

THE NEWSLETTER

Issue No.3 – January-February 2009

An Introduction

Dear Members,

My very best wishes to you all for a happy and above all healthy New Year.

The snow and ice that had covered most of Europe for a couple of weeks after Christmas disappeared just in time for the January lecture, on the artists of Venice's Golden Age, and it was marvellous to see so many people present, both members and visitors.

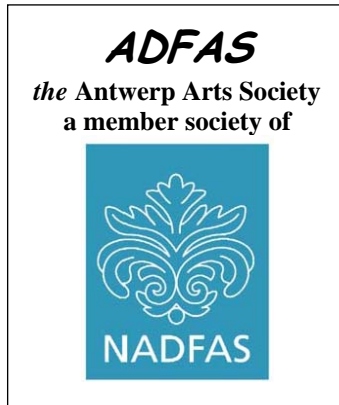
Our lecture for February is noteworthy for two reasons: its subject, Byzantium (later Constantinople, now Istanbul), was closely connected to Venice for many centuries; and the lecturer, Elizabeth Gordon, was the first lecturer to visit the fledgling ADFAS society in October 1991 (when she spoke to us on *Mozart and his World* in – the Church Hall). She has visited us several times since then; it will be a great pleasure to welcome her here once again.

And don't forget our outing on Saturday 7 February to the Vleeshuis Museum, under the guidance of Key Minnebo. Key is inspiring to listen to on any subject and her presence always ensures we have an absorbing time.

Angela Dodds

Samplers: Exhibition in the Maagdenhuis

This exhibition in the Maagdenhuis (Lange Gasthuisstraat 33) illustrates the special history of alphabet and stitching samplers. Many years ago, girls living in an orphanage such as the Maagdenhuis would work at producing samplers, on which they would embroider the alphabet, numbers and motifs. They were not only being taught how to sew, but learning their alphabet and how to read and spell. They would then use this technique to embroider their initials on linen sheets, napkins and towels. Each girl was very proud of her bottom drawer, full



of embroidered linen. It showed that she was both industrious and nimble-fingered, and thus a suitable marriage partner.

Who were these girls? In what conditions did they work? What do their samplers mean to us today? To find out, visit the exhibition which runs until 15 March, open from 10 to 5 on weekdays (closed on Tuesdays) and 1 to 5 at weekends; further information is available on 03/223 56 20.

Flemish Tapestries: Exhibition in Sint-Pieters Abbey, Ghent

From the early 15th century, Flanders was famous for its tapestries, sumptuous works of art made of wool and silk, and threaded with gold and silver. Inventories from the 1400s listed tapestries as being the most expensive art objects after jewellery.

A collection of 34 of the best Flemish tapestries from the 15th and 16th centuries is now on display in Ghent. The exhibition includes tapestries lent by the Royal Palace of Madrid, various Spanish cathedrals and famous European museums, and it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see such an important collection. The exhibition's highlight is the breathtaking panorama on the taking of Tunis in North Africa during one of the numerous campaigns of Emperor Charles V. The exhibition runs until 29 March at the Sint-Pieters Abbey, Sint-Pietersplein 9 in Ghent; audio guides are available in English as well as Dutch and French.

More information from 09 269 60 02 .

Exhibition visit: 'Heads on Shoulders', KMSKA, Antwerp 15 November 2008

Two things quickly became clear during our recent visit to the Heads on Shoulders exhibition at the KMSKA: one, without the explanation given by our guide at the start, I would not have understood what I was seeing; and two, it was very interesting and I was learning a great deal.

The bust began as a religious item, originally depicting one of the saints and then the ruler of the time when the bust would no longer be made of terracotta or wood, as the earliest ones were, but of plaster or even precious metal such as silver. Rubens brought many busts to the Low Countries; he had studied them when in Rome and used his sketches in many of the paintings he made on his return. Plaster copies of busts formed the first part of the exhibition; they were used in artists' studios to teach aspiring artists about the human form, as they still are today.

In the bombproof bunker in the basement of the KMSKA are the real busts, on loan from collections all over Europe. By now the busts (and the upper body – those which extend beyond the head and shoulders and include the torso of the sitter) were true-life images, warts and all if we can believe the plainness, even ugliness, of some of the sitters.

Thank you, Gilberte, as always for arranging a fascinating day.

AMD

**Our meeting place:
The Church Hall (St.Boniface
Anglican Church), Grétrystraat,
2018 Antwerpen
Info: 03/230 39 36.**

The February and March lectures

Monday 2 February 2009
CITY OF THREE NAMES AND
THREE CULTURES: Byzantium,
Constantinople and Istanbul
Lecturer: ELIZABETH GORDON

When the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great decided to move his capital from Rome to the western shores of the Bosphorus during the early part of the 4th century AD, Byzantium was already nearly 1,000 years old. Constantine was no fool. Strategically the location could not have been bettered – where Europe and Asia meet, and with control of the shipping between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. He called his city 'the New Rome', but it soon came to be known as Constantine's City – Constantinople. A newly-converted Christian who decreed that Christianity should become a state religion, Constantine set out building churches as fast as he could go.

The 6th century was a golden age for Constantinople. Emperor Justinian reshaped the city and built the Christian cathedral of Haghia Sofia with its huge dome, while glittering mosaics and gleaming marbles lining its walls. By now the Byzantine Empire extended throughout the Mediterranean from the Caucasus to the Atlantic, and from the Danube to the Sahara.



The Haghia Sofia, Istanbul

When after over eleven hundred years of Byzantine rule the city fell in 1453 to the 21-year-old Ottoman, Mehmet the Conqueror, he too made the city his capital. Domed mosques replaced Christian churches, the walls were now lined with beautiful Iznik tiles, and Haghia Sofia became an Islamic mosque. The high point in Ottoman history was reached during the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, whose inspired architect, Sinan, built 24 mosques in Istanbul alone. The final curtain came down on this fabulous city in 1923.

Elizabeth Gordon

The Royal Academy of Arts in Piccadilly, London, is holding an exhibition entitled *Byzantium 330-1453* (until 22 March). It incorporates some 340 objects including icons, wall paintings, mosaics, ivories, jewellery, enamels, manuscripts, and much else. More information will be available at the February lecture.

Monday 2 March 2009
THE FINE ART OF CRIME:
Actual Case Studies of the Trail and
Reparation of Stolen Art
Lecturer: MALCOLM KENWOOD

The media promote an image of suave and sophisticated gentlemen art thieves operating in heists with beautiful paintings, elegant locations and connotations of an exotic millionaire lifestyle. The reality is that the art thief is no aristocrat. Stealing fine art and antiques affords criminals with a high value commodity, often poorly protected, difficult (but thankfully not impossible) to identify, that can transcend national or international boundaries and reach those eager to deal with the discreditable and unsuspecting.



The Madonna with the Yarnwinder by
Loenardo da Vinci (ca. 1501-07), taken from
Drumlanrig Castle, Scotland,, in 2003

When the painting above was put on view by the Duke of Buccleuch in his ancestral home, Drumlanrig Castle, it wasn't long before it was seized in broad daylight. Four years later, however, it was recovered in a lawyer's office in Glasgow.

In 1972 armed thieves made off with jewellery, figurines and 18 paintings, including works by Corot, Delacroix, Gainsborough, Millais and a rare Rembrandt landscape, from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. All but one of the paintings have not yet been recovered.

Utilising fascinating actual case studies, this lecture examines the trail and repatriation of stolen art.

Our February and March lecturers

ELIZABETH GORDON

Elizabeth Gordon is both an art historian and a musician. She studied at the Guildhall School of Music and in Paris before teaching at Sherborne School for Girls and then went to live in Italy, where she stayed for 17 years, studying and teaching. She now lectures for London University (Extra Mural), for the National Gallery and the V&A. Her hobby is singing, and for many years she sang in the Bach Choir. She is currently an extra with the London Symphony Chorus.

MALCOLM KENWOOD

Malcolm Kenwood is a former specialist police detective with 20 years' experience in investigating art and antique crime, and he used to be recoveries director for the Art Loss Register. His company has created training courses to prevent and detect art crime which have been used by Scotland Yard. He has lectured to police conferences, customs officers, auction house staff, museum employees, Interpol, the FBI and specialist interest groups.

Volunteers Interlude

Although the work of the volunteers at the Volkskundemuseum is not yet finished, they have since the beginning of December been busy cleaning (for the third time) the Holy Shrine of the 36 Saints. This huge shrine has been chosen to be showed in the exhibition which will be organized in Mechelen on "450 jaar Aartsbisdom".

Under the guidance of Patrick Storme and under a huge time pressure, the volunteers are working very hard to make the silver shrine shine once more. The sculptured wooden stand and top are being redone by a restorer atelier.

As soon as the work in St Andries ends the volunteers will resume their projects at the Volkskundemuseum.

Other items of interest

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

David Phillips on whether Christmas is in Good Taste (December 2008)

I don't know what kind of lecture you were expecting, but with such a title I certainly expected something much more funny.

Our speaker sketched the evolution from the pageantry of Midwinter celebrations, through St Nicolas to Santa Claus and from the religious story of Jesus born in a manger, the Magi, the Star over Bethlehem, La Befana in Italy to end with the actual paraphernalia of Christmas gadgets and cards. All of this was illustrated with slides from masterpiece paintings as well as slides from old photographs and tasteless, sentimental postcard designs and kitsch.

In time, the Midwinter feasting became a more devotional celebration, but our lecturer's slides and stories put the emphasis on the drinking, dancing and misbehaving.

The now so popular Christmas trees were only introduced in England in the times of Victoria & Albert, and were a German import. At this point the lecturer showed us a set of photographs of a German couple and their Christmas tree, taken annually from 1900 up to the beginning of WWII. Very interesting to see the economical situation and the fashion change.

The evolution of St Nicolas into Santa Claus and Father Christmas figures also dates from the 19th century. It was in New England and America that Father Christmas became a commercial figure (think of Beer and Coca-Cola). Once Christmas had fallen into the hands of big publicity firms and consumerism, kitsch, violence and even sex infiltrated the subject.

GDB

Karin Debbaut on Venice, the Golden Age (January 2009)

If you were not present, you have missed a fantastic tour of the 16th century Venice painters and sculptures. It was a well structured lecture with an introduction setting the Golden Age of Venice in a historical frame. The

artists whose paintings were shown were first introduced with some biographical details and their connections to other artists. From each masterpiece our lecturer had chosen to highlight, often with extra slides for details, she gave interesting details such as measurements, who had ordered the work, in which collection it belongs now, etc. All her explanations showed a profound love for the artists and their work, the city of Venice and Italian art in general.

With an altarpiece by Giovanni Bellini (2nd half of the 15th C.) still much connected to Byzantine art, Karin Debbaut launched off. Parallels were made with the sculptural work of Donatello. On to Titian (c.1488-1576) who trained in Venice (under Gentile, and later Giovanni Bellini) and who in 1508 was working with Giorgione (c.1477-1510) on the frescoes at the Fondaca dei Tedeschi painting the side facing the town, while Giorgione painted that beside the Grand Canal. The use of draperies or columns (like Mantegna who painted like an architect) divides the painting into a portrait, a nude, a Madonna and child in the front and a landscape on the other side.

But things change: the paintings by Giorgione such as *The Tempest*, an allegory of motherhood which is a poetical not a biblical subject, and the *Concert Champêtre* are now set within a beautiful landscape. Under the influence of artists such as Michelangelo and Da Vinci the bodies are no longer static, they must be lively pictures which also depict states of mind. The horizontal lines are taken over by diagonal and vertical lines, which give the paintings a very solid impression. The lecturer returned to Titian with *Sacred and Profane Love*, different *Venus* paintings and other mythological subject with very sensual nudes and marvellous portraits: stately portraits (Philip II of Spain) and his last self portrait.

The lecture ended with a few works by Tintoretto (1518-1594), who had a very strong influence on Rubens, and works by Veronese (1528-1588) who was very much connected to theatre. Like many other artists he earned his living by painting theatrical decors. The last painting was Veronese's work

The Rape of Europa which already anticipates Baroque art.

Thank you Mrs Debbaut for this enthusiastic and interesting talk.

GDB

Other items of interest

From 20/2 until 24/5/2009

Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels (BOZAR)

From Van Dyck to Bellotto - Splendour at the Court of Savoy

The Centre of Fine Arts and the Vlaamse Kunstcollectie are getting together with a third partner, the Galleria Sabauda in Turin, home of the magnificent collection of the House of Savoy. This extraordinary project highlights the interest in the Flemish masters shown by the family that gave Italy its first king. See works by Jan Brueghel the Elder, Rubens and Van Dyck alongside those of Italian masters from the 15th to the 18th century.

Saturday 14 February 2009 at 3 pm

Classical music at the Rubenshuis with the Herefordshire County Youth Choir singing songs by British composers such as Elgar, Williams, Bird and Britten

It only lasts 30 minutes but your entry to the museum is included in the price of the concert. Tickets cost € 6 (and it's free for the over 65's) (rubenshuis@stad.antwerpen.be).

Found:

In the Church Hall after the January lecture, a pair of warm black gloves (with label: Thinsulate). Gilberte has them so if they are yours, call her on 03/230 98 72.

DATES TO REMEMBER

2 February 2009	<i>City of Three Names and Three Cultures: Byzantium, Constantinople and Istanbul</i> Lecturer: Elizabeth Gordon	Church Hall, Grétrystraat as from 7 pm Lecture at 8 pm
7 February 2009	Exhibition Tour: <i>Sounds of the City</i> with Key Minnebo	Meet at 9.45 am in front of the Museum "t Vleeshuis"
2 March 2009	<i>The Fine Art of Crime: Actual Case Studies of the Trail & Reparation of Stolen Art</i> Lecturer: Malcolm Kenwood	Church Hall, Grétrystraat as from 7 pm Lecture at 8 pm
4 March 2009	ADFAS Committee Meeting (If you have anything you would like brought up at the Committee meeting, please get in touch with Michael Smith)	
19 March 2009	Directory meeting, London [If anyone has any suggestions or ideas concerning future lecture subjects, please contact Angela Dodds before 13 March]	
6 April 2009	<i>Beyond the Gilded Stage: The Social and Cultural History of Opera</i> Lecturer: Daniel Snowman	Church Hall, Grétrystraat as from 7 pm Lecture at 8 pm
4 May 2009	<i>The Paintings of Hieronymus Bosch</i> Lecturer: Valerie Woodgate (preceded by the AGM)	Church Hall, Grétrystraat as from 7 pm Lecture at 8.15 pm (AGM at 8 pm)

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