

Spring Art Retreat at Maison Quaker 11 Avenue des Quakers, Congenies, May 10 – 15 2014
www.maison-quaker-congenies.org email centre.quaker.congenies@gmail.com

An appreciation by Caroline Coode e.cacoode@phonecoop.coop w.carolinecoode.co.uk
 Newcastle upon Tyne, UK local meeting.

Ten people converged on Centre Quaker Congenies to start the 5 day artist retreat. We had come from Germany, Philadelphia USA, Britain and France.

The variety of skills assembled included painting and silk painting; printmaking; weaving; photo-journalism and writing.

We were drawn together by the desire to explore, extend or develop our individual disciplines - as well as the surrounding countryside.

We met the 'amis residents' Judy and Dave who are welcoming, friendly and immensely helpful.

They have cycled all over the world. Dave is a master of bike fixing as well as playing the piano and singing to the dishwasher. Every morning he cycled to the nearest boulangerie to bring us our breakfast baguettes and - for a special treat - croissants! Perfection !

Judy seemed always on her feet bringing piles of plates and our food to the summer kitchen, making coffee and generally attending to our every need!

Our facilitator Karina and her writer husband Philip, had come from where they live elsewhere in France.

Several of us made good use of the above mentioned bikes going out to the very attractive nearby villages. Aubais, Calvisson, Sommieres, Aujargues and others. There is a smoothly surfaced 'voie verte' along old railway tracks. No cars and lovely subjects to paint.



A selection of bikes at front of Maison Quaker

On Saturday at 5.30 we introduced ourselves. Karina asked us to think about why/what/ how we want to express ourselves in our art or writing; how we might link our art to our spirituality; what we might write as our personal statement to describe our work and what we were hoping for from the retreat - if that is what it was!

Well of course it was - we were all away from our normal routines with time to devote to pursuing and developing our skills. All our meals were provided. We only had to sit down and eat, very delicious they were, provided by the exuberant Michaela and her husband - from number 10 avenue de Quakers - about 50 yards along the road. Three colours of local wine completed the delight.



Sketch by Caroline Coode

We ate outside in the 'summer kitchen' under the newly leafing vine.

Each day we started with 15 minutes of silence after which we did an exercise set by Karina, comparing the excitingly diverse results at the end.

1. Drawing by feel only, (eyes closed – very challenging!) then with eyes open drawing beside or over the top of the eyes closed version.

2. Group mark making activity to music;



The result

3. Portrait a) short pose with continuous line not looking at paper b) Longer pose with tones and details. Our gentleman photo journalist kindly agreed to pose and was an excellent model. He was pleased with our various results and took at least some of them home with him!



Continuous line by Caroline Coode



Group results

4. A very close study of a still life arrangement looking through a small hole in a piece of card, to concentrate on the reflected and shadow colours.



The subject



Sketch by Caroline Coode

In the afternoons we had a choice of visits to local places with a picnic or staying ‘at home’ to work in the beautiful garden. Before one such afternoon it was suggested that we focus on what we were intending to portray, emphasising tone/contrast, colour, detail or pattern, not trying to include all in one piece. The hope was to preclude the potential of producing a muddle! YES – very important to avoid.

Again we shared results in the late afternoon before some pre- dinner relaxation.



Line/detail



Colour/pattern



Tone

Sketches by Caroline Coode in Sommieres

Evening activities included piano and singing - Dave plays well and knows lots of songs and tunes which he plays with gusto and sometimes a bit of a swing!



Dave in action.



Resident Friend Judy with her bike and visitor Ruth from York

An informal – and very funny French lesson led by a lively French lady, Roll, who spoke French, English and German.

Terms of endearment = ‘tu es chouette mon petit chou’
‘you are lovely [or owl!] my little cabbage’

On other evenings we read poetry or played CD's we had brought and the last evening we had some circle dancing guided by a local French Friend.

Thursday 15, our last day came all too soon. We ended with 1 hour Meeting for worship joined by Denis and Francoise who live nearby. They have been involved with Maison Quaker for many years seeing it through the refurbishment and regeneration and are very actively involved in local events.

In our last sharing about our experiences one Friend spoke my mind saying that in the course of the Retreat, she had found, nourishing friendship, gentleness, kindness, beauty and lovely food.

To this I add my appreciation of expert facilitation by Karina, who combined encouragement, gentle challenge, flexible activities - 'it's YOUR retreat' - superb timekeeping and communication!

Footnotes / afterwords

Nightingales sang all DAY and night! The church clock strikes the hour twice.

Lizards scuttled about. A huge golden moon on our last night.

Rather frighteningly, a forest fire nearby on a very windy day which necessitated not only local 'sapeur pompiers' but also low flying aircraft dropping smothering dust. We were told that this happens every year when there is a high wind and is deliberately started by fanatical arsonists. Oh dear.

As a member of Quaker Arts Network www.quakerarts.net I was delighted to make a link with two members of The Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts from Philadelphia.

One is the editor of their magazine and he posted photos and a short blog each day. You can see this on www.facebook.com/quakersinthearts where there are some very nice photos.



The D41 bus from the back of Nimes train station stops 5mins up the road from Maison Quaker. Wonderfully convenient ! Just ask for 'Malle Poste'

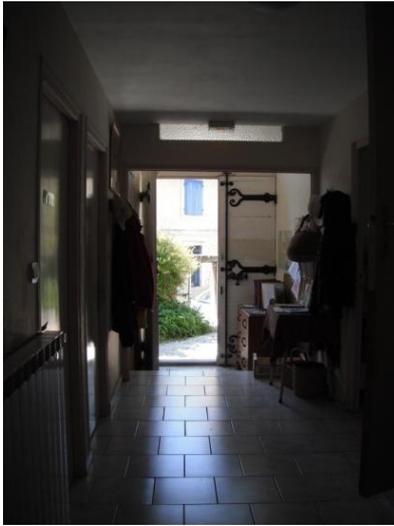
Aubais. Only a mile from Congenies



A writer at work



Working in the lovely garden



Front hall



The inside of the front door



The big meeting room



The burial ground



Water in the garden



11 Avenue des Quakers. Please come in!

