

## National Gallery, London

On 12<sup>th</sup> March 2011 a sizeable group of students from different courses in the Classical Education Forum visited the National Gallery with Mererid Velios, Art History Lecturer at the Forum, with a view to looking at a selected number of Renaissance and Baroque paintings in order to gain some understanding of the perspectives and techniques adopted by the particular artists. Mererid explained that the possession of such understanding would give us the criteria to analyse the work of other artists of that period.

One technique Mererid uses which we found particularly helpful was to draw imaginary horizontal and vertical lines across the central axis of the painting. By doing this we are able to put into perspective the different elements of the work such as the positioning of the different parts of the painting and the impact of light and shade in the accentuation of certain features, and the playing down of others. Such an analysis enables us, to some extent at least, to appreciate what the artist had in mind when compiling the work.

In view of the large number of people on the trip we were broken down into three or four groups so we were not able to spend the whole day with Mererid. Fully understandable in the circumstances, though I personally could have listened to what she had to say all day it was so interesting. Anyway each group had two sessions with her – one in the Renaissance gallery and the other in the Baroque.

In the Renaissance gallery we looked in detail at *The Agony in the Garden* by Giovanni Bellini, and a similar painting by his brother-in-law Mantegna on which the *Agony* is based, both being painted in the mid fifteenth century. This is where Mererid introduced her techniques of analysis to us which we found most helpful in comparing and contrasting the very different approaches of the two artists to the same subject material. In the Baroque gallery we were introduced to works by Velazquez including his only surviving female nude *Rokeby Venus* painted about 1648, and a portrait the title of which eludes me. Once more it was most enlightening to have Mererid using her mode of analysis to explain the work of this very great artist.

In between the talks we spent time looking at some of the other galleries. We had been given a paper by Mererid in which she had made suggestions for us to see particular works where we could apply the analytical techniques she had introduced to us. Among the Renaissance paintings we looked at were Robert Campin's *A Man; A Woman*; and in the Baroque gallery Caravaggio's marvellous *Supper at Emmaus*. We managed to come forward a few centuries to pop in to see a small exhibition of Bridget Riley's work which was being shown at the time. I was so pleased to have been able to see it as I regard her as a wonderful modern artist with truly unique skills.

We travelled to London by coach from Cardiff which meant that we were travelling for at least eight hours. Tiring certainly, but well worth it: it was a most memorable occasion. Perhaps an earlier start could be made in future? It is very nice to have these trips available to all students at the Forum so that we can interact and be aware what others are doing in their classical studies.

I want to thank Mererid for the excellence of her talks which contributed so much to a most enjoyable trip. My thanks also go to Meg Ward whose administration of the day ensured that it proceeded smoothly and without any hitches. Finally we would not be able to do any of this without Liz Mayor. Her answer to the peremptory and short-sighted closure of the Arts and Classical Studies sections of Cardiff University's much acclaimed Centre for Lifelong Learning was to set up the Classical Education Forum. Indeed her battle against the appalling philistinism of the University continues to bear fruit as the Forum expands into many new areas with expert lecturers at the helm. Indeed we have witnessed this on the trip to the National Gallery with Mererid whose dedication and commitment to her subject was so ably demonstrated. That we were on such a trip at all is indicative of the Forum's not being just a lecturing unit; indeed the many trips that have been arranged by Liz, as well as Day Schools on various subjects, gives a real vibrancy to the work of the Forum. Liz thank you so much for your enterprise, initiatives and far-sightedness. You have done so much in such a short period of two years: long may the Forum thrive.

Alwyn Jones. A very contented student  
in the Latin Language Workshop.

5 May 2011.