



THE ARTS
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VALE

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Programme 2023-24

October 5 2023

Tulipomania – a 17th century passion in art, gardens and collecting
Anne Haworth

Tulipomania reached its height in Amsterdam in the 1630s. Besotted collectors, speculated in and paid ever higher prices for the rarest varieties, hoping for a flower with petals of an unparalleled richness and intensity of colour. Most desirable was ‘Semper Augustus’, with its mysterious and spectacular ‘flamed’ petals. It featured as a motif on still-life flower paintings by Balthasar van der Ast and Ambrosius Bosschaert and on works of art from furniture to embroideries, ceramics and silver. Tulips inspired the production of Delftware flower pyramids for the English court of William and Mary. Examples can still be seen in the collections at Hampton Court Palace and Dyrham Park near Bath.

November 2 2023

A Carpet Ride to Khiva and Central Asia
Chris Aslan Alexander

A narrative approach to the revival of 15th century carpets in Khiva, a desert oasis in Uzbekistan. Illuminations on vellum (the only surviving representations of textiles from this era) flourished, despite Islamic prohibitions, and are all we had left of Timurid Carpets until Chris Alexander’s workshop wove them to life again. The lecture examines the traditional role of carpet weaving and embroidery in the social lives of Central Asian women, how social and how political influences led to the decline of textile production. Gender-inequality, corruption and the sourcing of natural dyes from neighbouring Afghanistan continue to challenge attempts at reviving the rich textile heritage of Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand.

December 7 2023

The Nativity in Art from Giotto to Picasso
Clare Forde-Wille

From the 13th to the 20th centuries, the Nativity must be one of the most popular subjects of all with artists, north and south of the Alps, from Giotto, Fra Angelico, Rembrandt to Rubens. Sometimes the scene takes place at night, sometimes during the day. The lecture will explore the many variations of the scene and their possible meanings, depending upon whether midwives, Joseph or shepherds are present, and will analyse the various postures and gestures of the Virgin as she adores the Christ Child.

January 4 2024

Eleanor Coade and her Stone
Angela Smith

Coade is an artificial stone that was invented in the 18th century. It was widely used for freestanding statuary and monuments, architectural detailing and even garden furniture. Hundreds of examples can still be seen across Britain. The stone was named after Eleanor Coade, who for many years ran a successful manufactory in south London. This lecture tells the story of Mrs Coade and the artificial stone that made her one of the most successful businesswomen in the late 1700s.

February 1 2024

200 years of Valentines
John Scott

At some stage in life most of us have received or sent a valentine card. While enthusiasm for such a romantic gesture has fluctuated over the years, the symbolism has remained enduring. This talk explores the expressions of roses, hearts and cupids as depicted by generations of engravers and concludes with the satirical and elaborate confections of the late Victorian era.

March 7 2024
The history of the City of London through Stained Glass
Anna Warrillow

This lecture covers almost 2000 years of London's history illustrated through its stained glass windows - covering the 19th and 20th centuries and contemporary glass makers.

April 4 2024
Chinamania - The impact of Chinese porcelain on European taste, collecting and display
Jane Gardiner

When the very first Chinese porcelains found their way to Europe, the beauty and fragility of the material led to their being mounted with precious metal and treasured alongside other rare and exotic objects such as ostrich eggs and rock crystal vessels. They were housed in cabinets of curiosities and exchanged as diplomatic gifts between great European rulers. This early and exclusive ownership of Chinese porcelain spread enormously in the 17th century with the opening up of trading routes between Europe and the Far East, led to a widespread fashion for housing and displaying collections of Chinese 'blue-and-white'; and spawned a whole range of European imitations.

May 2 2024
Breugel - the seasons and the world
Gavin Plumley

In 1565, Pieter Bruegel the Elder was commissioned to create a series of paintings for a dining room in Antwerp. The images, charting the course of a year, changed the way we view the world through art. Landscape had previously been a decorative backdrop to dramas both sacred and profane. But in Bruegel's hands the landscape and our interaction with it became the focus. Looking at paintings such as *The Return of the Herd*, *Hunters in the Snow* and *The Gloomy Day*, this lecture explores how Bruegel pioneered a whole new way of thinking about the environment and our individual places within a shifting cosmos.

June 6 2024
Breaking the ice – Jackson Pollock and American Abstract Impressionism
Ann Moszynska

What caused American painting to take off as it did in the mid-20th century? The painter Willem de Kooning attributed its initial success to the work of his friend Jackson Pollock whom he credited with 'breaking the ice'. Ann's talk looks at the career of the famous action painter and assesses how his contribution to painting (including his infamous drip technique) contributed to Abstract Expressionism becoming an artistic phenomenon worldwide. Pollock's path left a particularly significant legacy in terms of future developments.

July 4 2024
Tapestry – The ultimate wall decoration
Susan Kay-Williams

Tapestries were the most expensive wall decorations in the Middle Ages and beyond. Often commissioned in sets, taking years to produce, they graced some of the most significant courts of Europe from the 15th century to the 21st. This lecture will explore the making of tapestries and some landmark sets including those of the House of Burgundy, Pope Leo X and Henry VIII all made by the weavers of Flanders and those of Louis XIV and the current Queen of Denmark made by the weavers of the Gobelins factory in Paris. It will explore the changing approaches and some of the stories translated into tapestry.