to the town by the Brassey family.

23 April 2024 – Roger Mendham

The Art of the Automobile

The earliest cars were purely functional and lacked even the most basic of passenger comforts, such as doors or even windscreens to protect passengers from the elements. However, progress was rapid and by the mid 1920s we entered a golden age of automobile. The Art Deco movement influenced designs and the 'Great Gatsby era' included some of the most famous and fabulous cars ever built. This period was followed by the Streamline Moderne influenced cars of the 1930s and 40s. This talk covers some of the most beautiful cars ever built, from the earliest 'horseless carriages' to the supercars of the 21st century.

28 May 2024 – Georgina Bexon

Australian Indigenous Art – 50,000 Years Ago to the Present Day

The Australian indigenous people possess probably the oldest continuous culture on our planet. From the extraordinary early rock and cave art to the modern oil painting, these artists are great storytellers, passing their mystic culture and sense of the sacred nature of the landscape down the generations. This talk investigates the early beginnings of this fascinating art and traces its development to the modern day where it is exhibited in international galleries and sells for high prices on the world art market.

25 June 2024 – Gavin Plumley

The Art and Culture of Fin de Siècle Vienna

At the turn of the last century, Vienna was the capital of a vast empire and one of the most exciting artistic laboratories in the world. It produced painters such as Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka, architects like Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos and Josef Hoffmann, the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, the composer Gustav Mahler and the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Looking at these and others figures in the context of the society in which they worked, this talk asks how and why the City of Dreams became a cultural hotbed around 1900.

Summer Break

24 September 2024 – Andrew Prince

Splendid Journeys – The Art of Opulent Travel

Throughout history, travelling and journeys have been used as a way to display wealth, power and status, along with being a useful tool to control over mighty subjects. Today, we take a journey as a matter of course, not thinking really much of a distance of a hundred miles or more. In the past however, things were very different. On a journey, an aristocrat had to take not only clothes, but food, furniture, cooking facilities, tents horses and the like, not just for himself and family but for his travelling household as well. In this talk, Andrew shows the many lavish and opulent modes of transport used by monarchs, aristocrats and plutocrats that eased travel while on their seasonal “progress” to and from each others estates. He also illustrates how diplomatic meetings between rival Kings were turned into a contest, to see who could out shine each other in displays of the finest silver, jewels, silks, accommodation, and court retinue.

22 October 2024 – Roger Butler

Canal History and Heritage

This lecture provides a colourful introduction to the secret world of our 2000-mile inland waterway network and looks at all aspects of their exceptional artistic, architectural and engineering vernacular. Features range from sweeping aqueducts to tiny bollards; from colourful historic narrowboats to 'Roses and Castles' artwork; from grand World Heritage Sites to quirky listed buildings. A well-known architectural historian once described our canals as a 'poor man's art gallery'.

26 November 2024 – Jo Banham

The Roaring Twenties: Art Design and High Society

Like its name, the Roaring Twenties was a loud and boisterous decade, marked by novelty, modernity and huge social, technological, and economic change. Following the dark days of the Great War, it spawned a generation of wealthy and privileged Bright Young Things who were determined to shock and who broke with the conventions of the past to pursue a life of hedonism and promiscuity, fuelled by an endless round of champagne, cocaine, parties and jazz. Women wore fur coats and cloche hats, donned new boyish fashions and had short, cropped hair. Men drove fast cars, mixed cocktails and smoked American cigarettes. Society ate in new restaurants like The Trocadero, danced the Charleston in ballrooms like the Savoy, and drank in clubs like the Embassy and the Café de Paris. Valentino, Tallulah Bankhead, and Noel Coward emerged as major celebrities through the growing popularity of cinema and the stage. The Roaring Twenties was also a period of enormous vitality in art and design. Fashionable society was immortalised by portraitists like John Lavery and Cecil Beaton who brilliantly captured the glamour of the age. Leisure, pleasure and the excitement of jazz were portrayed in paintings by Burra and Roberts, while the speed of the city and travel were explored in work by McKnight Kauffer and Nevinson. Furniture and decoration showed the influence of Cubism, Vorticism and other styles associated with the avant-garde, while events like the discovery of Tutankhamun's Tomb ushered in an obsession with all things Egyptian and Oriental. This lecture aims to conjure up the energy and originality of the decade and to explore the lives of its leading figures and examples of its most innovative art and design.

10 December 2024 – Tyler Butterworth

A Bit of a Carry On

The remarkable untold story of Carry On actor Peter Butterworth, and his wife, Britain's first female TV impressionist Janet Brown, best known for her impression of Mrs Thatcher. Using classic film and TV clips, personal mementos, and rare photographs and letters from his family's unseen collection, Tyler reveals the private story behind his parents' public lives. It's a journey that takes in MI9, the building of a theatre in the notorious WW2 Prisoner of War camp Stalag Luft III, nights at Chequers with a Prime Minister, *This Is Your Life*, and many more moments in their long, shared life in the theatre.