

# CHAPTER 1

## PROEM

Let me please start by stating that I have attempted to explain the concepts expressed throughout this book in as simple a language as possible. As a person who has practised ophthalmology for more than forty years, it has not been my intention (excuse the pun), to try to blind my readers with either language or science. I hope I have succeeded in this task, but in the final analysis it is up to you, the reader, to make that assessment.

The ideas expressed throughout this book have arisen out of two interwoven passions, which have dominated my mind for more than forty years, and a third much more recently acquired disenchantment!

1. My first passion has been a continuous search to acquire more knowledge with respect to both ophthalmological medical practice and its corollary *human vision*; because it is, of course, primarily human vision which ophthalmological medical practice strives enduringly to protect.
2. My second passion has been a methodology, which I have independently developed, of selectively examining (and sometimes acquiring) discarded, unwanted paintings, by utilising principles which have been derived from an understanding of the neurophysiological engineering of human vision; and
3. My third more recently acquired disenchantment relates to the world's current state of art connoisseurship, where acceptance of a new attribution for a previously unidentified or misattributed painting is often at the discretion of a single person or organisation (usually the authors of a *catalogue raisonné* on the possible artist in question), who or which, primarily, appear to be selective archival collectors of provenances of their own choosing, rather than scientists with a fine appreciation of how artists paint, based on an understanding of the mechanisms involved in the viewing and perceiving of paintings. This, of course, requires a detailed understanding of the neurophysiological engineering of human vision. Furthermore, such persons or organisations often seem to make little effort

to try to understand or accept obvious new historical or stylistic evidence related to the painting, or forensic evidence gleaned from highly technical, innovative investigative advances into it; they seem to be allowed to ignore such evidence in deference to their own personal overvalued gut feelings and/or pompous egos.

Apart from passions, disenchantments and ideas, most books still require a catalysing stimulus to eventually get them started. In this particular case, there were three such stimuli.

The first stimulus was a visit to England to attend the 2015 Cambridge Ophthalmological Symposium, which was chaired by Professor John Marshall, the renowned inventor of the Diode & Excimer lasers. In retrospect, I felt very fortunate and privileged to have attended this meeting. It is traditionally, I am told, one of the United Kingdom's smaller ophthalmic meetings, but nevertheless, for me, it was by far the most scientifically interesting meeting I had ever attended. My fascination was aroused by the fact that many of the papers were, so to speak, outside the normal square. John Marshall approached me at one of the breaks, surprisingly, as I did not know him, and asked me what I thought of the meeting. I replied that this was the first ophthalmological meeting which I had attended in forty years, where I felt like a fool in the presence of geniuses; he most graciously tried to reassure me that he was certain I was mistaken in my assessment.

In one of his lectures Marshall made two rather basic points which for an ophthalmologist of my longstanding experience, proved to be the absolute highlights of the conference, because I had never considered them before and because learning about them changed the way I now perceive and think about my own vision.

These points concerned:

1. the effect of electric street lighting on rod photoreceptors, and
2. a population of retinal ganglion cells which contain photo-chemical pigments.

Marshall's first point was that in large cities, which are well lit at night, residents hardly ever get to use their rod photoreceptors. Rods are photoreceptors in our retina which have evolved over millions of years, which only function at very low levels of illumination (too low for our cone photoreceptors), and which are specifically designed to provide us with dark night vision. When negotiating our electrically lit cities at night, the level of illumination is sufficient to fully saturate our rods and to activate our cones. In such circumstances, our rods are rendered absolutely non-functional; and we probably only ever get to use them when we

wake up in a very dark room, in the middle of the night, to hop out of bed and visit the toilet.

Marshall's second point concerned a certain population of ganglion cells in our retinas which, like all our photoreceptors (our rods and our three types of cones), contain photochemical pigments. My guess is that these cells might be surviving relics from long ago, when one of our fishy ancestors lived in the depths of an ocean. Their current significance, according to Marshall, is that if someone was to lose all their rods and cones, that person would no longer visualise any forms, but still would be able to differentiate between night and day.

I then suddenly, and inadvertently, concluded that if I went ahead and wrote this book, I might be able to do for others what Marshall did for me – that is, revolutionise the way in which my readers (eye-care professionals included) perceive and think about their own vision; and that if I should indeed manage to succeed at this, then my having written this book would have been highly worthwhile!

My second stimulus was a man named Andrew Winfield Brainerd (1920–2013). Never underestimate a man whose surname is a combination of the words 'brain' and 'nerd'. There's a good chance Brainerd might be right and you might be wrong; and as his middle name Winfield suggests, he might win against you both in his field and in yours. Brainerd was a multilingual founding partner of 'Baker, McKenzie, Hightower and Brainerd' (nowadays known as 'Baker McKenzie'), perhaps the first and still one of the largest international law firms in the world, wherein Brainerd himself specialised in international taxation. He was also interested in art and was the author of two most interesting art books, *The Infanta Adventure and the Lost Manet* (1988) and *On Connoisseurship and Reason in the Authentication of Art* (2007). It is in relation to these two art books that I will discuss him in a later chapter of this book titled 'Edouard Manet'.

My third stimulus is a man named John Hoole, whose beautifully presented *biography/catalogue raisonné* of Welsh painter *James Dickson Innes (1887–1914)*, co-authored with Margaret Simons, was published by Lund Humphries in 2013. John Hoole has had a long-term interest in Innes, dating as far back as the early 1970s. His personal interest in Innes therefore spans both a considerable and similar period of time to my own personal interest in Innes' close friend, the Australian artist Derwent Lees (1884–1931). My first encounter with Lees dates back to 1975.

I have personally met with John in London in 2007, when his Innes *biography/catalogue raisonné* was still in its early stages; and I have been in intermittent email contact with him ever since.

John is very familiar with my book *In Search of Derwent Lees*, published in 1996.

I have a letter from him dated 20 January 2007 in which he states that the copy I originally sent him was misplaced when he left the Barbican six years earlier (that would be in 2001, which incidentally contradicts the blurb on his book which says he was a curator there from 1982 to 1998); and that since then he had recently acquired another copy. I was therefore completely taken by surprise, after purchasing John's *biography/catalogue raisonné James Dickson Innes*, to discover that Hoole had reattributed two paintings, which I have absolutely no doubt are by Derwent Lees, to James Dickson Innes.

Both paintings are presently in Australia; so it took me absolutely no time to confirm that this new attribution had taken place without even so much as a prior word to me or to the owners of both paintings. One of the paintings is owned by the Carrick Hill Trust and Estate in Adelaide. When I informed Richard Heathcote, the Director at Carrick Hill, as to what John Hoole had done, Heathcote expressed no knowledge of it whatsoever.

However, a second and even greater disappointment was yet to befall me; the Carrick Hill Trust has now similarly reattributed their painting to Innes, once again without even so much as a prior word to me, despite the fact that they know me to be the foundation stone behind their travelling exhibition, *Derwent Lees - The Forgotten Australian*, which toured Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane in 1997; and also because they know that the painting in question was placed by me on the cover of my book *In Search of Derwent Lees*, because the book had been wholly and solely written with the probability of a Carrick Hill exhibition in mind. It is of further interest to me that the Carrick Hill Trust regarded other Australian connoisseurs as obviously having more expertise with respect to Derwent Lees than myself, despite the facts that the National Gallery of Victoria invited me to write the Derwent Lees entry in the catalogue for their blockbuster exhibition, *Modern Britain 1900-1960* in 2007; and that the *Oxford British Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Handbook of Modern British Painting and Print Making 1900-1990*, both list me as the principal authority on Derwent Lees.

My own point of view is that this is simply another ad nauseam example of bureaucracy gone wrong; something I seem to encounter more frequently than previously in present-day Australia. I therefore wish to state that it is now my intention to present strong arguments for the reattribution of both of these paintings back to Derwent Lees in a later chapter of this book, titled 'Derwent Lees'. I intend to tackle this issue with strict reference to the neurophysiological engineering of human vision, a topic which, I am sure, professional art connoisseurs, in the main, know either little or nothing about. In the mindset of Andrew Winfield Brainerd, and with words borrowed from William Shakespeare, let me say, 'To be by Derwent

Lees or not to be by Derwent Lees; *that is indeed the question.*'

In conclusion, let me add that John Hoole has been a relatively good sport with respect to all of this. He has even gone so far as to supply me with a number of Innes images for this book, which allows me to significantly enhance clarity when presenting a methodological argument of poignant, piquant points.



Figure 7 : Ernest Albert Waterlow  
*Across the Meadow*  
26.5 x 39 cm



Figure 8 : Claude Monet, French, 1840–1926  
*Meadow with Poplars* about 1875

Oil on canvas 54.6 x 65.4 cm (21 1/2 x 25 3/4 in)

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Bequest of David P. Kimball in memory of his wife Clara Bertram Kimball 23.505

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