

# Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

## ESOL Resources

### Audio Transcripts – Higher Entry

#### **1b** **The Round Room**

When the Museum first opened in 1885, the Round Room looked the same as it does now with red walls, and lots of paintings. This gallery follows Victorian fashions. Then as now, this was the first room visitors came to when they entered the Museum from Chamberlain Square. The high ceiling and grand architecture make a big impression. The room was designed to display the art of the time. It's important to remember that back then these paintings were new, exciting and at times shocking. Today, these paintings show us what life and art was like in the nineteenth century.

In the room, you can see pictures arranged in four sections. If your back is to the staircase, then on the left, you can see subjects from history, literature and mythology. Moving around clockwise you can see views of the countryside; and on the other side, scenes of nature. Last of all are paintings of everyday life.

## **2b To Brighton and back for 3s, 6d**

This is the train from London to Brighton. The third class carriage is open to the weather. The passengers protect themselves from the smoke and dust with whatever they can find – an umbrella, shawls, and rugs. The man to the left has put a handkerchief over his top hat! In this small space, we find all sorts of people. On the right there is a young man and a woman. Behind them is a young mother with her baby. On the left there is an older couple with their well-behaved children.

In 1859, when this picture was painted, cheap day tickets to Brighton were very popular among working-class Londoners. Seaside resorts were very popular during this period. This is because the growth of rail travel made it easier for people to get there. This journey cost three shillings and sixpence, and took around two hours, but as this painting shows, it was not very comfortable! One writer of the time said,

“Be prepared for hail, rain, sleet, snow, thunder and lightening. Look out for smoke, dust, dirt, and everything that is disagreeable”.

## **3b Departure of the Fishing Fleet**

This is the port of Boulogne on the northwest coast of France. There is a real buzz of activity in the painting. A group of women have gathered on the quayside to watch a large fishing fleet go out to sea. Some are waving off the departing fishermen, probably their husbands. Others are sitting and chatting. In the foreground a fisherman tries to tempt two women with his day’s catch.

Artists in the nineteenth century often made paintings like this. They are like a snapshot of contemporary life: its people, fashions and activities. If you think it looks convincing, it might be because the artist, Alexander Chevallier Tayler, went to Boulogne to paint it.

Tayler settled in another fishing port, Newlyn in Cornwall, to join a community of artists already working there. They were interested in painting ordinary people.

#### **4b** **Cattle in the Stream**

This is a painting of a boy bringing four cows to drink at a stream. It is by an artist called Thomas Sidney Cooper, who specialised in painting animals. In fact, he painted so many pictures of cows he was given the nickname 'Cow Cooper'! He became very successful – he was even asked by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert to paint the royal herd of Jersey cows. Cooper had a very long career. From 1833, he exhibited his works at the Royal Academy of Arts in London every year for 69 years. The last time was when he was 98! To this day, he's still the longest ever continuous exhibitor the Royal Academy has ever had!

#### **5b** **A Widow's Mite**

In this painting you can see a young widow. She looks out into space, and her pale face stands out against the black of her dress and hat. She seems young, but she is working to support herself. She's carrying a hatbox of the type that were used by women who worked from home. These women were usually poorly paid. Despite her own difficult situation, she's thinking of others. Look at her other hand, and you will see she's putting money into a hospital charity box.

Sir John Everett Millais is the artist of this painting. He is one of the most famous artists of the nineteenth century. The idea for this painting came from a young widow called Miss Silver. She visited his studio and begged him for help. He asked her to come back the next day, dressed in the same clothes so that he could begin work on this painting.

## **6b Never Morning Wore to Evening but Some Heart Did Break**

In this sad scene, we see the aftermath of a fishing disaster. An old woman comforts a younger one who is crying over a fisherman who never made it back home. On the horizon, dawn is breaking. If there was a storm, it has now passed. The sea is completely calm. The stillness of the sea contrasts with the inner turmoil that these women must be feeling.

Walter Langley, who painted this picture, came from Birmingham, but spent many years living in Cornwall. His work there was inspired by the lives of the local fishing community, particularly the women, who faced hardship and loss with great dignity.

This is perhaps his most celebrated work. Its title comes from the poem, *In Memoriam*, by Tennyson.

## **7b The Piazza of St Mark's**

This is Saint Mark's Square in Venice. It is a summer evening and all sorts of people are walking, talking and enjoying drinks at a pavement café. You can almost hear the chatter of this lively crowd. In the centre two Asian sailors attract the attention of a little boy. A little to the right you can see three gondoliers in their striped shirts talk about their day's business. Behind, on the right, there's a band playing. Wherever you look in this painting, something is happening.

It was painted by William Logsdail. He wanted to make it as accurate and realistic as possible. To do this, he travelled to Venice, and set up his easel in the Square. He painted the background – the Basilica of Saint Mark and the Doge's Palace. He then gradually painted the crowd. He included portraits of friends and other artists. He included his dog, Chappie, on the right near the gondoliers.

This picture took Logsdail nearly a year to paint. When it was ready in 1883, it was a big success. One critic especially admired the care Logsdail had taken to make the picture look 'real'. This is what he said about the painting:

"There is every evidence that the artist has drawn from what he has seen – the men and women seem to be real men and women. Mr Logsdail is familiar with Venetian life, and has made it as familiar to others as it could be unless they lived in Venice".