

# **BRIDFAS News**

BRITISH DECORATIVE AND FINE ARTS  
SOCIETY OF BRUSSELS

[www.bridfas.org](http://www.bridfas.org)

February 2010

The **next lecture** will be held at 20.00 pm on Wednesday, February 3  
at the Woluwe St-Lambert Town Hall, Ave Paul Hymans 2.  
Welcome drinks will be offered starting at 19.30.

## **COMMITTEE COMMUNICATIONS**

### **CHAIRMAN'S NOTES**

#### **January's Lecture**

It was my pleasure to ring in the new year with a wonderful lecture by Prof. Ian Beckett on the "Waterloo Panorama and the Art of the Panorama and Cyclorama". As I've already seen a few panoramas in Europe as well as the U.S., I was anxious to learn more. I took notes wildly and was sorry to find out that the exquisite panorama in the Victoria and Albert Museum is no longer visible. The panorama in The Hague, however, has been nearly fully restored and can now be seen in all its splendour. What's more, a brand new panorama has just been opened in Voorhout, the Netherlands called "The Tulip Panorama" and it looks stunning. Closer to home, there is the Waterloo panorama which is always an exciting adventure for children as well as adults. My real discovery, though, was the Gettysburg panorama in my home state of Pennsylvania. I didn't even know that it existed! It's also just been restored, so I've put it on my list of must-sees the next time I go visit.

And what can I say about the weather last time? It snowed all day! Fortunately, by lecture time the snow had turned to misty rain making the roads navigable once again. I was happy to see that so many people braved it and came to the lecture anyway. I am sure that everyone would agree that it was well worth the effort.

The last lecture was also our annual used book sale. It would have been nice to have had greater participation, but the event was deemed successful nonetheless as it generated socialization and conversation.

#### **February's Lecture**

Helen McCabe will be speaking to us about the "Houses and Gardens of Normandy". This talk will be multi-faceted. First of all, the history of the development of the local gardens from moated medieval castles to lush 19<sup>th</sup> century seaside villas will be explored. Giverny, possibly the world's most famous garden and source of inspiration for some of the most iconic works by the renowned impressionist painter, Claude Monet, will also be included. As we will see, Giverny is so important that it continues to be an inspiration for modern gardens. An arts and crafts house, the colourful garden of the American Museum as well as two gardens planted as recently as the 1990s will all be featured.

*Paula Cagli*

## **STUDY DAYS**

### ***The Mandarin's Three Dreams***

There are no other words to describe our tour at the ING Mandarin exhibition except for "absolutely marvelous"! We were extremely fortunate to have had a young and enthusiastic guide, Christine Willemen. She possessed a profound knowledge of the history of China, and under her guidance the door to understanding a whole new philosophy and way of life was opened.

The traditional Chinese approach to life was meditational, and the exhibition reflected this perfectly. The muted colors of the walls, the projected bamboo grove on silk screens, and the soft lighting all contributed to set the mood.

We listened to a detailed description of the art of calligraphy, how ink was made, the instruments that were used, and the different styles of writing. Calligraphy scrolls were kept as collection pieces by the well-to-do and used as objects of entertainment and conversation. Often guests would add to the pieces by writing a comment on the side.

Painting actually grew from calligraphy. Most of the works on display were in black ink, but the styles were numerous. They were painted rapidly from memories of nature and were meant to be acts of meditation.

Mandarins, the Emperor's emissaries throughout the land, were often very adept at painting because they were, first and foremost, calligraphers. Usually from wealthy families and well educated in the arts, they had to pass exams in Beijing to become mandarins. As the exams were written, calligraphy was of the utmost importance.

What was the subject matter of the mandarins' paintings? Their fantasies were referred to as dreams, and they fell into three main categories: the bamboo grove which symbolized art and friendship, the plum blossom which represented love and female domestic life, and the butterfly which spoke of freedom and communion with nature.

The effect was mesmerizing!

*Paula Cagli*

### ***Moctezuma and the Aztecs***

Moctezuma and the Aztecs was the third and last in a series of exhibitions at the British Museum in London which addressed the topic of divine rulers in the ancient world. All of the study day attendees deemed it to have been the best of the three. To relive some of the highlights of that extraordinary day, there is now an article complete with pictures on the "Events" page the **BRIDFAS** website.

So have a tour on <http://www.bridfas.org/events.htm> and enjoy yourself!

*Paula Cagli*

*With special thanks to Victor de Vries for the photographs*

## MEMBERS' FORUM

### ***“VOYAGE TO ITALY”***

#### ***Come Inaugurate My Latest Photography Exhibition***

My latest photography exhibition, “Voyage to Italy”, has now been hung and is just waiting to be inaugurated. From Milan to Tuscany, Rome and Sicily, over forty photographs of my various Italian travels will be on display. Intense, intriguing and saturated with solitary emotion, they particularly highlight the art historical beauties of that country.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Media Division of the U.S. Department of State and will include a short video about me, my objectives and the meaning of my work.

I am pleased to invite you, your friends and families to the inauguration which will take place on Tuesday, February 2, 2010 near the American Embassy in Brussels. A formal invitation has already been sent to you via email with the exact address and RSVP details. As a reminder I am sending you an additional invitation along with this newsletter. It is essential to RSVP, print the invitation and bring it with you along with a picture id.

The exhibition will be curated by Stephanie Manasseh, the director of the Brussels Accessible Art Fair. [www.accessibleartfair.com](http://www.accessibleartfair.com)

So “benvenuti a tutti” and I hope to see you there!

*Paula Cagli*

### ***DFAS THE HAGUE TOUR***

#### ***“The Panorama Mesdag”***

The offer to join the DFAS organised visit to the Mesdag Panorama in Den Haag was too good to miss being timed to follow the last lecture. It is an easy two hour drive from Brussels (on a Sunday anyway) and only 180 km. Parking near the Mesdag is free on weekends as this is largely a diplomatic quarter. The group of 27 was greeted by the DFAS President, Jane (another American!) and the visit was 'curated' by a local academic expert on panoramas.

First you see a painting of a terrible storm which hit Schevingsehaven in the 1890s. Then you ascend a spiral staircase in the dark and come up in the centre of the wonderful 360 degree panorama, built in 1880. Facing out to sea, you can see a long beach with fishing boats beached by the tide and activity everywhere including soldiers doing exercises on the beach. The boats are very wide [length of only twice the width (beam)] and must have been very difficult to maneuver only with sails. Inland, you see the fishing village with domestic life, and on the other side the 'modern' town with a health sanatorium, bourgeois houses etc. The painter Mesdag put his wife in the Panorama as a painter working on the beach.

The Panorama has an excellent illusion of size, as demonstrated when the curator walked on the sand. The inner workings were also revealed when the group was allowed to approach it from downstairs. The painting is enormous, being 200 m. long and 14 m. high. It traveled once, at least, to Munich by train - a major exercise.

Afterwards, we had a coffee and met the British Ambassador who was there with his family being the Patron of DFAS The Hague.

Leaving the Panorama, a friend took us to the 'Mauritshuis', a wonderful collection of Flemish and Dutch masters. The house itself is very fine and well kept. Afterwards we recommend a drink in the comfortable 'Des Indes' restaurant, lounge and bar nearby. Unfortunately, in this area there are parking charges, even on Sundays.

*Tony Dodd*

## **SEEN IN ROME**

### **“Calder”**

A particularly rich exhibition of works by the famed mobile artist Alexander Calder (1898 – 1976) is currently on display at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, Italy. Calder was born near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and came from one of the most extraordinary families of artists. His grandfather was a sculptor and was responsible for Philadelphia’s most iconic work: the statue of William Penn on top of city hall. His father created the sculptures for Philadelphia’s most famous fountain in Logan Circle. His mother, a professional portrait painter, trained at the Sorbonne in Paris and later met his father while studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. His sister, instead, went on to found the UC Berkeley Art Museum.

Initially, Alexander was different, and he became an engineer. His interests lead him to study all about weights, counterweights and their various properties, and, before he knew it, he was hanging weights of different sizes, shapes and colours on wires and balancing them against one another. The process became ever more aesthetically sophisticated until Marcel Duchamp suggested that he call them “mobiles”. Thus, Calder, the abstract artist, was born. The fact of the matter was, though, that he always considered himself to be an engineer rather than an artist, so he never took his art too seriously. His work is whimsical and imbued with an innate sense of humour.

On display are Calder’s wire sculptures, mobiles, stabiles and abstract paintings which cover the entire span of his life. Some works are just funny little wires bent to look uncannily like certain people. Other works are enormous feats of engineering which hang majestically from the ceiling commanding the attention of all below. They come from various museums around the world, particularly the Calder Foundation in New York State.

As an added treat there is also a room dedicated to photographs of Calder and his work by Ugo Mulas, the famous Italian photographer who became very friendly with Calder after the latter moved to France. It is an immensely gratifying and uplifting exhibition.

Open until February 14

<http://www.palazzoesposizioni.it/MEDIACENTER/FE/CategoriaMedia.aspx?idc=90>

*Paula Cagli*

### **“Boldini e gli Italiani a Parigi”**

What happened to the art of the bourgeoisie in Paris when Degas, Pissarro, Monet, Sisley and the other impressionists were off inventing a whole new style? Who dutifully painted their portraits in the more classical, comfortable style they were used to? Considering the depressed economic times in Italy, many of its finest artists found work in Paris doing what Parisian painters no longer wished to do: paint on commission. Boldini, De Nittis and Zandomenighi were just a few of the names.

Initially, their works were solid and traditional, but as they gained more exposure to the Impressionists, their work began to show the new influence in what was often a strange and particular mix. Yet, they were commercially very successful in their integration of the classical with the contemporary.

The exhibition is a little-known slice of life of Paris in the second half of the 1800s. It is being held in the “Chiostro del Bramante” in the church of Santa Maria della Pace near Piazza Navona in Rome. The courtyard of the church is by Bramante; the façade is by Pietro della Cortona; and the frescoes inside the church are by Raphael. In other words, there are many good reasons to pay a visit.

Open until March 14

*Paula Cagli*

## ***“Michelangelo Architetto a Roma”***

Michelangelo (1475 – 1564) was perhaps the most accomplished painter and sculptor in history. Beyond the dome of Saint Peter’s Basilica, though, he is much less known for his architecture. Nevertheless, he was responsible for laying the groundwork for Baroque and Modern Rome. His was an époque in which the city was just emerging from the physical ruin that was the medieval. In terms of architecture, chaos reigned. Ancient Roman ruins literally littered the city making decent and practical living difficult.

With the new-found wealth the Renaissance brought, the popes as heads of state began to take it upon themselves to create a more beautiful city and a more pleasant place for all to live. Their very prestige was on the line. As the chief architect of several popes, the last part of Michelangelo’s life was dedicated to overseeing all sorts of building and urban renewal projects. He designed the city’s capitol buildings and square, the “Campidoglio”. He created a church within the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian, “Santa Maria degli Angeli e Martiri”. The Pope had Rome’s first straight street built which terminated in a city gate designed by Michelangelo, “Porta Pia”. The list goes on.

The exhibition is marvelously being held at the Campidoglio in Rome. On display are Michelangelo’s drawings, letters and models where the visitor can enter into the mind of the artist and follow his creative process from beginning to end. Each section of the show is dedicated to a particular building project so that it is organized in a very rational and didactic way. After the exhibition, the visitor exits onto the Campidoglio square and physically experiences the artist’s final creation.

Open until February 7

<http://en.museicapitolini.org/>

*Paula Cagli*

## **EXHIBITION SCENE**

### ***Brussels:***

MAGRITTE MUSEUM

Place Royale

Newly opened flagship museum for Brussels, 100,000 visitors by 7<sup>th</sup> August!

Tickets can be booked on line

PALIA CHINA”

Arts festival 8/10/09 - 14/2/10

“ASIA-EUROPE Faith and Trade”

@ BOZAR 25/6/10 - 3/10/10

“THE SILK ROAD”

@ Museum of Arts & History 23/10/09 - 7/2/10

The treasures of the mountains of Western China

“THE THREE DREAMS OF A MANDARIN”

@ ING Place Royale 22/10/09 - 14/2/10

“MEXICO festival”

@ BOZAR 16/1/10 - 25/4/10

“AFRICA festival”

@ BOZAR 11/6/10 - 20/9/10

### **Antwerp:**

“ROOM FOR ART IN 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY ANTWERP”

@ Rubenshouse 28/11/09 - 28/2/10

Willem van Haechts treasure rooms

“DELVAUX 180 YEARS OF BELGIAN LUXURY”

@ MoMu Fashion Museum 17/9/09 - 21/2/10

This is Handbag-Delvaux not Nudes and Trams- Delvaux

### **Liege:**

GRAND CURTIUS

Now open the new museum that brings together the collections along the banks of the Meuse

### **Louvain La Neuve :**

HERGE MUSEUM

A new purpose built museum opened in May 2009 to celebrate Herge and his most famous creation Tin-Tin

### **Tongeren:**

“AMBIORIX ROI DES EBURONS”

@ Museum Gallo-Roman 4/10/09 – 31/3/10

### **London:**

“KINGDOM OF LIFE-SCULPTURESOF WEST AFRICA”

@ British Museum 4/3/10-6/6/10

“FRA ANGELICO TO LEONARDO: ITALIAN RENAISSANCE DRAWING”

@ British Museum 22/4/10-25/7/10

“CHRISTEN KOBKE - DANISH MASTER OF LIGHT”

@ National Gallery 17/3/10 - 13/6/10

“VENICE: CANALETTO AND HIS RIVALS”

@ National Gallery 13/10/10 - 16/1/11

Expect heavy crowds, book in advance

“PAUL NASH:THE ELEMENTS”

@ Dulwich Picture Gallery 10/2/10 - 9/5/10

“VICTORIA AND ALBERT: ART AND LOVE”

@ Queens Gallery 19/3/10 - 31/10/10

“THE REAL VAN GOGH: ARTIST AND HIS LETTERS”

@ Royal Academy 23/1/10 - 18/4/10

### **Oxford:**

7<sup>th</sup> November the Ashmolean Museum reopens after major re-building

### **Paris:**

“JAMES ENSOR”

@ Musee d 'Orsay 20/10/09 - 4/2/10

A major retrospective of one of Belgium's greatest artists, previously shown in New York

**Lausanne:**

"EDWARD HOPPER"

@ Fondation Hermitage 25/6/10 - 24/10/10

*Andrew McCubbin*

**UPCOMING LECTURES**

<b>3 February 2010</b>	Helen McCabe <i>"Houses and Gardens of Normandy"</i>
<b>3 March 2010</b>	Christopher Bradley <i>"Splendours of North Africa"</i>
<b>14 April 2010</b>	Colin Lattimore <i>"History of the Long Case Clock"</i>
<b>12 May 2010</b>	James Taylor <i>"Ocean Liner Art"</i>