



Greenwich Decorative Arts <greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com>

Fwd: A GDAS Valentine for you

1 message

Greenwich Decorative Arts <greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com>
To: Greenwich Decorative Arts <greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com>

Tue, Sep 20, 2022 at 2:31 PM



GREENWICH
Decorative Arts
SOCIETY

Letter from President Cyndy Anderson

Dear Members,

Here is a Valentine confection from Karen Handal to transport you into the world of the arts. I know you will savor this gift.

We are halfway through GDAS's 35th year. As usual, our programming has been rich, varied and educational. Even virtually, the caliber of our lectures has attracted new members. Kudos to our fabulous Program Committee headed by Betty Johnson with a special shout-out to Jenny Pitman for organizing the wonderful Appraisal Day.

A note to our Benefactor and Contributing members - your membership includes at least one free guest pass. Please use this and share the delight of GDAS with a friend.

A most happy Valentines Day to you all! May the power of love and the power of art bring you joy.

Best wishes,
Cyndy

A GDAS Valentine for You
February 14, 2021



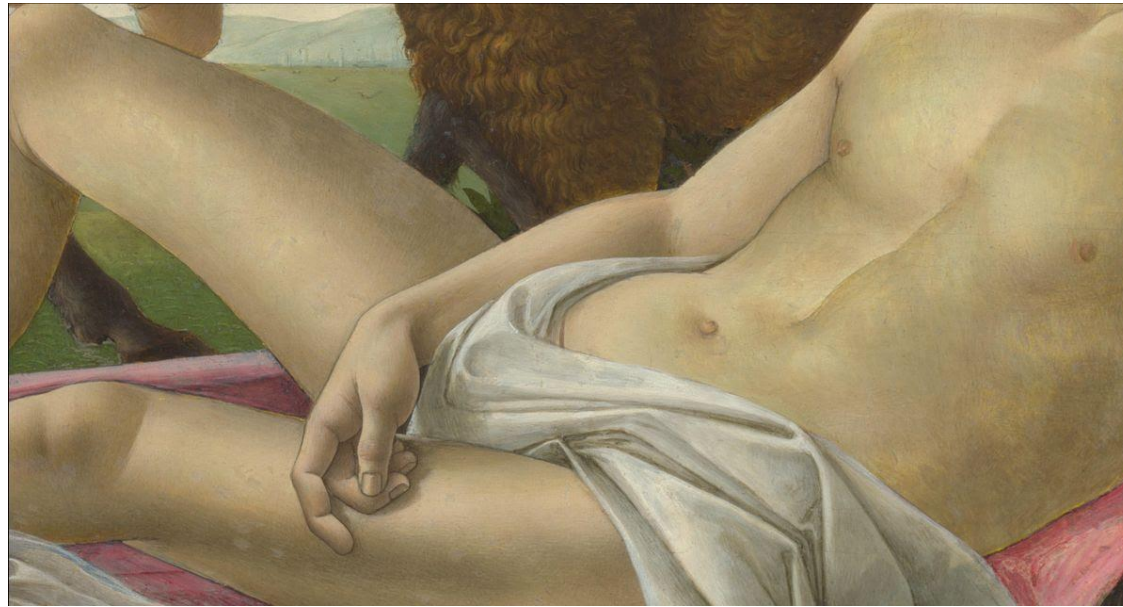
Pack your bags. Enough of this COVID-19. We're going to take a little Valentine's trip.



Venus and Mars (c 1485) by Sandro Botticelli.

We're off to Florence. Did you know the streets of Florence today are very much the same as they were in Botticelli's time? So here we are in 15th century Florence under the Medici rule, a place where anything was possible for people of talent.

Botticelli is the archetypal Florentine Renaissance artist. Everyone loves his paintings. Nothing says love, eternal, earthly and divine, more than *The Birth of Venus*, *Primavera* and *Venus and Mars*.



The Florentine citizens would have been very familiar with this classical story. Venus had a bad first marriage to Vulcan. Vulcan was such an angry and ugly little baby with a red, bawling face, his mother threw him off a mountain top!

You can imagine how things went from there. He was obsessed with fire and carried around his blacksmith hammer. He trapped his own mother and Jupiter made a deal with him that if he released her, he would be given the beautiful Venus as a wife.



So she was part of a deal cut between two powerful men. They were an unmatched pair from the beginning. Viewers would understand this painting. The beautiful, regal Venus - Goddess of Love, for heaven's sake - has an illicit affair with Mars, handsome, strong yet gentle Mars, God of War. Finally she experiences real love.

The figures, outlined in thin black lines, a traditional Florentine technique, have a striking clarity. The fine folds of Venus' robes are wonderful and achieve a sense of translucency. Botticelli always includes natural images of real plants.



Viewers would also know this: if a woman looked at a beautiful man she would conceive his child, which would be a male heir. Her hair plaits wrap around and become part of the adornment of her elegant dress. She's covered - this may be an affair but it is a story of love and chastity as well. She embodies grace and beauty.

Venus is dressed in the contemporary fashions of Florence and may also represent Simonetta Vespucci, a famous beauty whose romance with Giuliano de' Medici was well known. Simonetta first met the young Botticelli at a court gathering, and some historians believe



Botticelli fell in love with her natural beauty. We do know that Botticelli asked to be buried at her feet in the Franciscan Church of Ognissanti. His wish was carried out in 1510.



Mars is lost in a world of sleep that can only follow one thing - something very satisfactory as the viewers would know. Even the naughty little putti blowing the conch does not awaken him, nor the ones clanking his manly armor and playing with his weapons of war.

Notice the wasps buzzing around his head, perhaps a symbol that love is often accompanied by pain. Scholars note that they also represent the Vespucci family of Florence who most likely commissioned the painting. Their name means “little wasps” in Italian and their coat of arms included wasps.



The putti are laughing and the viewers would have appreciated this mischievous and somewhat tongue-in-cheek depiction. There is love, sexual desire and also fun and amusement in this painting - it's humorous, loving and timeless.

There's also a message: love conquers strife.
Love's grace has subdued discord and destruction.





Even if you don't know anything about the myth,

you know this painting is about falling in love.



Now we are off to France.
When is the last time you went dancing?



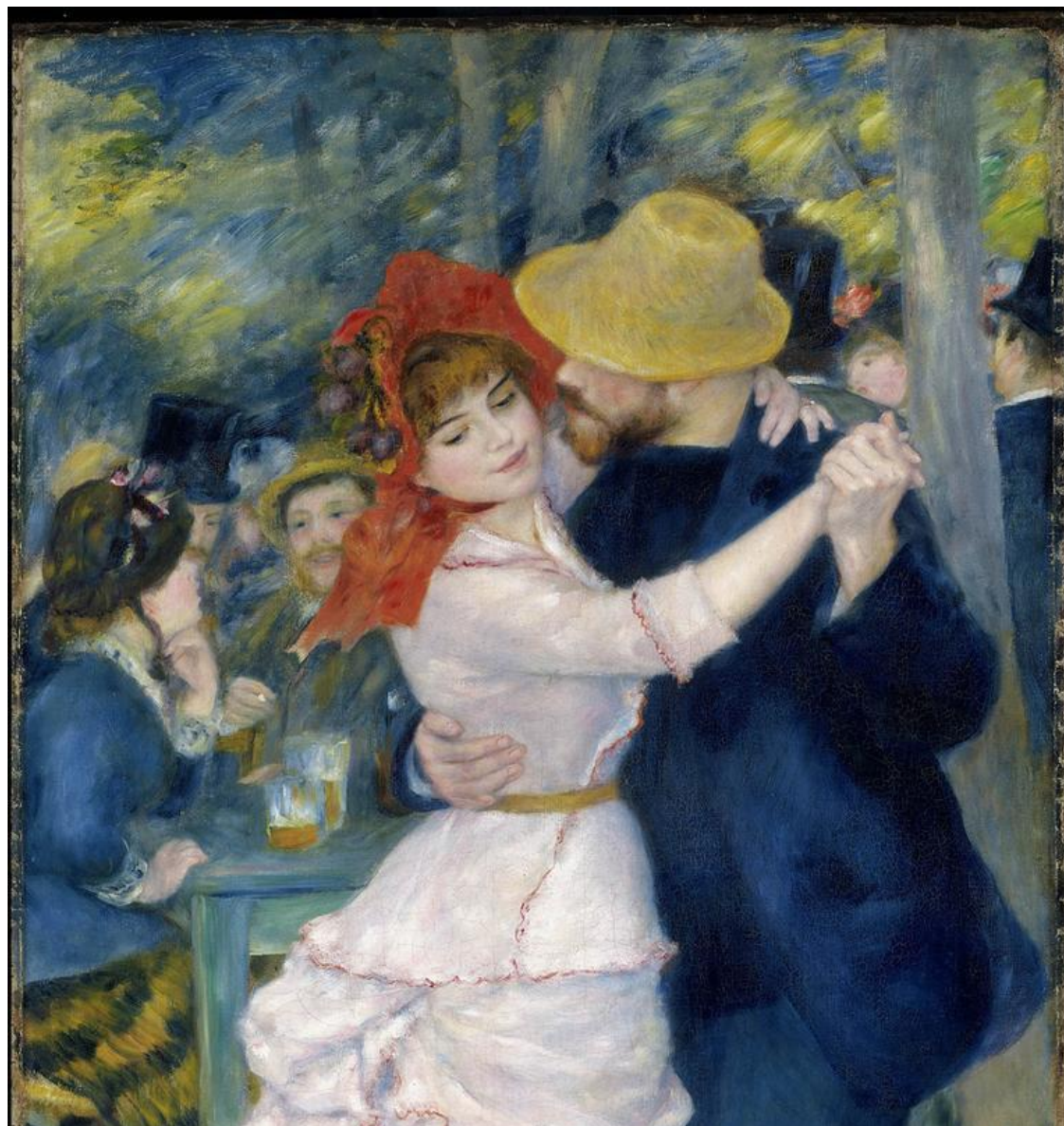
Renoir painted three scenes of dancing couples, all of which are life-sized. Picture six feet tall. *Dance at Bougival*, *Dance in the Country* and *Dance in the City* are rarely seen together. When the Frick showed them in 2012, the exhibition broke attendance records. [Look at this short Frick video](#) for an excellent description of their fashion.

These dancers are the equivalent of our dancing with the stars and capture the romance and beauty of 19th century France.

They make you want to dance.

Joyfully!

Tenderly.





In *Dance at Bougival* the couple swirls over a floor littered with cigarette butts, burnt matches and fallen posies. People in the background are socializing - without distance. Seen together, the paintings represent the same dance taking place in different levels of French society.







In *The Country Dance* Renoir used his future wife as a model. He portrays her in a dress of white radiance with scattered roses, with bright eyes and a sweet smile. (Refreshingly, she does not promote modern standards of thin beauty.) They seem to be spinning with such happy ecstasy that his hat has flown to the floor.

Abandoned as a child, Aline Charigot left the countryside for Paris to make a living as a seamstress. She accepted the invitation to model for Renoir and shortly after, they became lovers. They had a child and then married. Her dream of living in a home in her small village with a husband and family came true.

Initially reluctant, in time Renoir became very fond of her hometown, Essoyes, of the butter, the wine, the bread made there, declaring it superior to that in Paris. He said he loved being among the winegrowers “because they are generous.” He painted portraits of his family, of villagers, of the surrounding landscapes. And Aline became famous among his artist friends for her culinary skills, in particular for her bouillabaisse.







In *Dance in the City* decorum prevails. It doesn't have the merry-making of the other two but it does have an innocent sweetness. The girl and her partner are bound by rules and norms but we can imagine she dreams of a kiss.

And you have to love that dress.



Hang on to your hats. Now we are off to Mexico, to the dark side of love. As Botticelli knew, love is always accompanied by pain.



Los Dos Fridas (The Two Fridas), Frida Kahlo, 1939

“I suffered two grave accidents in my life: one in which a streetcar knocked me down....The other accident is Diego,” Frida Kahlo said in a 1951 interview. Kahlo was referring, of course, to her husband and fellow artist Diego Rivera, with whom she had a deeply volatile relationship.

Their marriage toggled between passionate highs and bitter lows; the latter were often inspired by Rivera's insistent cheating, and retaliative infidelity on Kahlo's part. Nearly 10 years after they married, Rivera began an affair with his wife's sister, an indiscretion Kahlo couldn't tolerate.

This painting was completed shortly after her divorce with Diego Rivera. The traditional Frida in Tehuana costume, with a broken heart, holds hands with an independent, modern dressed Frida. Rivera encouraged Frida to wear attire based on old Mexican customs, and in this dress she possibly will bleed to death. The double self-portrait, although laden with suffering, also embodies resilience.



The Two Fridas received the highest price Frida was ever paid for a painting in her

lifetime.



La Venadita (Little Deer or Wounded Deer), Frida Kahlo 1946

In a painting which evokes her physical pain and emotional depression, *Little Deer* expresses sadness that she cannot change her fate. The deer was an Aztec symbol; Frida used her pet deer "Granizo" as the model. She adored and adopted animals as surrogates for the children she could not have.

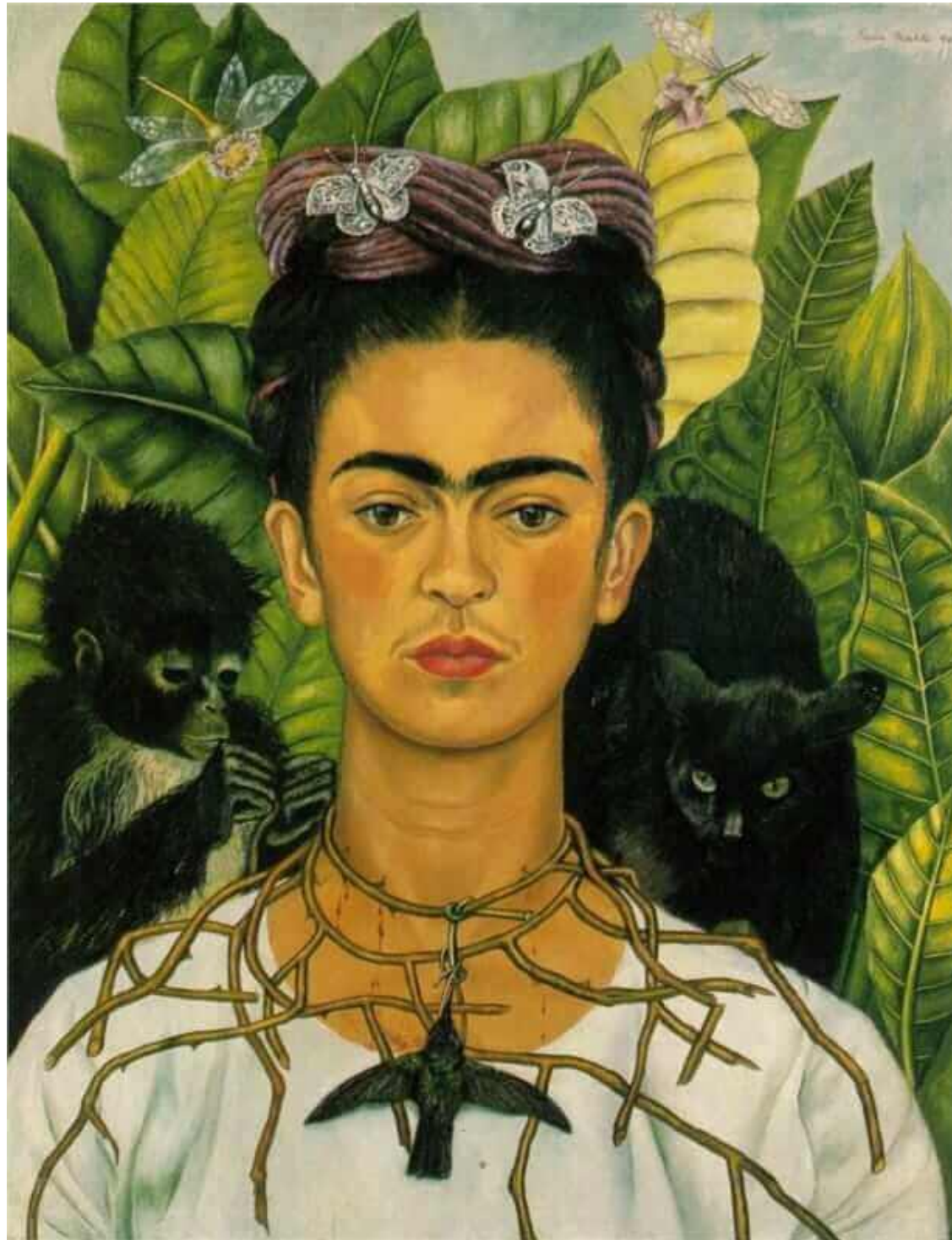
In the left hand corner is the word *Carma*, Spanish for Karma, suggesting her belief in the concept that even a person's harsh karma, or fate, faced with wisdom, can further spiritual development.



Kahlo's photographer father was German Lutheran and her mother was of Spanish and Mexican descent. Kahlo's work, ingrained in Mexico where she was born, also contains an artistic vision influenced by her father's roots. Her father had the financial support to sail to Mexico to pursue new opportunities. Wilhelm Kahlo never returned to Germany and changed his name from Wilhelm to Guillermo, although he never lost his German accent in Spanish. He became the most renowned photographer of the time in Mexico.



He created countless artistic photos of his daughter, and later she memorialized him in paintings. She accompanied him on his excursions and learned his work. Her right leg was handicapped after contracting polio at age six. Her compassionate, supportive and encouraging father played an enormous role in inspiring her creativity. Her affection for him, and his for her - his favorite child - sustained her throughout her life's difficulties.



Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird, Frida Kahlo, 1940

In her famous self-portrait Frida wears a necklace of a hummingbird. The hummingbird is considered to be a symbol of good luck in Mexican folklore and is associated with falling in love. But its love symbolism in this painting is undercut by the fact that it is dark and lifeless, love gone wrong.

The black panther can be seen as symbolic of looming bad luck and death, while the monkey is sometimes a symbol of malice. Rivera was the one who gave Kahlo a spider monkey as a gift, thus suggesting that it could be a symbol of Rivera, especially since he inflicts pain upon Kahlo by tugging the thorn necklace hard enough to make her bleed.

The thorn necklace alludes to Christ's crown of thorns. Her touchstones were formed by both European and Judeo-Christian influences as well as Mexican culture and mythology.

The butterflies and dragonflies symbolize her resurrection and a bright sign of hope.



On the wings of hope we are off to Skagen, a village in the northernmost part of Denmark.



A Stroll on the Beach, Michael Ancher, 1896

From the late 1870s until the turn of the century, a group of Scandinavian artists and their families descended on a small and remote fishing village with understated beauty.

The long beaches stretched for miles.

(This beach is reminiscent of Greenwich Point and Long Island can be seen across the Sound!)

It was the light that drew them to Skagen.



Summer Evening on Skagen's Southern Beach, Peder Severin Kroyer, 1893

Summer Evening shows two women walking the beach at that magic time of the day called "the blue hour" when the sky and the sea seem to embrace each other in a new blend of blue.

Savoring private time together in close proximity is a challenge in the time of COVID social distancing. The pandemic has stolen the possibility of such an intimate moment with a close friend or a sibling.

The painting heightens our appreciation of the gift we receive when someone offers his or her complete presence to us.



The light conveys a twilight zone conducive to intimate conversation,
a time when quiet wonders and epiphanies can renew our spirits.



Summer Evening at Skagen Beach, Peder Severen Krøyer, 1899

Kroyer wrote to a friend that he wanted to paint a portrait of his wife Marie and himself together in recognition of ten years of marriage. They strolled every evening with their dog Rap.

He conveyed his own feelings about Skagen evenings: "...when the sun goes down, when the moon rises up out of the sea ... with the fishermen standing on the beach and the cutters sailing by with loosened sails ... in recent years this has been the time I like most of all."



Summer evening at the South Beach, Skagen, by Peder Severin Krøyer, 1893

The painters tried to convey the moment of transition between day and night when the sky and the sea became one in a kiss.



"Hip Hip Hurrah!" Artists' Party at Skagen, 1888, Krøyer, Peder Severin (1851-1909)

When is the last time you sat at a table with at least five champagne bottles and no social distancing?

Depicting an al fresco party of the Scandinavian artists known as the 'Skagen Painters', the painting is a study in impressionistic light effects. The low early-evening sun plays across the overhanging leaves of the grove where the table is set up, throwing dappled reflections onto the men's faces and their fair hair and beards (Krøyer himself stands third from the left) and shimmering on bottles and glasses.

This painting presents toasts and sheer joyous revelry.



Buckle up!

We are going to continue the festivities in New York City for a Valentine's party in a very red room. Oh ~ and dial up our Valentine celebration by wearing a red outfit!



The elegant Diana Vreeland with her impeccable manners, her distinctive gestures and her marvelous laugh has invited us to a party in her red apartment.

We are channeling the legendary editor-in-chief of *Vogue Magazine* and special consultant to the MET Costume Institute, yes, the very eccentric and extravagant Diana who wrote her iconic *BAZAAR* column "Why Don't You..."

She believed in treating yourself as generously as you would your friends.

Why don't you...

- ~ Slip into your finest gown or Japanese kimono for a night-in of take-out and TV?
- ~ Send yourself a dozen roses or a beautiful plant just because?
- ~ Gift yourself the most luxurious stationery and elevate the art of a Valentine?



~ Make a toast to GDAS, our Board and the wonderful members who have supported it during a pandemic!



The detailed workmanship in Diane's New York apartment is by Billy Baldwin, one of Vreeland's oldest and closest friends. Vreeland quipped that “I want my apartment to look like a garden: a garden in hell!”

The flamboyant scarlet-flowered cotton of the walls and curtains of the living room reflects the abundance of the color red: red carpets, red-lacquered doors, closet linings, and picture frames.





A capacious and comfortable sofa with a collection of pillows includes playing-card pillows which she needlepointed herself.



The rooms contain an agglomeration of personal possessions — *objets trouvés*, collections, drawings, paintings, and photographs. The collections — Scottish horn, seashells, Staffordshire dogs, Battersea enamel — consist almost in their entirety of gifts from friends.



Many photos attest to Vreeland's genius for friendship. Red peonies, one of her favorite flowers, spill over from vases.



One of the many inspirations for the room was Matisse's 1908 painting *The Red Room*, considered by critics to be his masterpiece. The luxuriant raspberry red fabric with its energetic twists of blue pattern seems to sink down from the wall, taking over the surface of the table and uniting it in a single whole.



Of course Vreeland's apartment was not a "garden in hell." It has outward and visible charm as well as whimsical and personal significance.

“A very happy room to be in,” she said, “even when I was ill.”

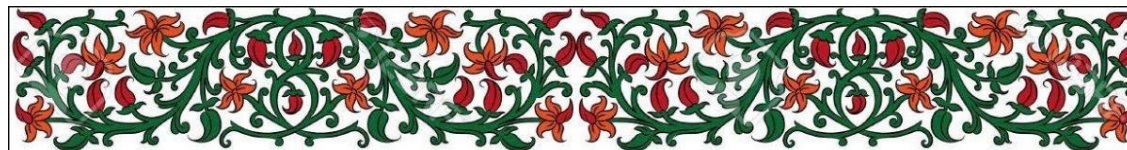


At the party we are going to have a grand time.
There is no pandemic, no COVID, in The Red Room.
Only festive celebration and happy toasts
to the very special members of the Greenwich Decorative Arts Society.



And of course a cup of tea by the fire to wind down a perfect art adventure.
Happy Valentine's Day!

Karen Handal
Musings on the Decorative Arts
Greenwich Decorative Arts Society
President Emerita
February, 2021



Thank you

- ~ Sandro Botticelli: *Venus and Mars* in Renaissance Florence, Caroline Campbell, The Jacob Rothschild Head of the Curatorial Department, The National Gallery, UK
 - ~ *Renoir, Impressionism, and Full-Length Painting*, Frick Exhibition, 2012
 - ~ *Frida Kahlo, Making Her Self Up*, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2018
 - ~ *The Light That Inspired the Skagen Painters*
 - ~ "Former Vogue Editor's Diane Vreeland's New York Apartment," *Architectural Digest*, 1975
-
-

This email was sent to Greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com

[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)

Greenwich Decorative Arts Society · PO Box 5095 · Greenwich, CT 06831-0502 · USA

