

Ruskin Art Club

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www.RuskinArtClub.com

NEWS AND VIEWS (2)

JANUARY 2018

FROM THE DESK OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GABRIEL MEYER:

Dear Members and Friends of the Ruskin Art Club:

Welcome to 2018 – the 130th anniversary of the founding of the Ruskin Art Club.

As part of a “wildfire” movement of Ruskin-oriented societies and reading guilds in the English-speaking world, and a signal contributor to the network of influential women’s clubs in late 19th century America, **the Ruskin Art Club was organized on October 12, 1888** in Mary Boyce’s parlor off Pershing Square in Los Angeles.

As Joseph Ryan’s 1999 monograph on the Club states:

“The founding members of the Ruskin Art Club were at the very cutting edge of a social movement that would carry the country into the 20th century. The movement took its name partially from the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, formed in London the same year as the Ruskin Art Club in Los Angeles – 1888. The founding women of the Ruskin Art Club were not setting out upon a nostalgic review of art or a mutual admiration society of each other’s [art] collections . . . Their . . . earnest study of masterful works of art . . . promised to bring forth the beauty of not only what is seen, but what is not seen. They believed that such a course, despite the mechanized society in which they lived, would lead them back to being truly human.”

The challenge remains. In perhaps even more daunting cultural circumstances, the members of the Ruskin Art Club, present and past, seek in the arts, in Nature, and in the mysterious power of Beauty, the instruments not only of personal transformation but, in the spirit of John Ruskin, of the physical, social and cultural landscape of our city.

We are planning a number of events this year to celebrate the 130th anniversary of the Club, including a **fundraiser at the historic Gamble House in Pasadena, a reception at our old clubhouse in the Wilshire district, and a symposium on the founding women of the Ruskin Art Club later this year.** Our engagement with the history of Los Angeles will also be a feature of the **2018 “Ruskin” lecture at USC’s Doheny Library** this fall, to be delivered by the eminent California historian **William Deverell.**

Next on the Ruskin events agenda is our collaboration with the **Craft and Folk Art Museum (CAFAM)** and the **“Melting Point: Movements in Contemporary Clay” Exhibition** (opening: January 27). We are participating in this important exhibition of new trends in ceramics through a **lecture/conversation**, sponsored by the RAC, with Berkeley-based craftsman and thorough Ruskinian **Timothy Holton on Sunday, February 4, 2018 at the CAFAM. Free.** See www.holtonframes.com for Holton’s work.

“RUSKIN AND THE RE-FRAMING OF ART: LECTURE & CONVERSATION WITH TIMOTHY HOLTON AND GABRIEL MEYER. RSVPs required, please! Via the CAFAM: www.cafam.org or email : grmncr@aol.com

Recommended Reading:

Among the new books on Ruskin and related topics that have arrived on my desk, you might be interested in:

***“All Great Art Is Praise: Art and Religion in John Ruskin” by Aidan Nichols, OP
(Catholic University of America Press, 2016)***

Not since William Burgess’s study, “The Religion of Ruskin” (1907), largely an anthology of quotations, has a scholar devoted a whole study to the specifically religious dimensions of Ruskin’s thought. Unlike Burgess, Nichols, a Dominican priest and scholar, is deeply interested in the **evolution** of Ruskin’s religious ideas, and, in particular, Ruskin’s gradual movement, as Nichols sees it, from a Calvinist strand of Evangelicalism, inherited from his family background -- on full display, for example, in “Modern Painters” volume 1 -- to a nuanced (and unaffiliated) appreciation of medieval Catholic life and piety in many of his later works. Whether one is persuaded by every aspect of Nichols’ “denominational” claims, the reader is treated to several illuminating chapters on Ruskin’s complex aesthetics and a wide-ranging theological examination of his whole output – an ambitious undertaking that accounts for the study’s more than 600 pages.

***“Marriage of Inconvenience” by Robert Brownell
(Pallas/Athene, 2013)***

Brownell’s book on Ruskin’s ill-fated marriage with Euphemia Gray, at nearly 600 pages, is not a “quick read” either. It is the latest in a series of books (not to mention films and plays) on the “disaster” of the epic mismatch between the ascetic bookish Ruskin and the socially ambitious “Effie,” later, after the annulment of the marriage on the grounds of non-consummation, the wife of Ruskin’s protégé, the painter John Everett Millais. What is remarkable about Brownell’s treatment is that it is, by far, the most thorough, based on exhaustive research into the pertinent diaries, letters, and, most importantly, contemporary legal documents that often place the circumstances of this famous Victorian scandal in an altogether new light, and lay to rest many of the speculations that have burdened past attempts to tell this story. Brownell is particularly interesting in his analysis of the familial and economic factors that played a role in the unhappy disposition of the marriage, and in his dissection of the factors that turned it into a scandal. If one must delve into the Ruskin marriage, and in nearly forensic detail, Brownell’s study is the most complete to date.

“Clarity is poetry” by Dinah Burch

For those less interested in full-scale tomes, I can recommend this recent article by Ruskin scholar published in the Times Literary Supplement (TLS, December 14, 2017

“Enthusiasts for Ruskin are a motley crew, largely because his legacy is so diverse. Whatever their interests or their politics, they can usually claim that Ruskin was on their side, . . . His most sympathetic readers are often of a practical disposition, and find their way to him through

a concern for the environment, or buildings, or the teaching of drawing, or through his broader work in education” <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/clarity-is-poetry-ruskin/>

MEMBERS’ TREASURES:

A sustaining principle of the Ruskin Art Club since it began has been that members, always as diverse in interests as those Dinah Burch mentions, share their talents, insights and art, in essence the treasures of themselves, so as to, *”to bring forth the beauty of not only what is seen, but what is not seen,”* as Joseph Ryan has put it. By continuing that tradition of sharing in our now digital-industrial age, we also help bring each other *”back to being truly human.”*

First to be highlighted in this column is RAC member **Jim Spates**. His **“Why Ruskin?”** blog (aha, our digital age also has its benefits!) entertains while it informs. And he will enjoy any comments, disagreements, suggestions you share in the comment section at: <https://whyruskin.wordpress.com>

Always a treasure, of all and for all, are dues-paying RAC members. Unglamorous. No fanfare, no publicity for this totally necessary support for our website, publications, speaker fees fund and program incidentals. But solid gold appreciation! If you’ve put off renewing, the New Year’s a good time! If you are not sure, contact Membership Coordinator Anne Petach at: clifford.petach@gmail.com

Ruskin Art Club

(Founded 1888)

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