



Anne Griffiths :: Contemporary Textile Art - August Newsletter

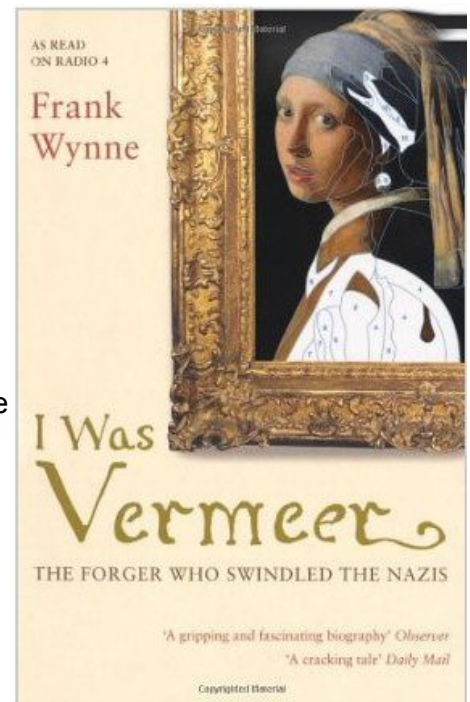
Dear all,

This month has found me going Dutch! I have just returned from the most wonderful holiday in the coolest city in Europe, Amsterdam.

It all started with a long conversation several months ago about the BBC 4 series "High Art of the Low Countries" which documented how many of the great artists came from Belgium and Holland. A Dutch friend told me about the 20th century Dutch artist Han Van Meegeren, who after the 2nd World War faced the death penalty for selling national treasures to the Nazi's. He was then faced with the choice of accepting his fate or confessing to having forged the artworks which had sold for fortunes. Of course I was hooked on the story bought the book and planned a trip to a city I had wanted to visit for years.

The timing was perfect, the [Rijksmuseum](#) having just reopened after a ten year closure for refurbishment is an amazing building.

It was designed by the architect Pierre Cuypers, and first opened in 1885. After 120 years, this radical makeover was undertaken beginning in 2004 where the building was stripped of all the later additions and restored to its original layout.



The centre piece of the museum is Rembrandt's "Night Watch" completed in 1642. It was only after the removal of a covering of dark varnish in the 1940's that it was recognised that the painting was not in fact of a night scene at all but showed amazingly skilled painting of light and shadow.

Of course when you see a painting it never looks like the images you see in Art Books and this was no exception but what makes this painting such an important and ground breaking work is that it was not painted in the typical style of the time which showed a series of portraits but it included movement as integral part of the composition.

Another of the attractions of the Rijksmuseum is The Milkmaid by Vermeer which is certainly in my opinion one of the most exquisite paintings of all time. The vibrant blue created using expensive ultramarine from Afghanistan is a colour that was much favoured by Vermeer and the enigmatic look on the girl's face perhaps wistful, perhaps concentrating, has been compared to that on the face of the Mona Lisa.

After seeing The Night Watch, it was inevitable that the house where Rembrandt lived from 1639 to 1656 would be next on the list. The house has been restored using the inventory of items made when the house was repossessed due to his bankruptcy. Visiting was like stepping back in time, the kitchen with the cupboard bed where the maid slept would have been the warmest place in the house, the entrance hall and parlour where he would have displayed his paintings for clients with his chair placed on the small platform to keep it out of the drafts and his studio where his apprentices ground and mixed the paints. How easy it is to forget the work that went into creating the paint before it was so readily available in tubes.



The Dutch are justifiably proud of one of their most famous artists and shown here in Rembrandt Square beneath the giant statue of the artist there is a bronze representation of Night Watch. This was made in 2006 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Rembrandt's birth. The sculptures have travelled the world and in 2013 the Rembrandtplein Entrepreneurs Foundation began fund raising to keep the sculptures permanently in the square.

The [Van Gogh Museum](#) was the other must see in Amsterdam, and I was not disappointed. So much of his work was shown here and so interesting to see the development from his art student days when he painted this horse from a statue, to his last unfinished painting of tree roots. There were also self portraits, two of the sunflower paintings and the "Yellow House" from his time in Arles and a plan from one of his letters to his brother Theo of how they were to be hung in the room he was preparing for his friend Gauguin.



Four floors of pure indulgence looking at the work of one of the worlds greatest artists, unbelievable that he died at the age of 37 and only ever sold one painting in his lifetime.





I have probably written enough about Amsterdam, but before I finish I just had to mention one of the three photography exhibitions that I visited.

[Foam Photography Gallery](#) was showing Edward Steichen Condé Nast Years, 1923–1937 the time he was working as the fashion photographer for Vogue and Vanity Fair.

Incredibly talented, Steichen was also a printmaker, artist, curator and horticulturist and credited with being the first real fashion photographer. His photos were not merely images of dresses, but creative interpretations that could stand alone.

Nowadays, it is considered an honour to take pictures for Vogue but in 1923 Condé Nast offered to omit Steichen's name from the credits as a favour, assuming that the photographer would rather not be linked to a commercial fashion production!

The photograph above is of Gloria Swanson. Taken in 1924 it is contemporary with Man Ray's portrait of Kiki de Montparnasse (see Feb 2012 newsletter).

So, apart from a holiday, I have finished the tiny tree inspired folded books that I showed in the last newsletter. Each book has a quarter circle cover and the pages unfolding into a full circular as shown below.

One book contains quotes, one pattern repeats of leaves, one patterns of nuts and berries and the fourth printed papers using monoprint techniques and my new Gelli Arts printing plate. As well as making sketchbooks in a completely different style, I will use the ideas as input to some larger textile pieces.

We will be making sketchbooks in this style on the ["Trees"](#) residential week in March 2014. As well as monoprinting and using the Gelli Arts printing plate.





I think the beautiful weather we have had this summer has probably taken precedence over the Distance Learning course, but I have had one beautiful parcel to look at from [Irene Donovan](#) which includes lots of dyeing, stitching whip and cording stitch with a very tight top tension and some resolved samples. This image uses layers of her dyed fabrics together with a range of straight and zigzag stitches to create some wonderful texture and line.

That must be all for now, as I have to go and watch *Girl with the Pearl Earring* which is coincidentally on iPlayer this week. More on Vermeer next month after the exhibition [Vermeer and his Music](#) at the National Gallery.

Best wishes,

Anne