

BIRMINGHAM ART CIRCLE NEWSLETTER



RECENT APPOINTMENTS

During our last meeting on February 27, the election of the BAC's officers were held, which resulted in the following appointments for the next three years:

Kate Sawbridge - President
 Martyn Harris - Vice President
 Rachel David - Vice President
 Raji Mahesh - Hon. Secretary
 Helen Haywood-Willis - Hon. Treasurer
 Maggie Leaver - Membership Co-ordinator
 Debbie Baird - Exhibition Secretary
 Katie Hammond - Website
 James Ware - General Committee
 Philip Singleton - General Committee

OUR PROGRAMME FOR 2026

March: Small Groups followed by work laid out for all to see.
 April: Gallery visit, supper and meeting at RBSA. Individual work discussions to whole group.
 May: Members' elections followed by talks by successful applicants. Depending on numbers possible work from members discussed.
 12 May to 24 May: Exhibition at Wolverhampton Art Centre
 June Speed Critique Evening. (Member led evening)
 Sunday 26 July: Art Outing followed by Show and Tell. (Location TBD)
 August: Individual work discussions to whole group.
 September: Art Material Taster Tables.
 Sunday 25 October: Members' elections followed by talks by successful applicants. Depending on numbers possible work from members discussed.
 Sunday 29 November: Waveney Fredrick Lecture.
 3 November to 14 November: Circle in the Square Exhibition at RBSA.
 All meetings subject to alteration at the last minute due to numbers and circumstances. Details to follow.

We have updated the guidelines for the election of new members. We are keen to expand our membership so if you think you know somebody who would make a great addition to our membership, our next elections are scheduled for May. Any candidate is expected to visit at least one meeting prior to their election. If you are interested in seeing the new guidelines please contact Maggie (Membership Co-ordinator).

BIRMINGHAM ART CIRCLE'S HISTORY HIGHLIGHT

By the 1870s, Birmingham had established itself as one of Britain's leading industrial cities. Its wealth came from manufacturing, engineering, and trade, yet alongside this economic success grew a desire for cultural enrichment. Institutions such as the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists already provided a platform for exhibitions, but many younger or more experimental artists felt constrained by its conservative outlook. They were increasingly influenced by broader artistic movements across Europe, particularly those emphasizing symbolism, aestheticism, and a rejection of strict academic realism.

It was in this context that the Birmingham Art Circle was founded in 1879. The group was established by Ernest Thompson, not an artist himself, and a number of forward-thinking artists, including Walter Langley, William Wainwright, and Edwin Harris. These individuals shared a common ambition: to create a collaborative space where artists could explore new ideas, critique each other's work, and develop a more personal and expressive artistic language.

Unlike larger, more formal institutions, the Birmingham Art Circle operated as a relatively intimate and self-directed collective. Membership was selective, and meetings often took the form of informal gatherings in studios or private homes. Here, artists would present their work, engage in discussion, and challenge one another intellectually. This emphasis on dialogue and experimentation was central to the Circle's identity. It encouraged members to move beyond purely commercial or decorative art and instead pursue deeper symbolic and emotional content.

One of the defining characteristics of the Birmingham Art Circle was its engagement with contemporary artistic movements, particularly those associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the broader Aesthetic Movement. While not directly aligned with any single school, members were influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites' attention to detail, vibrant colour, and interest in medieval and literary themes. At the same time, they were drawn to the idea of "art for art's sake," which emphasized beauty and individual expression over moral or narrative constraints.

The Circle also reflected the intellectual climate of the time, which was marked by an increasing interest in literature, philosophy, and spirituality. Many members explored themes drawn from mythology, religion, and classical antiquity, often infusing their work with symbolic meaning. This placed them in dialogue with wider European movements such as Symbolism, which sought to express inner truths and emotional states rather than simply depict the visible world.

To be continued.

EXHIBITION REVIEW - CRISTINA GARDINER



Cristina Gardiner visited the Spring Cheltenham Gallery in the Montpelier Area of Cheltenham, where a group of Birmingham artists had an exhibition of small paintings entitled "Uncertain Narratives" from the 18 to the 24 of March.

Annette Pugh, Angela Maloney, Graham Chorlton, Julia Sommerville and Erin Conel, the latter from Malvern, offered unframed pieces right off the studio wall of small acrylics alongside more conventional work and prints. As the title "Uncertain Narratives" suggests, the exhibition presented ambiguous images, some incongruous, of everyday instances, thus challenging the conventional understanding of the external world.

Photos from the gallery's instagram @springcheltenham

EXHIBITION REVIEW - JAMES WARE



James Ware visited a major exhibition entitled "Studio Prints. Celebrating the Balakjian Collection", on view until April 12th 2026 at the New Art Gallery Walsall. The works come from the archive of London based Studio Prints, established by the artist Dorothea Wight (1944-2013) in 1968. Wight, alongside her husband, Marc Balakjian (1938-2017), produced prints for world-renowned British artists for over 40 years.

It's a guilty pleasure to visit a local gallery repeatedly to be immersed in an exhibition that engages and stimulates, then draws you back again. Beautifully curated, the scale of the gallery and layout allows Freud's powerful portraits to breath on stark bare walls. His confident line work, in large scale etching is enviable in its confidence of application, creating dour insight of the models and the sitting relationship. The recognizable style captures the acutely observed form and contours with intended line and a looseness of drawing that is unencumbered by restriction of the media.

Delightful mezzotints by Dorothea Wright and Marc Balakjian offer atmospheric and sensitive studies of interior curtained windows and objects, with a small pop of muted colour that warm the prints. Well worth a visit along with the permanent Garmin Collection at one of our best local galleries.

Photos from the gallery's website and by James Ware

NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Hi All,

Just a quick note to invite you all to a new informal social get together between our regular meetings.

A chance to discuss anything and get to know each other better in a less formal atmosphere (or maybe just for a natter and a cuppa!)

Meet outside Medicine on 69a New Street on 15 April at 2 pm

Drop me an email if you are interested: kathryn.e.sawbridge@hotmail.com

See you there!

Kate

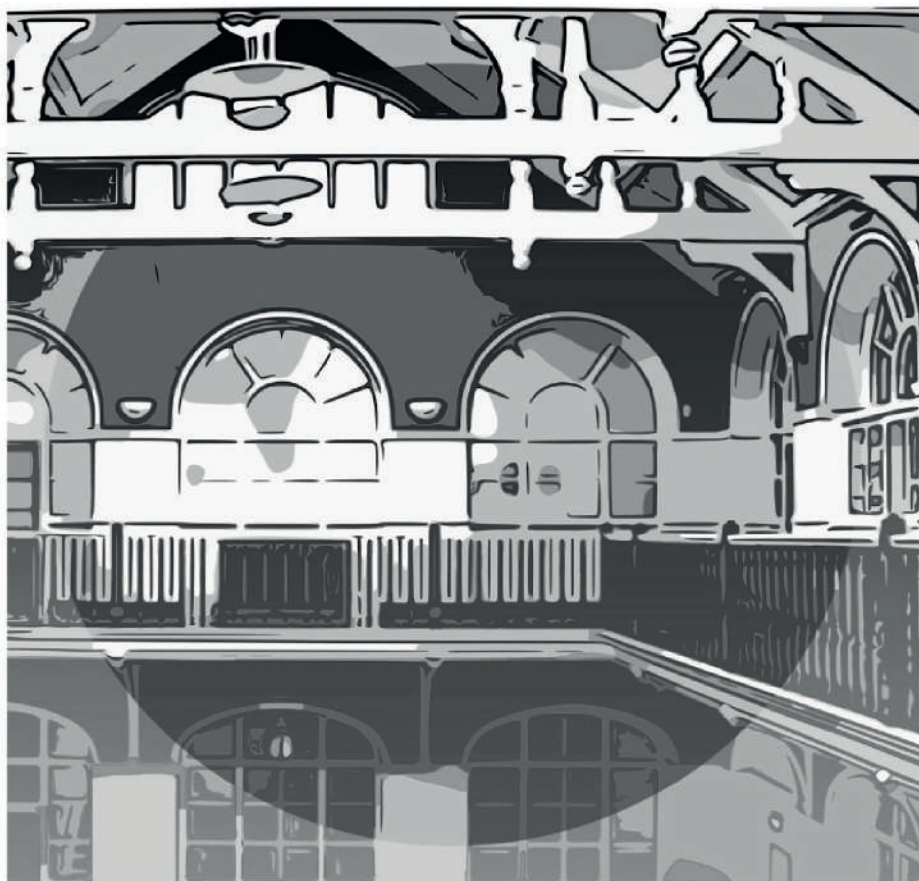
P.S. No pressure to attend, just an idea to try!

Let us know if you have any ideas or submissions for this newsletter.

We would love to hear from you at

kathryn.e.sawbridge@hotmail.com or

anbt2009@gmail.com



BIRMINGHAM ART CIRCLE SHOWCASE

WOLVERHAMPTON ARTS CENTRE (FORMERLY THE NAC)

DUNKLEY STREET, WOLVERHAMPTON, WV1 4AN

9AM TILL 5PM DAILY (SUNDAY 10AM)

12TH - 24TH MAY 2026

PRIVATE VIEW: 15TH MAY 2026 6PM-8PM

