

THE RAINBOW

Box Art Group Newsletter - Friday 28th October
2022

Written by and for the members of Box Art Group (No. 78)

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Blue Iguana

Watercolour, by *Richard*.



Exhibition

Our annual exhibition was held from 7th to the 9th October, with 78 paintings being exhibited plus lots of cards and unmounted paintings and prints.

Generally, visitors were impressed with the overall quality of the exhibits.



We had around 145 visitors during the 3 days of the event, but the 'Meet the Artists' evening was disappointing, with only a few visitors, so we need to re-consider how we approach this next year. However, the favourite painting competition received 107 votes in total, distributed across 46 different paintings, so it was very close, with the winning entry receiving just 8 votes.

And the winner was Gail's painting of St Mary's Cirencester, (below), with Jill's Toadsmoor Stream second with 7, and two tied for third, Hilary's Footprints in the Snow and Jill's Stroudwater Canal, with 6 votes each.

The portraits of the Queen were well received, and especially David's stamp, above.





Thanks very much to all the exhibitors,
Beth for arranging the paintings, the
committee and all the stewards and
helpers with the set-up and dismantling.

Pete

Favourite painting, St Mary's Cirencester.

Gail

Alfie

A few weeks ago I draw this picture of "Alfie" the old donkey who wanders the Common with the old nags, who is a bit of a local celebrity. Unfortunately he died (we are told "peacefully") out on the Common a few days ago, and there has been a bit of a thing about posting pictures of him on Minch Life Facebook page over the last couple of days. I posted the above drawing which has since gathered about 190 "Likes" and an offer-to-purchase. I agreed to sell in exchange for a cheque to the Nailsworth Donkey Sanctuary.

Michael



The Age of Steam

This was painted with acrylic on paper. I was pleased with the dark reflection of the sky on the engine, but the figures look rather stilted.

Pete



Why do artists draw from the nude?

The place of life drawing as part of an artist's training has waxed and waned over the centuries, but all artists agree that it is a continuing challenge to produce representations of the human figure that carry conviction because we have evolved to be hyperaware of the messages carried by facial expressions and bodily attitudes. One of the major roles of art has therefore been the representation of people - with full weight given to non-verbal communication. We all find it necessary to practice regularly.

Sometimes it was powerful men who wanted images of themselves and their families, advertising their wealth, prestige and power. Images of glory and terror were also used to reinforce religious teaching. The figure work of professional artists therefore needed to convey the sometimes larger-than-life personality of their subjects or they might as well do some other job. Our sensitivity is such that even minor defects of representation can break the illusion - even if we cannot diagnose exactly what is wrong. The essential "rightness" of great art is instantly recognisable, especially to those of us who struggle to attain the same heights

Why, however, did artists practice drawing nude models? Modern participants in life classes do, indeed, feel that they are part of a long tradition, but powerful patrons were not typically painted unclothed, though gods and goddesses frequently were for, perhaps, artistically valid reasons. Many artists would, however, claim (and I think not without reason) that it is difficult to draw clothed models that "live" unless you really understand how the body works underneath the clothes. Some, such as Leonardo, felt that it was even necessary to study human anatomy in order to understand how muscles and bones work under the skin. Why does this seem to be necessary?

You may well argue that if an artist is skilled at accurately drawing what he sees it ought not to matter whether he understands the anatomy underneath the exterior layers. For a talented artist this is a feasible but not necessarily the easiest path to convincing representations. Live models are indeed alive, and inevitably move to some degree and rather than being a problem for the best artists it may even help them to capture the essential personality of the model. (Indeed, I have done life classes where the model is *asked* to move.) The artist is not acting like a camera, capturing a representation of one instant in time. He or she is, over time, absorbing the relationship of three-dimensional volumes along with the personality of the sitter, and creating a representation on paper that is only partly constructed from what appears before the eyes. The rest comes from their own imagination and an understanding of the way bodies work.

My personal experience is that drawing clothed models to a high standard can be harder than drawing those who are unclothed. Admittedly, any viewer would be less confident in critiquing a representation of a clothed model that seems to misdirect about the hidden volumes: a layer of clothes, falling in awkward folds, *could* be hiding a well-constructed body. The great artist, however, *makes* you believe in the living body underneath, by showing how it supports the external layers at the points where it should touch: infelicitous folds would just not be drawn that way. The representation will not fully convince the viewer unless it matches our everyday experience of seeing the way clothes work over the bodies of those around us. I certainly find it difficult to produce clothed images that really satisfy me, but I think that my nude drawing experience puts me in a better position to diagnose the problems and fix them because I can visualise what I cannot see.

With an educated eye you can even see problems in the productions of some professional artists. Look, for example, at the paintings from the second rank (or even third rank) artists that decorate many of our country houses. To my eye at least (which I admit is probably more highly sensitised than most) some of the bodies just do not work under the clothes: the hands are the wrong size and shape and I find it difficult to believe in arms that seem to have the wrong length and do not attach to shoulders in the usual place. (All those who try life drawing know that hands are at least as difficult to draw as faces, and the angles of arms have to be *just* right.) I sometimes wonder whether these artists were disadvantaged by not learning to draw from the nude in the more prudish periods when it was a less typical part of artistic training. Of course, maybe you just got a second-rate job from the artists who could not demand the fees of first-rate artists.

So, there is a fairly widespread consensus amongst practicing artists that drawing from the nude is both highly challenging and worthwhile. It is the ultimate exercise in accurate observation where errors are ruthlessly exposed, even to the less experienced eye. Drawing from the nude is the essence of an effective learning experience because our in-built intuitive understanding of the human figure exposes errors in technique to a much higher degree than drawing from clothed models. The key to continuous improvement is critically identifying and diagnosing the nature of defects, before attempting to avoid the errors causing the defects in the next drawing. It seems to be easier, in my experience, to complete this learning cycle with unclothed models.

It has therefore also been claimed that once you have learned to do accurate representations of the human figure, you will find drawing almost everything else relatively easy by comparison. I do not think that things are quite that simple. Each type of subject presents their own challenges, and you still have to gain a good understanding of how to see what is actually there and then create a representation on paper that produces the intended impression on a viewer.



Nevertheless, those who acquire the skills of life drawing with reasonable success will be practiced in the process by which such understanding is acquired, and will also be accustomed to holding themselves to a high standard. They should be able to transfer the same learning skills to address the particular difficulties associated with other types of subject.

Are we, however, still too much the captive of a tradition that has outlived its original purposes, and is now somewhat in conflict with modern sensibilities? It is time to face the question which feminists have titled “The Male Gaze”. This is a term that originated in critiques of early cinematography, where women often figured primarily as objects of attraction for men, having little agency of their own in the story. The critique can be extended to a good deal of classical art.

My own personal experience of life classes is that there is a preponderance of female models. My impression is that there are similar ratios in life drawing images posted on-line - though I have not attempted any definitive survey. My informal

conversations suggest that in general the artists who attend life class (who tend to be balanced between the sexes) would mostly prefer to have a fifty-fifty mix between male and female models, but male models seem to be less available.

I have not talked to enough life models about this issue to understand their motivations and why this is the case, but I suspect that the generally less favourable economic position of women is a partial explanation for the current gender imbalance: they can certainly earn more per hour from life modelling than the typically minimum wage opportunities available in social care, retail and hospitality. (Models not infrequently also work in those sectors, at least part time, with life modelling providing a useful additional income supplement.) Some of the most financially precarious professions are in the arts, and the models themselves may have trained and perhaps are still trying to earn a living in the arts, with additional cash flow always welcome. Dancers, musicians and fine-artists have all figured in my own drawings. The now well-known operatic diva Lesley Garrett is happy to tell how she partly financed her musical training with life modelling. Many of the models have therefore experienced the life class from the other side of the drawing board. They are also aware of the long and hallowed tradition of "life-class", probably feel more comfortable with the idea of nude posing for that reason and will be aware that the attitude to the model is generally respectful. The best life models certainly give the impression that they are "comfortable in their skins".

We are so familiar with the presence of nude art that we tend to overlook its essential oddness in a society that generally has taboos against public nudity. Post nude photographs on social media and they are likely to be taken down fairly quickly by the moderators: post nude art and on the whole you will have little difficulty - even if your art is almost photo-realistic (though there are occasional tales about photos of famous paintings being thought too shocking for Instagram). The license of tradition and familiarity can create odd inconsistencies. It does, however, test credibility to suggest that the art of the nude has no connection with the physical attraction between the sexes (or even within the sexes). Sexual attraction is part of the human experience and the point at dispute is how it should be validly represented in visual art in ways that neither cause gratuitous offence nor that exploit the subjects. On the other hand artists such as Jenny Saville have built a well deserved reputation out of drawing particularly un-idealised female nudes.

It is of course not hard to find examples of the provocative, including famous art in museums. Paintings such as Manet's "*Olympia*" or Monet's "*Déjeuner sur l'herbe*" were controversial in their time: clearly erotic and deliberately shocking and some modern artists clearly believe that they need to be as shocking as possible in order to gain attention in an overcrowded profession. (Nor does this apply just to the representation of the female body: there are clearly homo-erotic elements in some paintings of classical subjects. It may be that the artist were just exhibiting and revelling in their undoubted virtuosity in representing human flesh, but one sometimes wonders if the images of well-muscled young men step over the line into gratuitous nudity.

I find it difficult to formulate a definitive opinion on this topic - though I would certainly feel uncomfortable if I thought that the models found the work distasteful, but felt compelled to the work by the need for the money. I do, however, know that life models who regard the work as their full-time profession encourage postings of their representation on-line, and indeed may well run their own websites which include drawings by a variety of artists. For them, self promotion is the key to a good stream of work. In some cities, such as Bristol, artists' models have formed themselves into professional "collectives" that organise and therefore share the profits from life-classes.

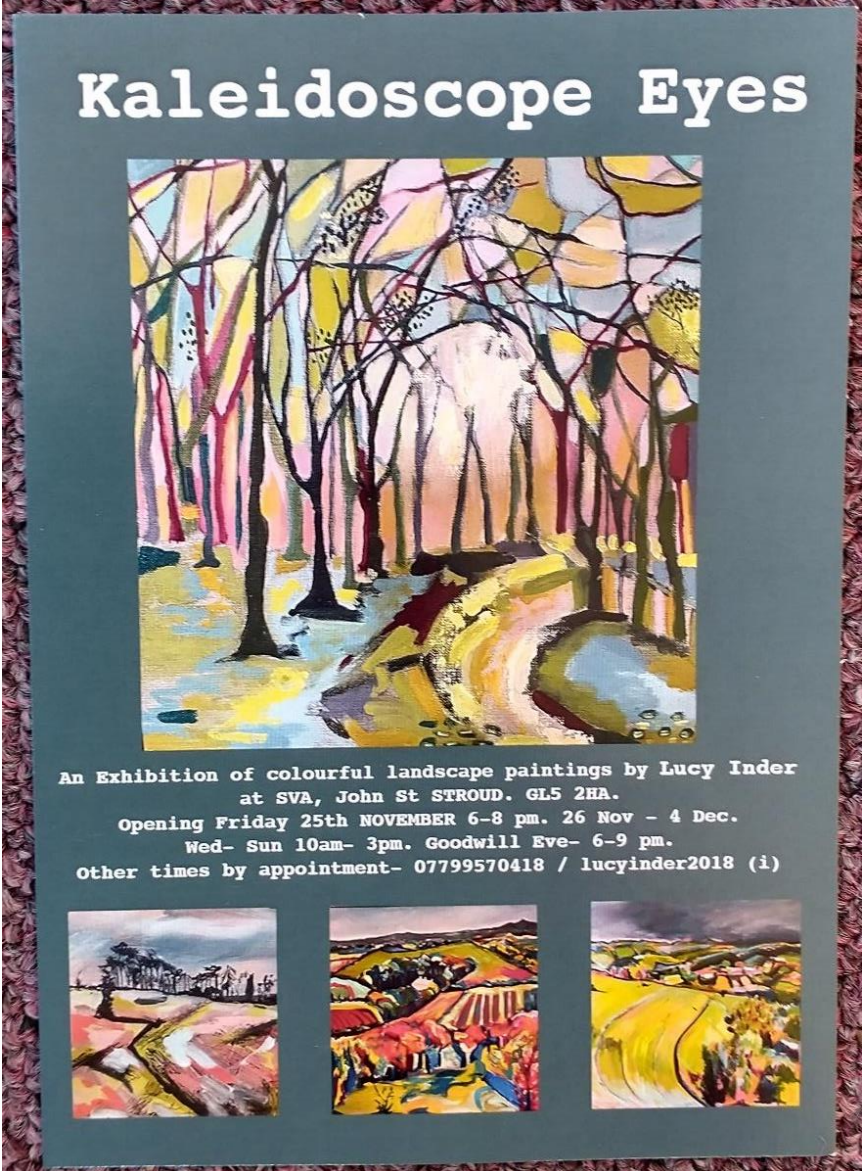
I think that one ought to worry about exploiting the economically disadvantaged - but is life modelling substantially more concerning than the position of those working in social care? At least the pay is much better. Are we too focussed on producing art that satisfies the taste of men? There is now much more of a gender balance between men and women (in fact tipping towards females) in those creating art and I suspect the same is true of those who now buy art. Is life drawing justified for the technical benefits that it produces? Those who need to draw the human figure, clothed or unclothed, generally think that this is true, but you need to make up your own mind. I would, however, suggest that you experience a life class

before you reach your own decisions. There are easily accessible opportunities in the Stroud area, including Saturday and Tuesday evening sessions at *Stroud Life Drawing*.

Michael

Upcoming Exhibition

The exhibition will be in Stroud Valleys Artspace, on John Street, Stroud.



Kaleidoscope Eyes

An Exhibition of colourful landscape paintings by Lucy Inder
at SVA, John St STROUD. GL5 2HA.
Opening Friday 25th NOVEMBER 6-8 pm. 26 Nov - 4 Dec.
Wed- Sun 10am- 3pm. Goodwill Eve- 6-9 pm.
Other times by appointment- 07799570418 / lucyinder2018 (i)

Autumn Term Sessions

3 rd November	Beth	
10 th November	Beth	Photographing artwork with Michael McEllin – Bring your camera
17 th November	Roxy	
24 th November	Roxy	Still life
1 st December	Beth	Post photograph processing with Michael McEllin
8 th December	Beth	Make a wooden Christmas decoration – details to follow Bring your own mince pies & Christmas social Bring and buy table of donated materials
12 th January		Spring term begins

Portrait sitters

Please add your name to one of the empty session slots below. We need two sitters every Thursday; each session will last for one hour (2:00-3:00pm and 3:00-4:00pm) with a five-minute half-time break if required.
Please ask friends or family if they could come and sit. Non-members would be paid £5.00 'pin money' per session. They could do a double session if they'd like.

	Session one (2:00-3:00pm)	Session two (3:00-4:00pm)
13 October 2022	RICHARD BAKER	HILARY BAKER
20 October 2022	MICHAEL MCELLEN	JO GALE
27 October 2022	SHEILA ALLEN	honne Francis
03 November 2022	JOSE THOMAS	HILARY TURK
10 November 2022	PETE SMITH	SUE DIXON
17 November 2022	Hilary Kommer	Dave Woodrighen
24 November 2022	Rick Francis	Rick Francis
01 December 2022	Margaret Adams	Mike Coople
08 December 2022 (CHRIS PARTY)	Wendy P. Cowles	