

THE NEWSLETTER

Issue No.5 – May/June 2005

Trudy's Chairwords

The best laid plans ... who would have believed that not one but two NADFAS lecturers in one season would be unable, due to illness, to fulfil their contract? In the fourteen years since ADFAS began, this is the first season to be thrown into disarray after the carefully balanced Programme has been fixed, so we have been very lucky up to now. Still, you can imagine the committee's collective delight & relief when Douglas Skeggs appeared on 9 May (in obvious good health!) to deliver his excellent lecture on *Velasquez* with the passion and enthusiasm of a true aficionado of this amazing painter. The returned lecture survey forms showed some criticism of the poorer quality of some of the slides and a few people found that Mr Skeggs' speech was a bit fast but even so, the lowest score was 8 overall, with at least four 10 out of 10s! It was an informative and enjoyable lecture on which to end this season.

The April guided visit to the St Charles Chapel proved very interesting and was well attended, with many of us staying on for a sociable lunch at De Groote Witte Arend restaurant afterwards. The special tour and dinner at the Katoen Natie is also fully subscribed, so the committee is optimistic about next season and looks forward to receiving returned questionnaires from you all, so that we know what types of extra activities you would like to have in future. Planning has already begun for the 4th ADFAS Contemporary Art Exhibition, which will be held at the beginning of June 2006 at the gallery "t Kapelleke", Oever 27 in Antwerp.

The next *Newsletter* will be sent in September, with information for the ADFAS AGM and the 2005/6 season, which will start in October. Until then, I wish you all happy and healthy summer months.

Trudy Debec

The ADFAS Heritage Volunteers – latest news

In the October issue of the ADFAS Newsletter we announced that the project of cleaning the Silver Reliquary Ship at St Andries was nearly finished. We have reassembled the ship, but parts of the rigging still need restoration. The restorer Evelien van Biezen will do this. Sadly, due to financial problems, the glass case is still not ready which means that the beautiful silver ship is getting dirty again very rapidly. The volunteers have promised to come back for a last quick cleaning just before the ship is placed in its glass window case.

As with former projects at St Andries church, the volunteers were treated very well. Coffee and some sweets were always waiting for them and all the church personnel, including the main priest, Rudy Mannaerts, were extremely kind and helpful. It was a pleasure working for them.



From l. to r.: Gilberte, Martine, Dominique, Myriam and Ada. Moïra is there too, but not on the picture!

Meanwhile in November we contacted the City of Antwerp's Archives Department. As they are moving in 2006 to the restored "FELIX Pakhuis"

(a fantastic location) they were very pleased to hear about possible help from the ADFAS Heritage Volunteers. Martine Baines and myself have discussed a possible clearly defined project: updating the inventory of old glass pictures, cleaning them and packing them in acid-free paper and boxes. We started on this new project in January 2005 with a full day's introduction to the Archives in the morning and in the afternoon we received training at the Photography Museum (also in Antwerp.)

If you want to know anything more about the ADFAS Heritage Volunteers, please get in touch with me. My details are on the last page.

Gilberte Du Bois

What do YOU want to do next season?

With this Newsletter you are receiving a questionnaire. Your Committee asks you, please, to take just a few moments to complete it and return it in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope.

During the season just ending, we have suffered not only from cancellations by lecturers but have also had to cancel outings arranged, with great care and trouble, by your Committee (or rather, by Maureen Smith, responsible for organising visits and outings).

Obviously we are not going in the right direction with our ideas. We now ask YOU to let us know what YOU want to do – and we will do our best to provide the programme that YOU would like.

ADFAS Committee

Our meeting place:

**Café/Restaurant Rubenshof (first floor), Groenplaats 9,
2000 Antwerpen (tel: 03/231 59 52)**

Items of interest to our members

NADFAS Review

Have you all received your latest copy of the *NADFAS Review*? And if so, have you yet had a chance to look at page 47 – an article by our very own Gilberte Du Bois on the cleaning of the Silver Reliquary Ship at St Andries. Well done Gilberte! And of course all the ADFAS volunteers who worked on the project.

Did you know that of the 10 Mainland Europe NADFAS groups, ADFAS in Antwerp is the only one that has a Heritage Volunteers group?

Another interesting article is on page 35; Chloë Sayer lectures to us on 7 November on Arts and Crafts in Mexico.

St.Charles Chapel in the Grootte Witte Arend, Reynderstraat 9 April 2005

The Chapel is not open to the public but our Guide, Key Minnebo, was able to take 14 of us there, by special arrangement, for a special and unusual visit. Special because this is not a Museum, more a Restorer's Atelier, unusual because little in the Chapel is what it first seems.

Few walking past the Grootte Witte Arend, itself now an interesting tavern in the old part of Antwerp, realise that the other side of a wall carries 15th Century murals that are amongst the earliest examples of such domestic decoration. Those in the know can see into the chapel through a sealed inset glass door and get a glimpse of the murals. Murals in the gothic chapel, dedicated to St Charles, might well be expected, so what is unusual and why are they considered domestic?

Which St Charles? Charles Borremeus, a favourite in Antwerp, the Charles favoured in France or, less likely, some other. No one is sure but probably the French. Why this choice for a gothic chapel in Antwerp? Because the chapel is neo-gothic in style and only dates from 1901 with the arrival in the property of the "Flying Nuns", a French charitable order noted for their elaborate winged headdress. The order "Les Filles de la Charité de Saint

Vincent de Paul" was founded by a Frenchman, Vincent de Paul (1581?-1660), and is devoted to caring for the sick and the education of girls in what is now called "domestic science". It was they who converted what had until then been domestic space into the chapel we see today. The order stayed until 1976, after which the chapel was de-sanctified. The whole property was then used initially as a cultural centre and then, in part, as the tavern we know today.

The ancient murals were discovered during the conversion to a chapel, under layers of plaster and wall paper. They depict an unusual theme for murals of the period: "Sybils" or non-temple Greek prophetesses, usually twelve in number though only seven are now to be seen, whose oracles were more of a domestic or personal nature. The murals are undated, unsigned and unrecorded but clothing and headdresses point to the period between 1480 and 1510. This dating is reinforced by a further mural, done at the same time, showing an angel with two coats of arms. One has a rook with a ring in its beak and the other three bears, allusions to the German families Rinck and Bars (ring & bear) who, records show, occupied the site in the period 1491 to 1555.

Restoration and conservation work to preserve the murals, badly affected by salts in the plaster, started quite soon after their discovery and continues to this day. This includes making full size painted reproductions placed over those murals that are the worst affected. One of these paintings is itself now being conserved. Hence the feel of an atelier rather than a museum.

The difference between "restoration" and "conservation" is also clear to see. The work in the early 1900's, in remembrance of the historical painter Karel Ooms and under the patronage of his widow Edith, was restoration carried out and signed by Jos Ratinckx.

Restoration in the 19th and early 20th century meant : What is missing or damaged is replaced or repaired, usually without making a clear distinction between what is original and what is not. Today we conserve, keeping as much of what is original as possible and, most importantly, where repair or replacement is unavoidable

techniques are used which allow for differentiation between original and new. Conservation work is still going on.

So we have an "old" chapel that is new and a chapel no more, with a treasure of ancient murals that might easily have been lost forever. A place of repose we may suppose. But leaving aside the time a false mint was run in its cellars, there is the extraordinary affair of the Van Mechlen family.

Sisters Anna-Louiza and Maria-Theresia inherited the property in 1660 under a will which stipulated that, should one of them die, the other would inherit her share. Anna was unmarried. Maria had a husband Francisco, who maintained he was an Italian Prince, and he and Maria wished Anna dead so they could get their hands on the property. On the 11th August 1662 Maria's coachman was persuaded to shoot at Anna as she left church. He missed, but it was close, the bullet lodging in Anna's skirts. The coachman gave evidence against Maria, who was banned forever from Brabant "under pain of death". (A reminder that, historically, Antwerp is not Flemish but Burgundian.) Maria tried slipping back into Mechelen a year later, but was again banished. Her husband finally took matters into his own hands and, on 21st February 1666, fired a pistol at Anna, again as she left church. He was a worse shot than the coachman and the bullet stuck in the wall next to her. Francisco was sentenced to death, despite his protestations that the court had no jurisdiction over a Prince. The execution was botched and Francisco, badly wounded, fell from the scaffold and was, as was then the custom, nursed back to good health - so that the executioner could have another go! His pleas for a milder sentence were heard and he, like his wife, was banned forever from Brabant. If only they had been patient - Anna died two years later but, because of the banishments, it was Maria's sons who inherited the property. The banished Maria and Francisco were back in Antwerp in 1669 but only to sell The Grootte Witte Arend on their sons' behalf.

So you see: You just never know what is on the other side of the wall.

Comments on recent lectures by ADFAS members

Please send us your comments and we will publish them. Thank you.

Lieve Dejonghe on the Jean Planque Collection (April 2004)

I have often thought Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* should be re-titled *The ADFAS Programme Secretary on learning that yet another lecturer has cancelled at the last minute* and I am sure that is how Trudy felt with just 24 hours before the start of April's lecture on Pompeii! But she saved the day with the help of Brussels art historian and guide, Lieve Dejonghe, who once again stepped in to give us a lively and informed talk linked to a current exhibition at the Museum d'Ixelles, *From Cézanne to Dubuffet: The Planque Collection*.

Collections are fascinating for one never quite knows what will be found and, just as an artist puts him/herself on the line by saying "this is what I can do", so Jean Planque revealed his personal taste by saying "this is what I like, what I am prepared to pay for **and** show to you". Jean Planque's acquisitions are an eclectic mix of Modern Art from the second half of the nineteenth century through to the mid twentieth. Many of the names are high profile today but, as Lieve was quick to point out, at the time a number of these artists had had their work turned down by the academies and the official annual *Salons*, giving rise to the famous (or infamous?) *Salon des Refusés*. Admittedly the paintings were not considered to be of the highest quality and said to be "suitable for the basement" by Planque himself! Nevertheless, he knew every artist personally and was considered to be an authority on modern art – it is said that the great Picasso was "hooked by the collector's knowledge".

Cleverly, Lieve did not try to replicate the exhibition but rather gave us an indication, a flavour, of what to expect with images taken from her own slide collection (it is for this reason that, although well-represented at the exhibition, we saw no Picasso's; she had recently removed them from that particular slide-carousel!). She started with Renoir, who was working in the Montmartre area when it was still countryside, happy pictures of young

women and flowers (did *you* know that Renoir decorated porcelain? Me neither). Most artists have their weak spots and so avoid painting what they can't – for Evenepoel this was feet, so he didn't, but Renoir could which is why we often see full-length portraits of his, feet and all! In some of his early studio portrait works you can see the painted background which is quite unrealistic, rather like photographic studios that were in abundance in earlier times.

From Renoir to Degas (another *salon refusé*) with his famous *classe de dance* series, then a sketch from which he worked *Après le Bain* when Lieve raised the point of what has been seen as Degas' voyeuristic viewpoint. A self-portrait with Mary Cassatt in his studio where he depicts himself resting, not painting. Tavern scenes, dances, theatre, everyday people at their leisure. This is really quite an overwhelming collection because hard on the heels of these two come Monet, Lautrec, Cezanne. There is no way to do justice to the visual richness of this display, not by using mere words but, as before, Lieve gives out little nuggets that stay in the mind and on the retina. Cezanne's portrait of *Madame Hortense* was so much like a painting by Rik Wouters that the French artist just had to be an inspiration for Rik. Ambroise Vollard, art dealer to so many of these *avant-garde* artists, had to sit for *80 sessions* in order for Cezanne to complete his portrait.



Hortense Fiquet In A Striped Skirt
By Paul Cézanne

More nuggets: Lautrec's posters (think Can-can and *Moulin Rouge*) were used by the Parisian Ministry of Works to cover up ugly building/road works but, by this time he was becoming so popular that discerning collectors were dashing out in the cover of darkness to

turn street-art into something far more profitable. And now think Monet and Giverny – *Waterlilies* – romantic or what? Well, according to Monet's son, his only regret was that the house hadn't taken a direct hit during WWII!

So much more to say and so little space; and consider what a man who made his money from pig-food can do when fired with enthusiasm for contemporary art.

ML

Velasquez, the Great Magician by Douglas Skeggs (May 2005)

We all know the name Velasquez and I am pretty sure we all could name at least one or two of his paintings, but his pictures are not as widely known nowadays as for example those of Rubens or Van Dyck. But in his day he was the most admired artist in the world by other artists. Today his statue stands in Madrid in front of the Prado Museum's main entrance.

After the wonderful lecture Douglas Skeggs gave us, I will now definitely look with a different eye to Velasquez' paintings. The speaker focussed our attention to so many different characteristics of the artist's work: the compositions with often that empty area in the middle, the modern-looking brush strokes to enhance the texture, the realism of the human beings depicted, the backgrounds in variations of black etc.

Douglas Skeggs showed us not only the different well known portraits of King Philippe IV of Spain, the Meninias, the Dwarf and the famous picture of Pope Innocent X, but also impressive battlefields, beautiful landscapes and intimate pictures of everyday people.

With so much knowledge and such perfect, although very fast, enunciation, I could have listened to our lecturer for much longer. Wonderful end of season!

GDB

DATES TO REMEMBER

29 May 2005	Open air art market - "Lambermontmartre, Lambermontplaats, Antwerpen-Zuid (a short walk from the KMSKA) and on 26 June, 31 July, 28 August, 25 September		
17 June 2005	Evening Tour (with guide) and dinner: Katoen Natie Art Collection	Van Aerdtstraat 33	5.30 pm
30 August 2005	ADFAS Committee Meeting (if you have anything you would like brought up at the Committee meeting, please contact Trudy Debice or Gilberte Du Bois)		
<u>2005-2006 Season:</u>			
3 October 2005	ADFAS Lecture, preceded by the AGM <i>Landscape into Sound</i> Lecturer: Digby Hague-Holmes	Rubenshof, 1st floor	7.30 pm
7 November 2005	<i>The Arts and Crafts of Mexico, Past and Present</i> Lecturer: Chloë Sayer	Rubenshof, 1st floor	7.30 pm
5 December 2005	<i>Three Wise Men: Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh – the Traditions of the Magi</i> Lecturer: Christopher Bradley	Hilton Hotel Antwerp (to be confirmed)	7.30 pm
9 January 2006	<i>Eating Restoration Glue to Stay Alive: The History of the Hermitage</i> Lecturer: Dr Rosalind Polly Blakesley	Rubenshof, 1st floor	7.30 pm
6 February 2006	<i>The Florentine Renaissance Palace</i> Lecturer: Dr James R. Lindow	Rubenshof, 1st floor	7.30 pm

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