

Lecture Series

February 2020



Behind the Belle Epoque

with Sylvia Sagona

Travels Through Time

Cultural Studies and Tours

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Behind the Belle Epoque

This lecture series will investigate the real significance of this Golden Age which was only given its Belle Epoque epithet after the horrors of the trenches of World War I. It was the time of the colonial scramble for Empire in Africa and of great advances in technology featuring the electric light, the telephone, cinema and the motor car. The armaments competition in Europe required cheap labour and the class divisions in Paris became marked and permanent.



The Belle Epoque we revisit in our minds was so much more than the 1900 World Exhibition or the exquisite clothes of the carefree Parisienne in the canvasses of Tissot and Béraud. It was a mind set whose legacy can still be perceived in the political stalemate of the Macron government as it tries to take on the powerful railway unions and in the relative lack of support for the #MeToo movement in France.

The lecture series aims to uncover what living in the Belle Epoque actually meant to different classes in Paris and to what degree there was a “Belle Epoque” in the rest of France.

Lecture Series Details

This lecture series will consist of 3 x 1.5 hour illustrated lectures and morning coffee. Please select one stream.

Dates

Stream 1 : Tuesdays – February 11, 18, 25

Stream 2 : Fridays – February 14, 21, 28

Time

10:15 – 12:00 noon

(Lecture starts at 10:30 sharp)

Cost

The cost for the 3 sessions is \$145 (incl GST)

Venue

Alloarmo – 5 Grattan Street, Hawthorn

Lecture 1 – February 11 / 14

France Divided

The industrial revolution and the rule of the Third Republic caused deep divisions between city and countryside, Church and State, artisans and industrialists, bourgeois and worker, science and folklore, new technology and traditional habits as well as establishing restrictive definitions of gender identity. As France expanded its colonial empire, the battle began over who was really French. These tensions are still visible in the “gilets jaunes” riots in Paris in 2019.

Lecture 2 – February 18 / 21

The Angel of the Hearth

While women in rural France continued to work on family farms, Parisiennes were codified as either mothers, muses or harlots. Medical science developed theories of hysteria, neuroticism and feeble mindedness to maintain female status as that of a legal and political minor. For middle class women, matrimony was destiny. Vice and virtue were class defined. Working class girls had to resort to prostitution in order to survive. However in 1900 the first feminist movement emerged out of an anti absinth and alcohol society.

Lecture 3 – February 25 / 28

Art, literature, theatre and dance in the Belle Epoque

During the Belle Epoque all classes of Parisians developed their own type of leisure activities. The Bourgeoisie wanted to be seen and so patronised the Opera, the ballet and theatre while the working classes frequented new types of cabarets and popular theatre on the boulevards. Art found new wealthy conspicuous spenders and so the Salon art of Bouguereau prospered alongside that of the Cubists, Fauves, Symbolists and Decadents. Art Nouveau flourished briefly but left its mark with Guimard’s metro entrances. The Ballets Russes scandalised as did the poetry of Rimbaud and the novels of Proust and Colette.