



THE GOLDEN AGE OF BRITISH WATERCOLOUR HUGH ELLWOOD

The Arts Society Fylde
Lowther Pavilion Theatre
6 September 2023 at 2.00pm

Just where did the summer go? While it's not yet quite the Last Night of the BBC Promenade Concerts (9 September - a real sign that summer is almost over), that other marker of the changing seasons - the Blackpool Illuminations - were switched on last Friday. On that basis, it has to be time to welcome you back to The Arts Society Fylde for the start of our (fifteenth) season of lectures - and who better to offer that welcome than our very own President, Hugh Ellwood? Hugh spoke to us in January 2016 when his topic was the architect Augustus Pugin and again in October 2020, on that occasion taking Antoni Gaudí as his subject. Today, Hugh's topic is British painting in watercolour from what he calls "The Golden Age of British Watercolour", being the period from 1750 to 1880.

As Hugh points out, watercolour is an extraordinarily versatile art form and is, he says, "almost uniquely a British phenomenon". It embodies uncertainty, fluidity, luminosity and transparency, making it the most challenging of all the media. It was ideally suited for the 18th and 19th century sensibilities that sought a more direct encounter with the natural world.

Several factors allowed watercolour to flourish and develop. Artists would accompany the aristocracy on their grand tours to make on-the-spot studies; technical advances in materials allowed them to experiment; the practice extended to the leisured middle classes and watercolour societies were founded. Above all, the towering artists of the day, such as Cotman, Cox, Girtin and Turner embraced the medium and took it to standards that could be exhibited at the Royal Academy.

HUGH ELLWOOD

Hugh Ellwood studied philosophy in Rome, followed by a degree in architecture at the University of Manchester. Previously he was an architect partner with Building Design Partnership, the largest multi-discipline design organisation in the UK, and was for some years an external examiner in architecture at the University of Manchester. For several years he was a visiting lecturer in the history of art and architecture at the University of Central Lancashire. A watercolourist himself, Hugh has lectured extensively to various societies and organisations, including cruises, on art and architecture.



Image: Conwy Castle, North Wales, c. 1800, Thomas Girtin (Southwark, 18 February 1775 – London, 9 November 1802); National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, public domain