

WHEN YOU LOOK AT PAINTINGS IDEAS FOR GALLERY-GOERS

Try to see original paintings, in your local art gallery and at the gallery or museum in any town you are visiting. Only by seeing originals will you realise how important the size of a work is, how important it is to see the true colours of a painting. Many galleries have full catalogues, explanatory leaflets, arrange lectures, or even have video shows on a particular artist or a particular painting. All can be instructive and stimulating. But if you can't visit galleries and have to rely on reproductions such as postcards or illustrations in an art history book, we still advise you to follow this plan.

FIRST – If you are in a gallery, take a quick look round.

SECOND – Choose only two or three paintings to concentrate on. Choose them because you like them, because they puzzle you, or perhaps just because you feel you would like to spend time with them, and find out more about them.

THIRD – Look hard at each painting in turn. Make sure you know the date of the painting and the name of the artist. Decide what are the work's most outstanding features; make sure that you have seen everything that is depicted, all the details. And then note the composition of the work... is it a balanced painting for instance and how is the balance achieved? Look carefully at the colours, decide where the light comes from, note how space is conveyed. By doing this you will become increasingly familiar with the painting.

THEN – Ask yourself questions about the painting. What is the painting really about? (is it just a landscape giving a near 'mirror image' of a country scene, or is it, for instance about the depiction of light? Has that stately home in the background some significance maybe it indicates the status of that large figure in the foreground, is the work a reflection of society at the time the work was painted?) Why was this painting considered so important that it is in a gallery, or reproduced in a book? What other things would you like to know about it?

THEN – Find out the answers! If you are in a gallery which has an education officer, he or she will help. Or consult the catalogue; consult books in your local library.

THEN – Look again at the painting. Has your first impression altered? If so, why?

SO – Get to know individual paintings: reach at least some understanding of them. This 'getting to know' will, we hope and believe, be absorbing, rewarding and pleasurable.

A NOTE ON BOOKS – There is a formidable number of books on art and art history...where do you start?

Here is just a short list of general books:

Ernst H. Gombrich *The Story of Art* (Phaidon 1984: new ed).

J Halls *Halls Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (John Murray, 1975)

George Heard Hamilton *Painting and Sculpture in Europe 1880-1940* (Penguin, 1978)

Norbert Lynton *The Story of Modern Art* (Phaidon, 1980)

Peter and Lynda Murray *Dictionary of Art and Artists* (Penguin 1983 new ed)