

THE NEWSLETTER

Issue No.5 – May 2006

Trudy's Chairwords

Although the 2005/6 series of lectures has now ended, ADFAS still has two events in June to round off the season and we hope that as many of you as possible will enjoy both.

By now everyone should have received an invitation to the 4th ADFAS Contemporary Art Exhibition. The gallery has changed ownership since we first arranged to rent the space for the ADFAS exhibition, hence the change of name to 't **Andrieskapelleke**. The Opening Reception will be held on Friday, 2 June at 19.30. Claude Laroye, Managing Director of AXA Art in Belgium, will officiate and we hope that you will all be there to celebrate the opening. AXA Art's sponsorship has helped ADFAS cover the costs of organising this event. As you know, NADFAS has also given its support. Our third sponsor, M.F.Frames Limited (UK) is providing an expert to supervise the hanging of the exhibits, an essential element to the success of any art exhibition. Without sponsorship, it would be almost impossible for ADFAS to undertake such an ambitious project, so the committee is very grateful to the above.

Thank you too, to all those of you who have volunteered to help man the exhibition. I hope you will find it a pleasurable and worthwhile experience. The works on show, all of which will be for sale, cover a diversity of mediums and styles and will hopefully generate much interest, whatever your personal tastes in art. Paintings, sculpture, prints, collage and lacquer work of a very high quality ... something for everyone?

After the exhibition is over there will be the final ADFAS outing of this season, details below.

Overall, I feel that this has been a good season for ADFAS, with a number of excellent lectures and higher attendance throughout than over the previous few years. In comparison, the lowest

number of members and guests was 34 in April, whereas last season we had only 28 people at some lectures. This season our highest attendance topped 50 at the December and January lectures, not bad when membership stands at 51. As for lecture content, the April lecture *The Awkward Relation Between Art & Reality* was deemed to be "one of the most interesting we've ever had" by a number of attendees, endorsing the policy of having at least one non-NADFAS speaker per season.

But it is not all joy! The cost of remaining part of NADFAS is increasing all the time. At recent meetings in London notification was given of a rise of GBP 25 to one of the annual costs ADFAS pays, plus the introduction of a Euro 50 contribution to Mainland Europe expenses. Travel costs for the lecturers from UK, which we share with Brussels and The Hague DFAS' and lecturers' fees, add to the expense. There will be no increase to ADFAS subscriptions next season but this is something the committee will have to consider in the near future.

As always at the end of a season, a plea for new committee members! As I announced at the last lecture, I shall be standing down after 8 years on the committee, the last three as Chairwoman. Two of our current committee members may be spending much more time away from Antwerp in the coming months due to family commitments, so ADFAS really does need more willing volunteers to run the Society. Please give it some thought. My sincere thanks to the committee for all their hard work through this season, especially to Gilberte who has gallantly

hosted all the committee meetings at her home. A big thank you also, to Martine Baines, Grishma Shah, Janet Hammersley and Michael Smith – members who have given valuable time to help ADFAS run smoothly.

In October ADFAS will celebrate the 15th anniversary of its inauguration. The programme of lectures for 2006/7 is already fixed and a first outing arranged. In the September *Newsletter* there will be details of a celebratory start to the new season. Thank you all for your continued enthusiasm and support for ADFAS, I hope you will extend it to encouraging friends and acquaintances to visit your Society's art exhibition next month and bring them along to start the new season in October.

WHAT'S COMING UP in Antwerp?

- **Morocco, Artisans of Memory**, until 1 October at the Etnografisch Museum. The exhibition is an ode to the artisanal arts and crafts of the rural Berber and urban Arabo-Andalusian cultures. Skilfully decorated woodwork, fine ceramics, harmonious textiles and sumptuous jewellery bring to life centuries old artisanal traditions whose repertoire of form and embellishment goes back a millennium.
- **Long Live Sculpture**, from 1 June to 30 September at the Middelheim Museum. In addition to the museum's splendid permanent collection of modern sculpture, this year sees an exhibition featuring a selection of works by a number of pioneering artists from Belgium and abroad.

Our meeting place:

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

Reports on the February and March lectures

Claire Portheine on a Mission Impossible – The Awkward Relation between Art and Reality (April 2006)

To tackle the subject, Claire Portheine gave us a ride through visual art, and more in particular through painting.

What is reality, what is it that we see, how does the brain work? To answer these questions our lecturer made us think of how babies have their first sight experiences. We see things upside down, we don't see everything together, we see bits and pieces, we learn to recognise objects, colours, forms etc. Once we know how to read the codes, we recognise our own sort, we recognise windows, houses, painted animals etc.

To illustrate this Claire Portheine showed us a great number of well known works of art, from the primitive Bayeux Tapestry to the modern work of a Mondrian, enough to make us understand that when we look at the Fortis Bank's logo, we can see an equestrian statue on a nice day! Understanding abstract art or art from other cultures can be very difficult. We see what we see, but there are things we don't see! We need to know the codes, the signals. Today's artists know the codes, but they try to stretch the boundaries of the accepted signals.

The lecture continued with slides of Greek and Roman vase paintings and frescoes. All with perfect perspectives. In the centuries that followed that knowledge was completely lost. In Renaissance times artists had to reinvent the perspective rules. To illustrate this we made another ride through well known European paintings. Artists who were also architects succeeded best in playing with the perspective lines.

Once the perspective was conquered, artists tried to conquer space. Velasquez painted a spinning wheel without spikes, because he wanted to show that the wheel was turning, moving. The futurist Boccioni painted many pictures, the one after the other, to express movement. New rules, new codes!

In fact, to understand and to appreciate art, we must know the codes. Through the centuries we learned that a group of people with open mouths represents a chorus - think of Memling's or della Robbia's singing angels. But an open mouth can also mean a psychological sound, think of the famous Scream by Edvard Munch. Today artists like to play with the resemblance to a known code. Take Magritte's work "*Ceci n'est pas une pomme*" Do we understand it or don't we want to understand it?

Thank you Mrs Portheine for this delightful lecture, with plenty of laughs and wonders.

GDB

Maggie Lamb on A Garden Tour of Europe (May 2006)

The lecturer, a photographer and passionate gardener, wanted to give an overview of garden design in Europe. In fact, garden architecture goes back to Persia (6th century BC), where all the key elements are to be found: precise geometrical regularity, quadripartite design corresponding to the four lines of life, and the use of water, fragrant flowers, and clipped boxes. The knowledge on Persian gardens with irrigated crops came to Europe via different routes: over Turkey, to Greece, and Italy and from Turkey over Northern Africa to Spain. One of the oldest European gardens that still exists is that of the Alhambra Palace in Granada (Spain) and the Generalife. The beautiful courtyard, started in 1377, fuses outdoors and indoors, whereas the summer palace comprises a series of terraced gardens set up on the hillside. Another example marked by the Moorish rules is the Alfabia garden (Palma, Mallorca), whose most impressive feature is a 200-foot long pergola with water jets to cool the air.

From Spain, the lecturer took us to Lake Como, at the Villa Serbelloni, which could have been the house of Pliny the Younger (61-114 AD). In two letters, he gave a clear and intelligible account of a garden ground with its

fixed shape and original planting with acanthus. Pliny himself had been influenced by Vitruvius (1st century BC), known only as the author of *De architectura* and whose ideas have greatly been utilized and interpreted by the builders of the Renaissance. A rare surviving example of a High Renaissance garden is that of the Villa Cicogna-Mozzoni with its dramatic water staircase, the sunken enclosed courtyard garden with classical statues and large pieces of tufa. Still in Italy, on Isola Bella, the Palazzo Borromeo is an extraordinary Baroque extravaganza, instigated in 1632. The centerpiece is a series of five terraces topped with statues, and a water theater with jumping unicorn.

Then in France, Villandry (1532-1536) is one of the most fascinating gardens: the various ornamental gardens, water garden, herb garden, kitchen garden, potager garden, and "*jardin d'amour*" are internationally famous. For the Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte (1657-1661), built by Le Vau and decorated by Le Brun, the garden was designed by Le Nôtre. In this perfect example of a formal French garden, Le Nôtre created astonishing vistas on a heroic scale by skilful use of the laws of perspective. Versailles illustrates Le Nôtre's "*savoir faire*", with its parterres, great basins, an orangery, famous fountains, ornamental groves, and a 1.8-km cruciform canal.

To end the talk, a few slides were presented of the Parc de Bagatelle, with its rose garden created in 1905 by Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier, Monet's garden in Giverny, and Le Bois des Moutiers in Varengeville. Finally, some photographs were shown of gardens in the Northern Countries (Island Mainau, Swiss Botanical Garden, Keukenhof, and Arboretum Kalmthout).

This interesting subject was rather too large for the allotted time. The audience was left a bit wanting, the more so because of the lecturer's enthusiasm for her subject.

MDC

Other items of interest

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

Forthcoming Events

Tuesday 27 June

Zozan's on the Lambermontplaats, near the Museum of Fine Arts, is part restaurant and part exhibition space. We start with an in-depth talk on carpets and an explanation of how they are made, while looking at the carpets that are on display. We then move from the exhibition area to the restaurant and bring our ADFAS season to an end with an hour or so of pleasant conversation, good food and excellent company.

Time: 5 pm. The cost will depend on the menu you choose for dinner. Call Gilberte and ask her to put your name on the list – Gilberte can be reached on 03/230 98 72 or 0477/530 501.

Friday 20 October

Visit to the new Palace of Justice in Antwerp (our guide will be Key Minnebo, well known to many ADFAS members).

“On 28 March 2006 the new law courts for the City of Antwerp were formally opened by King Albert II. This is one of the Richard Rogers Partnership's major public buildings of the early 21st century, designed in conjunction with Belgian co-architects VK Studio. Like many of RRP's projects, it reflects a vision of the city as a humane and democratic place with a commitment to the regeneration of urban life. The site for the law court is at the Bolivarplaats, on the southern edge of Antwerp's central area, where the urban fabric is broken by a massive motorway interchange, cutting off the boulevard that leads into the city. The new building is one of the catalysts for RRP's long-term masterplan of “the new south” of the city, currently in progress. It is conceived both as a gateway to the city and as a link across the motorway between the city centre and the Schelde River. It houses eight distinct civil and criminal courts and includes 36 courtrooms plus offices, chambers for judges and lawyers, library and cafeteria, with a great public hall (the space traditionally known as the “*Salle des Pas Perdus*”) linking six radiating wings of accommodation. This space is capped by a striking roof-structure, crystalline

in form, linking the paraboloid roofs that cover the courtrooms.”

The previous paragraph is taken from the Richard Rogers Partnership description of the Palais de Justice project; we have all seen the building from the outside, and there is no doubt, whether you like it or not, that it is a very imposing building.

So this is a very special opportunity to decide for yourself whether it is a worthy addition to the Antwerp city skyline. We would have liked to visit it sooner – and a weekend would be better for some of our members, we know; but it is an extremely popular attraction and a Friday afternoon in October was the first open slot for a visit. Call Gilberte on 03/230 98 72 or her mobile, 0477/530 501, and let her know if you want to join us – and do so quickly, as the group is limited to a maximum of 20 participants.

Time: 2 pm. The tour will last about 2 hours, and the price per person is €4.

AMD



For more information (in Flemish or French) see www.buildingsagency.be

Heritage Volunteers meeting in London

On 20 April the Heritage Volunteers Area Representatives Spring Meeting was held at NADFAS House in London.

As usual we were welcomed by Kath Hollands, the Heritage Volunteers Chairman. Then followed a brief comment on the Area reports, with the emphasis on items of particular interest or any problems. The morning ended with the introduction of the volunteering documents:

- the promotion documents (on which a picture of ADFAS' project at the Poesje is printed)

- the regional conference

- the volunteers representatives

- any training required.

During lunch I met Elspeth Foley (East Anglia) HV Representative. She is the person who has asked to visit the work done by ADFAS' volunteers in Sint Andries church while touring Belgium with her society. Their tour is now fully organised and will take place sometime in the autumn. If they have time in Antwerp, they would love to meet some of our ADFAS members.

After lunch we received a guided tour by NADFAS Volunteers of the Foundling Museum on Brunswick Square. This is a most fascinating Museum with the moving and inspirational story of one of London's proudest achievements, but also a museum with a fine collection of paintings by Hogarth, Reynolds and Gainsborough and an extensive Handel collection.

And ... don't miss the Coran Café at the museum!

GDB

WHAT'S COMING UP in Antwerp?

• **The Felixarchief** (in the old Sint-Felixpakhuis) will open on Friday 18 August. For the next few days, while the Tall Ships Race ends in Antwerp, the building will be open to everyone. The reading room or *leeszaal*, an essential part of the FelixArchief, will be open to the public at the beginning of the new academic year in the autumn. Our Heritage Volunteers, Ada, Gilberte, Grishma, Martine, Moira and Myriam, have been working hard for the last 16 months checking, listing and packing the City's collection of old glass plate photographs for removal to the Felix Archief, so ADFAS has a very special relationship with the new archives department.

