

1. Roger Fry & Clive Bell

Prof Kenneth G Hay

The University of Leeds (UK)

Roger Fry (1866-1934)



- b.London 1866, of the prestigious 18th-century family which made its fortune in the chocolate trade, porcelain and early railways. They were the sponsors of Bristol University..
- Worked as a critic, art historian, museum director, university Professor
- Part of the 'Bloomsbury Group' which included Virginia Woolf, Quentin Bell, and Duncan Grant.

The Bloomsbury Group



Left to right: Lady Ottoline Morrell, Maria Nys (neither members of Bloomsbury), Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant, and Vanessa Bell

- A group of associated British writers, intellectuals, philosophers and artists in the first half of the 20th century, including Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster and Lytton Strachey.
- This loose collective of friends and relatives was closely associated with Cambridge University for the men and King's College London for the women, and they lived, worked or studied together near Bloomsbury, London. According to Ian Ousby, "although its members denied being a group in any formal sense, they were united by an abiding belief in the importance of the arts."
- Their works and outlook deeply influenced literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality.

The Bloomsbury Group



Roger Fry and his wife Helen (1897)

- 10 core members
 - Clive Bell, art critic
 - Vanessa Bell, post-impressionist painter
 - E. M. Forster, fiction writer
 - Roger Fry, art critic and post-impressionist painter
 - Duncan Grant, post-impressionist painter
 - John Maynard Keynes, economist
 - Desmond MacCarthy, literary journalist
 - Lytton Strachey, biographer
 - Leonard Woolf, essayist and non-fiction writer
 - Virginia Woolf, fiction writer and essayist
- In addition to these ten, Leonard Woolf, in the 1960s, listed as 'Old Bloomsbury' Adrian and Karin Stephen, Saxon Sydney-Turner, and Molly MacCarthy, with Julian Bell, Quentin Bell and Angelica Bell, and David Garnett as later additions. Except for Forster, who published three novels before the highly successful "Howards End" in 1910, the group were late developers.

Bloomsbury Ethics



Vanessa Bell, by Roger Fry

- Influenced by **G. E. Moore**: "the essence of what Bloomsbury drew from Moore is contained in his statement that 'one's prime objects in life were love, the creation and enjoyment of aesthetic experience and the pursuit of knowledge.'"
- Moore's "Principia Ethica" (1903) expounded the notion of intrinsic worth as distinct from instrumental value. As with the distinction between love (an intrinsic state) and monogamy (a behavior),
- There were stable marriages and varied and complicated affairs among the individual members. The greatest ethical goods were, "the importance of personal relationships and the private life", as well as aesthetic appreciation of: "art for art's sake".

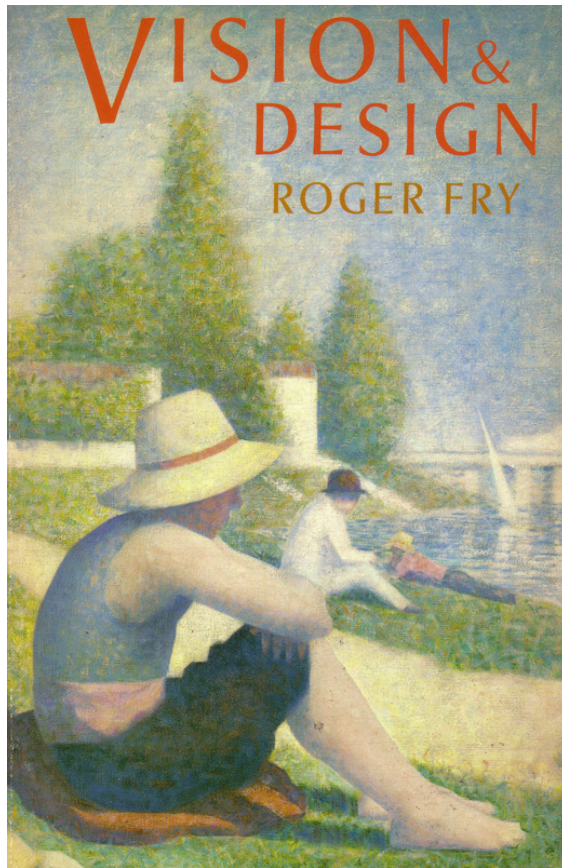
Bloomsbury Aesthetics



“Nina Hamnett” by Roger Fry (1917)

- Roger Fry joined the group in 1910. His post-impressionist exhibitions of 1910 and 1912 involved Bloomsbury in a second revolution following on the Cambridge philosophical one. This time the Bloomsbury painters were much involved and influenced. Fry and other Bloomsbury artists rejected the traditional distinction between fine and decorative art.
- These "Bloomsbury assumptions" are reflected in members' criticisms of materialistic realism in painting and fiction, influenced above all by Clive Bell's "concept of 'Significant Form', which separated and elevated the concept of form above content in works of art" it has been suggested that, with their "focus on form ...Bell's ideas have come to stand in for, perhaps too much so, the aesthetic principles of the Bloomsbury Group".[30]
- The establishment's hostility to post-impressionism made Bloomsbury controversial, and controversial they have remained. Clive Bell polemicised post-impressionism in his widely read book *Art* (1914), basing his aesthetics partly on Roger Fry's art criticism and G. E. Moore's moral philosophy; and as the war came he argued that "in these days of storm and darkness, it seemed right that at the shrine of civilization - in Bloomsbury, I mean - the lamp should be tended assiduously".

“Vision and Design” (1920)



- Set of 25 essays on topics ranging from African Art to Giotto and William Blake to contemporary domestic architecture.
- Highlighted the ‘common ground’ of ancient art and modern art, life and art.
- Bushmen drawings, for example differ from most ‘primitive’ art, including children’s art, for their preference for retinal rather than conceptual imagery;
- “Post-impressionists do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life but to find an equivalent for life.”
- Fry was friend and mentor to the Bloomsbury group - Virginia Woolf wrote his biography and “Vision & Design” was a major contribution to their aesthetic.

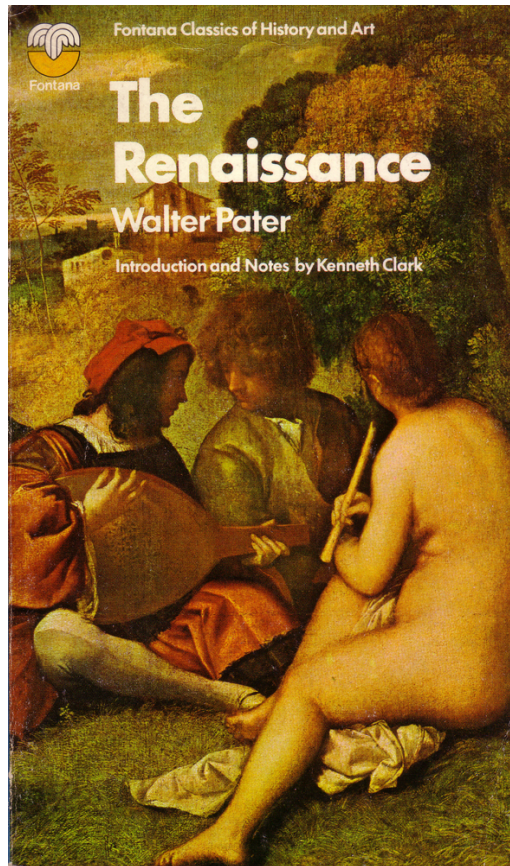
Fry: “Vision & Design”



A Room at the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, Matisse Room,
by Vanessa Bell, Leonard's sister-in-law, 1912

- Fry, in defending Post-Impressionism to a hostile public, asked that we don't look at Cézanne as we would look at 19th-century academic art but rather as doing the same kind of thing as Giotto - in terms of “values of form, design and expression” (Tilghman, pp. 74-5)
- Fry was deeply critical of establishment 19th-century academicism: “As the prostitute professes to sell love, so these gentlemen professed to sell beauty.”
- Fry's “Essay in Aesthetics” is mid-way through the period covered by the book and forms his most important theoretical statement.

Fry: “An Essay on Aesthetics”



- In order to appreciate a painting, said Fry, the mind has to be clear of all extraneous clutter
- All emotional and literary association,
- All conceptual or intellectual puzzles it might provoke for the mind
- All discussion about whether or not he work was like or unlike nature had to be forgotten before any just aesthetic evaluation could be arrived at
- **Waler Pater**, in “The School of Giorgione” (1877) had argued that paintings were paintings, before they were illustrations or reminders of natural; appearances. For Pater, “essentially pictorial qualities must first of all delight the sense, delight it as directly and sensuously as a fragment of Venetian glass”...A great picture has no more definite meaning for us than an accidental play of sun and shadow for a few moments on the wall or floor.”
- Fry adopted Pater’s stance and used it as a critique of abstract and sentimental theories of ‘Beauty’ .

Fry: “An Essay on Aesthetics”



“Still Life” by Roger Fry

- Fry was sceptical of the ‘coarse, turbulent, clumsy art of the 19th-century’ and suspicious of the ‘operatic gestures of the Baroque, but he did bring aspects of the aesthetic experience sharply into focus..
- He understood profoundly the Florentine preoccupation with the third dimension, he argued persuasively in defence of Cézanne and the Post-Impressionists, and he was eloquent about South American sculpture and Negro art
- The key point in Fry’s aesthetic is the radical distinction between art and nature.
- Similarities between art objects and natural effects were merely superficial. In reality they were quite distinct experiences.
- Nature offers the mind a mass of undifferentiated stimuli with no purpose attached.
- Art however, is organised, structured and purposive. (This is more or less a restatement of **Whistler’s** “Ten O’ Clock Lecture” (1885) “To say to a painter, that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit on the piano...Nature is very rarely right.”
- Fry’s first art teacher, Francis Bate insisted on the separation of art from moral considerations; and in the work of **George Santayana** and **Denman Waldo Ross** (known to Fry), there is an attempt to formulate theories which locate aesthetic satisfaction within the work of art itself.

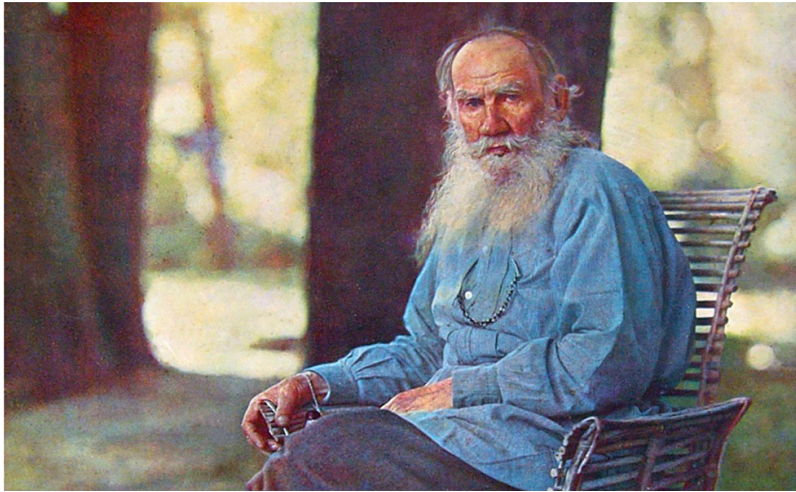
Fry: “An essay on Aesthetics”



Giotto, “The Expulsion of Joachim”, Padua, Arena Chapel, (1305-8)

- It was **Bernard Berenson’s** description of Florentine painting, however, and Giotto in particular) that encouraged Fry in his analysis of the formal properties of art.
- Giotto, said Berenson, attains “a keener sense of reality, of life-likedness than the objects themselves”
- This was achieved. Not through illusionistic tricks, or slavish copying of appearances, but by careful selection of telling formal relationships.
- It was “upon form and form alone that the great Florentine masters concentrated their efforts”, so that “finally we are forced to the belief that, in their pictures at least, form is the principal source of aesthetic enjoyment.”
- Fry tried to extend this observation to cover a much wider compass of aesthetic experience and apply it to all art, from ancient to modern.
- His distinction between ‘the instinctive life’ (of practicalities, doing and striving, bound up with ethics) and ‘the imaginative life’ (of contemplation, objective, withdrawn from the pressures of daily life and remote from morality)

Fry: “An essay on Aesthetics”



Leo Tolstoy at his estate, Yasnaya Polyana, in 1908.
By Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky, a pioneer in color photography.

- Both aspects of mind have their own way of apprehending the external world. The instinctive relies on a utilitarian, analytical vision, dominated by concepts; The imaginative life, however operates according to a system of aesthetic values and is associated with an intuitive, creative, synthesising view of the physical world.
- **Tolstoy's** “What is Art?” (1898) argued that all previous aesthetic theories understood ‘aesthetic value’ as an abstract notion - Beauty, Truth and Goodness have no definite meaning, and hinder us attaching any definite meaning to art. So Tolstoy developed an expressive theory of art:
- “To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and. Having evoked it in oneself, then by means of movements, lines colours, sounds or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling - this is the activity of art.”
- Art is not the creation of beauty, but the generation of expressive forms which communicate emotion.
- Fry disagreed, however, that the power of art could be measured by its effect on the instinctive life. For Fry, art could not be measured by moral criteria.
- Instead, art was to be measured by the subtlety and power with which it communicated the emotions of the imaginative life - through movements, lines, colours.
- Form was the expressive medium of the imaginative life.
- Western Art, since Giotto, had gradually ‘forgotten’ its main aim to give expression to the imaginative life, and been distracted with a concern for illusion and optical trickery in imitating reality. Now with the Post-Impressionists, it had returned to its true course.

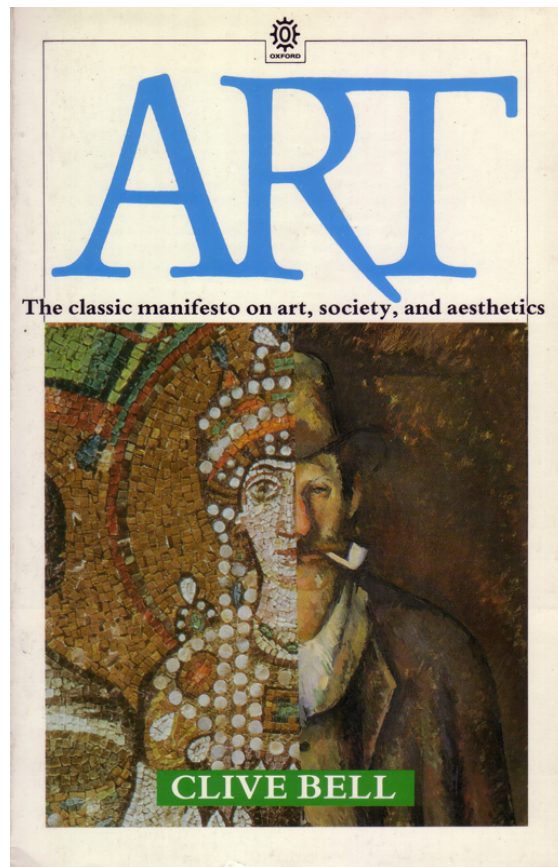
Clive Bell (1881 - 1964)



“Clive Bell” by Roger Fry

- English art critic, co-founder of the Bloomsbury Group, and brother-in-law of Virginia Woolf.
- At Trinity College, Cambridge, he met **Leonard Woolf, Thoby Stephen** and **Lytton Strachey** and developed a passion for painting. His marriage to **Vanessa Stephen** placed him at the centre of the Bloomsbury Group
- His 1910 meeting with **Roger Fry** was crucial for the development of UK art, for together, they set up the first Post Impressionist exhibition at the **Grafton Galleries** and a second exhibition in 1912.
- Fry, too busy with his own **Omega Workshop**, asked Bell to write an account of the new aesthetic, and the result was “Art” (1914) which placed Bell at the forefront of the Modern movement in the UK.

Clive Bell: “Art” (1914, revised 1949)



- “What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions?” - Bell asks in “Art”. “What quality is common to Hagia Sophia and the windows of Chartes, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl...and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero dell Francesca and Cézanne?”
- The answer for Bell was: “Significant form”
- In an era of bold manifestos, such as Vorticism Futurism and neo-Realism, the boldness of Bell’s assertions were meant to shock and grab attention.
- Consequently, for many years, the notion of ‘significant form’ became a dogma, identified mostly with post-impressionism, but also became a central idea to Bloomsbury aesthetics.
- The book remains provocative, energetic and irreverant, and encouraged Bell’s contemporaries to rethink many of the cherished ideas of traditional taste and aesthetics.

Bell - formalism



Paul Cézanne, “Still life with Watermelon and Pomegranates”, (1906) Watercolour, Private collection.

- For Read, appropriate forms were those which “result in a pleasurable sensation” - not any objective definition.
- To Bell: “The starting point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion” (1915, p.6)
- This emotion is produced by the perception of a certain kind of form, which he called: ‘significant form’;
- But this form was itself defined in terms of the relevant emotion: “When I speak of significant form, I mean a combination of lines and colours that moves me aesthetically.” (ibid. p.12)

Bell - Formalism



Immanuel Kant

- The new formalism was closer to the subjectivism of Hume than to older views based on the objective qualities of form; And similar questions arise as to ‘the standard of taste’ - i.e. who decides?
- If judgments of quality are merely, “what moves me aesthetically”, then they become purely personal. In Kant’s example - one person finds Canary wine agreeable, while another does not.

Formalism: intrinsic vs extrinsic qualities



John Constable, "The Hay Wain", (1821) Nat Gallery, London

- In the example of a beautiful landscape:
- Beauty is extrinsic to the painting, in contrast with any intrinsic beauty or other aesthetic qualities of the painting.
- An ugly object can be painted in a beautiful way, and vice versa.
- A Gothic cathedral may have aesthetic qualities over and above/distinct from its religious/historic atmosphere: the former can be appreciated without any knowledge or belief in the latter.
- For artworks, intrinsic beauty is more essential: if we want to see a beautiful landscape, we can visit it in reality. For the painting to be beautiful it must have some intrinsic qualities of its own, independent of the landscape/subject it depicts.

Formalism: intrinsic vs extrinsic



Raphael, "The Transfiguration" 1518-20, Vatican Museum

- The issue of intrinsic vs extrinsic qualities came to a head at the turn of the 20th-century with the emergence of non-representative painting.
- By 'subtracting' the allegedly 'non-essential' part (representation) Fry and Bell expounded the merits of the formal components and their arrangement as the essence of the new aesthetic.
- Moreover, the lessons learned from non-representative painting were to be applied retrospectively, to all past painting
- To Fry, 'We are liable to have our aesthetic reactions interfered with if we look at a painting like Raphael's "Transfiguration" with its 'dramatic overtones and implications' in mind. Rather, we should become; completely absorbed in its purely formal relations..by the pure contemplation of the spatial relations and relations of plastic volumes", so that we can isolate that "Aesthetic quality" which is the one constant quality of all works of art."

Bell : Art - separation from life



Angelica Garnett, Vanessa Bell, Clive Bell, Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes and Lydia Lopokova at Monk's house, (before 1939)

- “The irrelevant representation or descriptive element’ may detract from both the creation and the proper appreciation of art.
- It can be a ‘sign of weakness in an artist’ , who may be, ‘too feeble to create forms’ and try instead to, ‘eke out his talents’ by ‘suggesting the emotions of life’ , through a representative content.
- A similar weakness was that of spectators with ‘defective sensibility’ who, unable to appreciate true form, focused instead on those superficial aspects of apparent content for which they could feel some emotion. Such people, Bell says, “are like deaf men at a concert.’ (p.29)
- “To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions...We need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three-dimensional space (p.25,27)

The Omega Workshop Ltd.



Nina Hamnett painted by Roger Fry, 1917, in a dress designed by Vanessa Bell and made at the Omega. The shoes may also be from Omega and the cushion on the chair is covered with 'Maud' linen, also by Bell.

- a design enterprise founded by members of the Bloomsbury Group and established in July 1913. (Directors: Fry, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell.
- It was located at 33 Fitzroy Square in London, and was founded with the intention of providing graphic expression to the essence of the Bloomsbury ethos.
- The Workshops were also closely associated with the **Hogarth Press** and the artist and critic Roger Fry, who was the principal figure behind the project, believed that artists could design, produce and sell their own works, and that writers could also be their own printers and publishers.
- Fry, like **William Morris** before him, aimed to remove what he considered the 'false divisions' between the decorative and fine arts, and to give his artist friends an additional income opportunity in designing furniture, textiles and other household accessories.
- Fry was keen to encourage a Post-Impressionist influence in designs produced for Omega. However, **Cubist** and **Fauvist** influences are also apparent, particularly in many of the textile designs.
- To ensure items were bought only for the quality of the work, and not the reputation of the artist, Fry insisted works be shown anonymously, marked only with the letter omega.
- The products were in general expensive, and aimed at an exclusive market.

The Omega Workshops 1913-19



Furniture by Roger Fry for the Omega Workshops exhibited At the Bloomsbury Exhibition, Musée d'art et d'industrie de Roubaix (Nord), 21 November 2009-28 February 2010

- They produced a wide range of individual products, such as painted furniture, painted murals, mosaics, stained glass, ceramics, textiles, and printed books, and organised a series of Solo exhibitions including: **Edward McKnight Kauffer**, **Alvaro Guevara**, **Mikhail Larionov** and **Vanessa Bell's** first solo exhibition in 1916.
- Most manufacturing for Omega was outsourced to professional craftsmen and fabric producers in England and France.
- Omega Workshops also offered interior design themes for various living spaces. A commission was taken to decorate a room for the 1913 **Ideal Home Exhibition**, and an illustrated catalogue, including text written by Fry, was published in autumn 1914.
- **Wyndham Lewis** was initially part of the operation. Lewis, however, split off at an early stage, taking with him several other participants (**Frederick Etchells**, **Edward Wadsworth** and **Cuthbert Hamilton**) to start the rival decorative workshop **Rebel Art Centre** and the **Vorticist Movement**, after accusing Fry of misappropriating the Ideal Home commission
- The management of the Omega Workshop passed to **Winifred Gill** from 1914, as the men started to become involved in the First World War.
- The range of products continued to increase throughout Omega Workshops' six-year existence, and in April 1915 Vanessa Bell began using Omega fabrics in dress design, after which dressmaking became a successful part of the business.
- **Edward Wolfe** worked at the Omega Workshops, hand-painting candle-shades and trays, and decorating furniture. Wolfe, who died in 1982, was one of the last of the Bloomsbury painters.

Late Bloomsbury and critique



Duncan Grant and John Maynard Keynes c. 1913

- As the 1930s progressed Bloomsbury began to die:
- A year after publishing his "Portraits in Miniature" (1931), **Lytton Strachey** died; shortly afterwards **Dora Carrington** shot herself. **Roger Fry**, who had become England's greatest art critic, **died in 1934**. **Vanessa and Clive's eldest son**, Julian Bell, was killed in 1937 in the Spanish Civil War. **Virginia Woolf** wrote Fry's biography, but with the coming of war again her mental instability recurred, and she drowned herself in 1941. In the previous decade she had become one of the century's most famous feminist writers with three more novels, and a series of essays including the moving late memoir "A Sketch of the Past".
- It was also in the 1930s that **Desmond MacCarthy** became perhaps the most widely read—and heard—literary critic with his columns in The Sunday Times and his broadcasts with the BBC. **John Maynard Keynes's** "The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money" (1936) made him one of the century's most influential economists. He died in 1946 after being much involved in monetary negotiations with the United States.
- in 1938 **Virginia Woolf** published her radical feminist polemic "Three Guineas" that shocked even some of her colleagues. **Clive Bell** published an appeasement pamphlet (he later supported the war), and **E. M. Forster** wrote an early version of his famous essay "What I Believe" with its choice, still shocking for some, of personal relations over patriotism, that, in "personal relations ... love and loyalty to an individual can run counter to the claims of the State".[39]

Bloomsbury - critique



Wyndham Lewis, "Portrait as the painter Raphael" (1921)

- Wyndham Lewis's "The Apes of God", which called Bloomsbury 'élitist, corrupt and talentless', caused a stir of its own.
- Keynes later renounced the group's belief in undisturbed individualism, their Utopian belief in human reasonableness and decency, and their refusal to accept the idea of civilisation as 'a thin and precarious crust'. "We completely misunderstood human nature, including our own"
- In general the Group has been criticised for its élitist and introverted focus on the personal at the expense of the larger social whole.

Quentin Bell (1910-1996)



“Quentin Bell” by Duncan Grant

- Educated at Leighton Park School and in Paris, Bell became a Lecturer in Art History at the Department of Fine Art, King's College, University of Durham from 1952 to 1959,
- Appointed the first Professor of **Fine Art at the University of Leeds** (1959 to 1967).
- In 1964 he was appointed Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University and, in 1965, Ferens Professor of Fine Art at the University of Hull. Bell was a Professor of Art History and Theory at the University of Sussex from 1967 to 1975.
- He sometimes worked as an artist - principally in ceramics - but for his career he was drawn to academia and to book-writing. Bell's biography of his famous aunt, "Virginia Woolf: A Biography", 2 vols (1972), won not only the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, but also the Duff Cooper Prize and the Yorkshire Post Book of the Year Award.
- He also wrote several books on the Bloomsbury Group and Charleston Farmhouse.

Sir Lawrence Gowing (1918-91)



"Julia reading", by Lawrence Gowing, (1941-2), Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

- A first marriage, to **Julia Strachey**, a member of the Bloomsbury Group, ended in divorce. In 1966 he married Jenny Wallis.
- Gowing wrote major books on Vermeer, Turner, Hogarth, Cézanne, Matisse, Renoir and Lucian Freud, and film on "Matisse: a kind of Paradise" (Arts Council) with John Read, **Herbert Read's** son.
- Among the major exhibitions he organized were those for **Turner** at the Museum of Modern Art, NY in 1966, **Matisse** in New York in 1966 and London in 1968, and **Cézanne**, which traveled in 1988-89 from the Royal Academy to the Musée d'Orsay and the National Gallery of Art.
- He was Keeper of the British Collection and Deputy Director of the Tate Gallery (1965-67)
- Principal of Chelsea School of Art (1958-65)
- Professor of Fine Art University of Leeds (1967-1975)
- Director of the Slade School of Fine Art London from 1975
- 1977-8 First Chairman of the Serpentine Gallery, Arts Council Film Chairman.
- Trustee of the British Museum, National Portrait Gallery, the Tate Gallery and associate of the Royal Academy
- Curator of the **Phillips Collection, Washington**
- Wrote the General Catalogue of the **Louvre Museum, Paris.**