

N 20 G

S U M M E R newsletter A U G U S T 2011

With a new policy in place your new chair attempts to both lighten the load, and spread the administrative burden of the group by doing the newsletter himself..... so apologies in advance for infelicities of prose, lapses of manners and those occasional expressions of bigotry and prejudice.

Good to see members so well represented both at the Forum '*Elements*' show and the current '*Colour and Form*' at the Assembly House. Both characterised by considerable curatorial skill and effort and not inconsiderable financial support and sponsorship. It will be interesting to see what the future holds for the Assembly House as a venue, but one we should probably put in the frame when thinking – *where next?*.....

Glad to report that finances are all ok, but usual gripe that so far so few subscriptions have been paid. Subs are, by any standards, pretty modest and, were one to cost the time and hassle in reminding and collecting them, it would probably be cheaper to do it free. But, we don't; so please extract digits and get on with it. (meanwhile, any ideas as to how to

make it a more painless process gratefully received.) A gentle reminder to those recently elected; membership only begins when you have paid.....

This year a full complement of licentiates (anybody got a better word for them? It sounding like I seldom feel....) Rachael Clarke, Ilona Bush, Grant Lee and Henry Jackson Newcomb join us fresh from NUCA and are young and whose energy and enthusiasm will benefit us all: big welcome and more in a minute.....

Dates for Diaries - forthcoming events etc etc

September 6th ' *What the members think* ' 7.30 *The Chapel - Park Lane*

Following his valued talk to us, Keith Roberts will be facilitating an evening similar to one conducted by NCAS last January. An opportunity for all to say what is on their minds, their concerns for the future, what seems to be going well and what can be done better. Hopefully Keith will tease out and unravel some of the major issues and strands of thought that can then be put to the committee to work into some kind of programme and plan to move forward over the

next 2/3 years.

October 4th Evening for Licentiates 7.30 Venue to be advised

After a short introduction by one of those who helped select, each of our new members will have 5 mins to say something of themselves, their work or what they are about. In keeping it tight and to the point it will allow maximum time for questions and discussion from the membership. While it would be depressing if we did not feel we have something to offer them, I am also confident they are able to bring much to us: we shall see.

November 1st Professor John Last: Principal NUCA: 'NUCA and the 20 Group: New beginnings '

This must be a welcome opportunity to get a clearer view and understanding of where NUCA currently is, its plans for the future and hopefully strengthen links that maybe have become weakened over the years. Moving from Bournemouth to become Principal in 2009, John has been at the helm during a period of rapid and fundamental change – both on a micro and macro level.

With a commitment for the college to relate

more directly to the City and to the arts in and around it, John is also keen and enthusiastic to understand more clearly what we feel the 20 Group may also bring to the table.

Just another reminder for the Cromer cafe show in October: this will be restricted to small(ish) drawings and because of the current strength and vibrancy of Life drawing within the Group, David H is especially keen for these to be represented. Further details before too long.

After some very slight help with the Castle watercolour show I was keen to see the full-blown, unexpurgated version at the Tate, and could not have been more disappointed. The hype - probably their own - could not have been more fulsome, 'magisterial' - *'stunningly comprehensive' - the greatest ever review of the medium'* was so wide of the mark I thought it the wrong show.

What the Castle showed in quality, concision and coherence the Tate waffled into mediocrity, repetition and a completely overweight view of the 'Englishness' of the medium (limp, fey, well mannered and polite) - ok, borrowing a Durer for the show may present problems, but no Cezanne, no Klee or

Nolde or even Winslow Homer let alone anything at all from either China or Japan. It gives a limited, very partial view of both the history and the medium.

But it was the contemporary section where the flimsiness of the show went into total collapse: a deeply unpleasant oil by Neal Tait which turned out to be a deeply unpleasant turbid

acrylic. Nearly 7 square metres of magnificent *Vivace* by Sandra Blow, showing acrylic at its versatile best. A hauntingly beautiful Peter Doig hung next to one of grinding clumsiness.

But three each of Bethan Huws and Tracy Emin had me lurching to the Exit..... all

exquisitely, and expensively framed, their smudgy vapidness was eye wateringly inept and bland.

I felt in the presence of a twelve year old curator who had just discovered that so much paint was soluble in water, - and yes, we did get emulsion.....

Only Cozens (d 1786) and the inevitable Joseph Mallord came to the rescue to evidence the strength of watercolour as a *thinking* medium: the direct and intimate connection between eye and brain and hand.....

.....help was however at hand a few galleries away in the highly

charged, dynamic *Vortisist* show where watercolour (and gouache) was extensively used to explore and articulate new ideas, and give new means of representing the world they lived in and wished to re-define. The work of Dorothy Shakespeare was a revelation and, whatever the dodgy politics and questionable ethics; this is a group rightly being redefined outside the stultifying parochialism of English painting of the time.....

..... I have always loved some individual works by Miro, but never quite 'got him' and after the wonderful Tate Modern show I feel much the same. (The watercolour show would certainly have been lifted with a couple from his lapidary *Celestial series*) But two unflinching characteristics became progressively clearer as the show unfolded: - the increasing boldness and authority his work assumed as he got older, the technical freedom that went with it. And the total absence of what now seems valued so highly - irony. He was part of a period and time when painting was a serious matter reflecting the tides of world events and the role of the artist within them. It was witness to his world: -well worth the visit.....

..... so forgive the abuse of this high office, while I indulge in these gentle musings (rant) - people have been saying we need more discussion, more exchange of thoughts and ideas. Should some of this be incorporated and given a platform on the web site?

More to think about for September 6th..... till then....

Martin

