



## A RISKY BUSINESS - MARKETING MODERN ART IN EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY LONDON

EVELYN SILBER

The Arts Society Fylde  
Lowther Pavilion Theatre  
5 April 2023 at 2.00pm

If, when someone mentions “Leicester Galleries” to you, the first thing you think about is a world-class collection of German Expressionist art in an East Midlands city (“The Leicester Museum and Art Gallery”, in fact), you’re in for an introduction instead to a London venue that was one of the few galleries bold enough to promote modern art during the first half of the 20th century. On her first visit to The Arts Society Fylde, Evelyn Silber will speak about the Leicester Galleries which operated for most of its 73-year existence from Leicester Square. It presented over 1400 exhibitions, including the first one man shows in England of many modern masters – Van Gogh, Gauguin, Degas, Matisse and Picasso - to name only a few. It fostered the careers of numerous now well-known British artists including Paul Nash, Jacob Epstein and Henry Moore, Keith Vaughan and John Craxton.

Thanks to our speaker, we’ll be able to explore the ventures, triumphs, crises and controversies of the gallery’s heyday between the Wars, focusing on exhibitions of Matisse and Picasso, Jacob Epstein and Henry Moore.

Presenting and selling modern art brought great challenges during the early part of the 20th century, unlike today when modern and contemporary works fetch astronomical prices and Tate Modern attracts huge audiences. Then, it was a highly risky business and British taste was notoriously conservative.

Ms Silber points out that George Bernard Shaw, who had worked as an art critic, wrote to an artist friend in 1917, “Unless you can say ‘this picture is the very thing for your splendid dining room!’ you have no chance. That is why it is more important to dine out than to study painting.” Perhaps there will be a chance to decide whether we all agree.

### EVELYN SILBER

Evelyn Silber is the former Director of the Hunterian, University of Glasgow and of Leeds Museums and Galleries. Her publications include *The Sculpture of Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska*, *Life and Art*. She is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow and continues to work on aspects of early 20th century sculpture and the exhibition and promotion of modernist work in Britain as well as leading specialist cultural tours.



### FURTHER STUDY

Philip Hook, *Rogues' Gallery: A History of Art and its Dealers*, 2017, (particularly Part 3, *Modern Times* and the item on *Gentlemen and Players: the British*).

*Exhibition: The Memoirs of Oliver Brown*, Oliver Brown, 1966 (out of print )

*Percy Moore Turner. Connoisseur, Impresario & Art Dealer*, Sarah A M Turner, 2018

*Image: The Leicester Galleries, June 1909 (used as public domain)*