

newsletter

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Winter 2022/Spring 2023

website: www.thepastelsociety.org.uk

THE PASTEL SOCIETY



Egyptian Village, Halla Shafey PS, PSA, IAPS/MC

Featured Artist Halla Shafey PS, PSA, IAPS/MC



Girl from the South of Egypt

Halla Shafey might not have become the artist she is today if she'd followed one of her other varied career choices. She toyed with the idea of Egyptology, archaeology – even marine biology. In fact, it never crossed her mind to become an artist. She loved economics (her father was an economist) so that's what she applied to do at the American University of Cairo.

“At the time,” she says, “there wasn't any department for Applied Arts, or fine arts, there were just courses.” So, instead she studied Islamic art and architecture, the history of Western art, taking them as electives. She also headed up a student art club, which invited famous Egyptian artists to exhibit and give talks. But, after her masters, she says: “I didn't touch a pencil or pen or draw anything for the next 20 years.”

The sea change happened when celebrating her fortieth birthday with some schoolfriends. “We'd all turned 40 the same month and were deciding what should we do with our next decade,” she says. Her response was: “Well, I have thought about it and I want to take a whole year off work and explore creative pursuits.”

She started taking professional art lessons, others in photography, pottery, experimented with mosaics and began writing. Halla knew she had a creative calling – but which direction to go in? Then, at 46, she decided: “OK, I'm ready. I'm going to have my first solo exhibition.” And that was it. She closed the chapter on being an economist and development specialist and started a brand new one.

Her friends, family and colleagues went into shock, but she told them that she couldn't combine art with her previous career as they are so different. “One requires the right side of the brain, and the other, the left,” she says. “I tried to do both, but really art needs your full-time attention. And my focus was only made possible because I had the greatest support from my family when I decided to become an artist.”

Since then, she has exhibited internationally as her work has developed, in China, Russia, the US and Europe. She has won 18 international awards and honors, with work featuring in such publications as *The Pastel Journal*, *Pratique des Arts*, *Artists & Illustrators*, *The Globe* and *Pastel World*.

Halla particularly enjoyed her relationship with the Porta Coeli Foundation in Italy's Basilicata region. It led to her spending 12 days last year in an old Coptic monastery which has been transformed into a museum. The works produced went on show at the end of that time.

“It was amazing just to be able to seclude yourself somewhere and work without social obligations or interruptions,” she says. “The work I produced there would have taken two or three months in Egypt.” The theme was inspired by cities, and how artists manage to live and work in them. Other Italian artists joined her there.

Halla also gave two public talks there. One was about contemporary Egyptian artists from a psychological point of view, relating to the city and the challenges for artists who live there. The other looked at the specific problems that women artists face in Egypt today – often the same that they face in other countries – using pomegranate (a fruit that grows in both Egypt and Italy) to link the two cultures.

Her reputation has built steadily. She was selected by a prominent art writer/journalist for inclusion in the 2022 biography of 45 prominent Egyptian artists of the 20th/21st Century, while a book by a prominent Egyptian art critic on her work is due to be published at the end of this year.

Halla has a keen interest in art education and mentoring. For the past three years she has been teaching a six-week course in abstraction in

pastels with the Pastel Academy of the Pastel Society of America.

But how did her relationship with the Pastel Society in the UK start? She and a friend first visited a PS exhibition in 2011, before she even became an artist. The friend encouraged her to submit work and in 2013 she did. Back in 2011, though, she was approached by a stranger who asked whether she was enjoying the exhibition.

She told him yes, very much, and confided that she was trying to become an artist. He asked to see her work, and then gave her what she considers the most important piece of advice, which she has never forgotten.

“He told me that I had amazing potential, and sense of colour, and created very expressive work, but that I should let go of photo references and just use my imagination and memories,” she says. “I just looked at him and said how can I do that? And he replied: ‘It will come.’”

That man was the 2011 Pastel Society President, John Ivor Stewart, and his words resonated in Halla’s mind in the coming months. She began experimenting, letting go, submitting her paintings to the Society from then on. In 2013 it accepted one titled *The Girl From The South of Egypt*, illustrating the traditions and ties that bind them.

She visited the show with her son, who had just started university in the UK, opened the catalogue and discovered her work in the first spread, having won second prize (Halla went on to win three more between 2013 and 2022). “It was a transformative moment for me,” she says. “I was amazed and very happy, going on to meet other members.”

After that she became a regular at the exhibition, and able to apply for membership. “It took several years,” she says, “but it was a very, very proud moment for me as an Egyptian artist being accepted in this prestigious and reputable Society.”

Since then, from her base in Cairo, Egypt, where she lives and works, she continues to push her expressive work in abstraction while always trying to integrate different media. Besides pastels, she’s working with monoprints, acrylics...making up for the time she didn’t go to art school. She constantly

experiments and improvises. “But the advantage of that is that I’m always thinking outside of the box and not being straightjacketed,” she says. “I don’t have a teacher’s voice in my head saying: ‘you can’t do that’ and can just use my intuition.”

“That’s actually why I like the UK Pastel Society, because every artist has their own individual, very strong, expressive style. And I think this is what they liked about my work, too.”



Halla at work in her studio



Red Sea

The President's Letter

In welcoming 2023, the Pastel Society will be celebrating having its 124th Exhibition at a much sunnier and warmer time of year. We now open on 23 May (Private View) and 24 May (opening day).

Looking back at 2022, it has been an up and down year. Our sales were below target at the Annual Exhibition despite a truly great standard of work. We also had the sad news of the deaths of Paula Rego, a Pastel Society Honorary Member, Ann Wilkinson PS, one of our best-loved and loyal members, and polymath Tom Phillips, another Honorary member. Obituaries for all three are included in this Newsletter. However, we are still attracting submissions from potential new members, and this is very encouraging.

I am looking forward to seeing our current members' new work in the May exhibition. It is so important that members contribute works this year as the Mall Galleries is suffering from the effects of our country's economic woes like everyone else and a strong show will help counter that.

Simon Hodges VPPS will again be organising the workshops during the exhibition, which were very popular last year. We will publish a full list of subjects and tutors in March on the Pastel Society Website. Do come along and join in – they are great fun.

The Council has been busy looking at revising the Pastel Society rules, which have not been updated since 2014. This is an opportunity to make some changes that will affect how many pastel paintings you can submit for the Annual Exhibition. We are planning to allow one more small painting to be submitted on the basis that there would be room for these, based on the numbers in last year's exhibition. We hope these extra works may prove attractive to the public. This means potentially that up to four larger paintings can now be submitted with two small ones.

There will be one Heatherleys seminars session this year on September 18 and 19. Details will be in the summer newsletter and on the Pastel Society website.

We are also in the final stages of producing the new Pastel Society website, mastered by Simon Hodges and Cheryl Culver with input from the

Council. First views are very exciting, and it is always good to refresh our approach to digital media from time to time. The new website will go online as this newsletter goes out – check it out. This will also allow us to promote the art of pastel further. It is a huge shame that we are not one of the first media that young artists consider when developing their drawing and painting skills. This is partly historical and partly due to the preferences of art teachers who surprisingly do not see the advantages of the medium.

To encourage more users, it is important that our members show their work to as many young artists as possible and look for talent which can be encouraged to submit to the annual exhibition and take up our medium. Any suggestions for developing our profile are welcome from both our members and friends. Please feel free to contact me on this and any other issues relating to the Society – rees888@btinternet.com

Richard Rees
President, The Pastel Society

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Susan Relph, Roy Wright.

Editorial Contributions

This newsletter aims to reflect the news and views of its members, and so if you are planning any workshops or exhibitions, please get in touch and I will endeavour to feature your input in a forthcoming issue. Likewise, if you have an article that is bursting to be written, please forward it to me. My email is Louella.miles@writers4management.com and I will acknowledge receipt and get back to you as soon as I can.

News about the Pastel Society

The New Pastel Society website is complete and ready to launch. It is coming available around the same time as this newsletter, so enclosed is a sample of its style. The still images here can never do it justice but if it is the latter, I hope you love it more than you simply think 'ok.'

From those early days when we asked for opinions on what you wanted, we have strived to take all the ideas on board and, with the knowledge of our website designer Liam Culver, design a website for both now and the future.

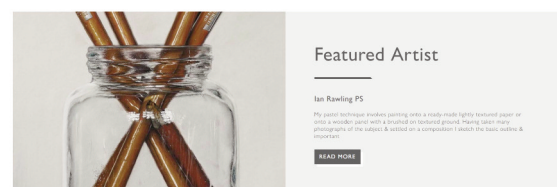
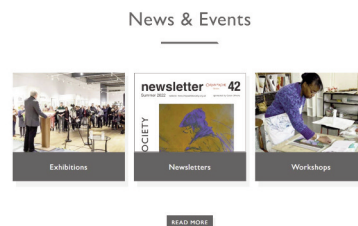
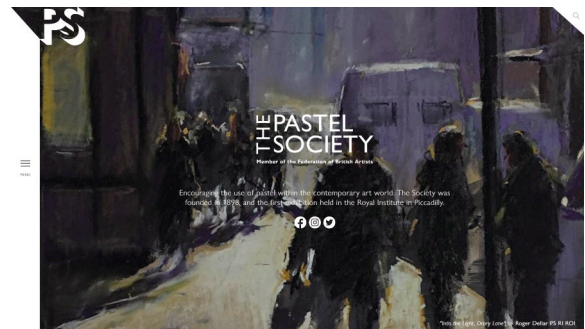
Cheryl Culver was also on the design team to share knowledge of the existing website and reveal where changes were needed. We have endeavoured to make it as visual as possible and, while not all members may agree with some of the decisions, the site is now easier to adapt to everyday and future needs. So please give it time to bed in.

But this is only the start and should be treated as the basic composition. It is now time for more members to step up and provide the narrative, tone, drawing and colour to both increase the image of The Society and themselves simultaneously. We need more visitors going to the site and for that we need them to want to.

Some people say that websites are a thing of the past and Instagram and similar beasts are the way in the future. However, our view is that websites are the new bricks and mortar where people can come together and break off into smaller groups to talk elsewhere on other platforms. We will always need galleries and exhibitions to see 'real work' and meet 'face to face' but introductions can be made on the website and it is a valuable exchange forum.

Over the coming months, an archive of past members/exhibitions/etc., accessible to Friends, members and the public who request information will become available and build on the history of the Pastel Society. We had great service from our old website but now we have the chance of a fresh start to concentrate on educating people to the infinite possibilities of Pastel and other dry media, encouraging new members and finding a bigger audience.

Simon Hughes VPPS



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Ashmolean behind the scenes pastels

On Thursday 16 March from 2.00pm to 4.00 pm the Ashmolean Museum (free entry) is opening its doors to Pastel Society Members and Friends. Up to 24 people can attend in two groups of 12 for an hour each. Please contact Felicity on felicity.house22@gmail.com to register your interest and book a place (fee £15).

Obituaries

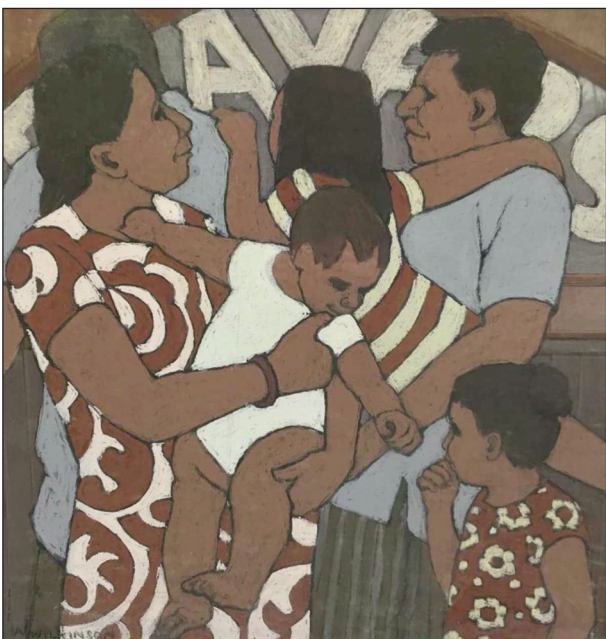
Ann Wilkinson PS (1934 – 2022)

It is with great sadness that we learned of the death of Ann Wilkinson in March 2022, aged 87, after a short illness. Ann was a much-loved Member of the Pastel Society and was always first to volunteer to run a workshop or steward at the Annual Exhibition. Even though she stopped using pastels due to Alzheimer's disease a couple of years ago, she managed to create wonderful line drawings until her health declined. Her love of life and great positivity will be missed by all who knew her.

Ann was born and brought up in Lancashire and married a fellow student whom she met at art school in Oldham. They moved to Atherstone in the Midlands where they raised three children, and both taught at the local secondary school. She became a member of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists and regularly exhibited at other galleries around the country.

Ann moved to Surrey in 2002 to be close to her growing family (including eight grandchildren and two great grandchildren). She enjoyed travelling and visited many countries including India and China.

Ann was elected to the Pastel Society in 2004 and was also a member of the Birmingham Society of



Close Family Two, Ann Wilkinson

Artists. She won many Awards including the 2008 Brian Sinfield Award, 2007 Wenham Major Prize, 2003 Unison Prize, 2001 Coley and Tilley Prize.

Her many exhibitions included the Southampton Art Gallery and Broadway Modern in 2008. 2007/8 The Craft Gallery, RBSA Gallery, Birmingham in 2007/8 in a one-woman exhibition. She also showed at the Orange Street Gallery, Uppingham and the Harrogate Gallery in 2007.

Ann was also a skilled writer and publications included a 2008 article on the use of pastels for still life and figure compositions in the *Pastel Journal* (August Issue) and a 2008 Article on approaches to still life in *The Artist* (February Issue).

Dame Paula Rego Hon PS (1935 – 2022)

When the great Portuguese Artist Paula Rego died in 2022, the director of Tate, Maria Balshaw, spoke of the institution's sadness at hearing the news, describing Dame Paula as an "incredibly important figure". She added:

"She was an uncompromising artist of extraordinary imaginative power, who uniquely revolutionised the way in which women's lives and stories are represented. Over the course of her career, she gained enormous respect from many fellow artists and art critics, leading the way in giving powerful form to denouncing injustice.

To hold her celebrated retrospective at Tate Britain last year was a true privilege, and our collections are so much richer for holding a significant number of her ground-breaking works.

For many, many women, including myself and countless colleagues at Tate, she was the greatest of trailblazers and a vivid personal inspiration.

We will ensure that future generations have the opportunity to feel the unrelenting force of this work and are as moved by it as so many have been over the decades".

In a varied career spanning more than five decades, Dame Paula created magical pictures based on her childhood memories and fairytales,



Dog Woman 1994, Paula Rego

which made her a highly successful and collected artist with her works selling for hundreds of thousands of pounds.

She was seen as one of the most notable figurative artists of her generation, with her work ranging from painting, pastel, and prints to sculptural installations.

She was made a Dame Commander by the Queen in 2010 at a ceremony held at Buckingham Palace and won the Mapfre Foundation Drawing Prize in Madrid in the same year.

Dame Paula Rego received numerous Honorary Doctorates including from Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and from the Rhode Island School of Design in the US as well as Honorary Membership of the Pastel Society UK which was highly relevant given her outstanding late pastel work.

Tom Phillips CBE RA Hon PS (1937 – 2022)

The artist Tom Phillips, who has died aged 85, was a great friend of the Pastel Society, a prolific and varied artist and educator and one of our Honorary Members.

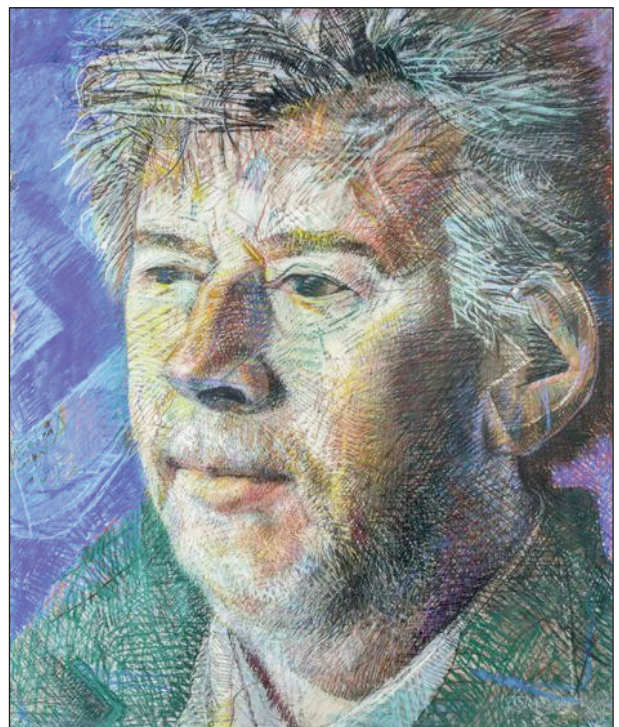
He was born in Clapham, the second son of Margaret (nee Arnold), who ran a boarding house, and David Phillips, who speculated on cotton futures. There was nothing in the young Tom's background to suggest that he would become an artist.

While studying English and Anglo-Saxon at St Catherine's College, Oxford, from 1958, Phillips attended life drawing classes at the Ruskin School. This led to his studying art full time at Camberwell School of Art from which he graduated in 1964 (his first tutor there was the painter Frank Auerbach). He was also an accomplished musician and singer.

In the late 70s, he had begun work on a new translation of Dante's *Inferno*, illustrated with his own prints: this was published in 1983. Six years later came *A TV Dante*, which he co-directed with the avant-garde film maker Peter Greenaway.

By now a Royal Academician – he was elected RA in 1989 – Phillips curated the academy's show *Africa: The Art of a Continent* in 1995, before taking over as its chairman of exhibitions.

He maintained his rigorous working practice to the end of his life. In September he published *Humbert*, after Humbert Wolfe's *Cursory Rhymes* (1927) – "a perfect canvas for creative intervention" – and in October an illustrated edition of TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*.



Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Tom Phillips

Rediscovering my voice

Last year we saw Jeannette Hayes step down after a very active and productive stint as President. Here she looks back on her time at the helm, and offers an insight into what she has been up to since then.

Generously given the opportunity to pen a few words in this first Pastel Society newsletter of 2023 (and ignoring at my peril the wisdom of T.S. Eliot: “For last year’s words belong to last year’s language and next year’s words await another voice”), I would like to begin by thanking the membership for their support during my tenure as President and for keeping the Society going through their active participation in all things pastel. Or should I say, pastel, pencil, gouache and charcoal?

It was certainly a turbulent period of highs and lows – the joy of record sales at an annual exhibition in 2021 offsetting the misery of coronavirus lockdowns, while the addition of exciting new members went some of the way to easing the pain of losing some of my personal heroes and guiding lights, in particular Victor Ambrus, Bob Last, Paula Rego and Ann Wilkinson.

Since stepping down from the lofty role of President and all that it entails, I have found a lot more time to work and have relished rediscovering my voice on paper and canvas. Not needing to rush back to address the latest administrative issue has had the added benefit of being able to take Pretzel for longer walks. Not so much fun in the rain but when the weather is fair, the crisp light of a sunny winter day provides endless inspiration.

2023 promises to be as busy if not busier than 2022, the highlight of which was a solo show at Art Wave West. I especially look forward to the 124th Pastel Society Show and to taking part in the 97th Fair of the Pastelists in Bourges, France.
www.le-mouciau.fr



Sketch of Jeannette, Victor Ambrus

Talking of pastelists, I was most touched by the parting gifts of flowers, a book of members’ images which I know Richard put together and a cheque that was the result of generous donations from members. You’ll be pleased to know the book has acquired a talismanic quality and the cheque is going to go towards framing a sketch that Victor made long ago at an Arts Event Evening at the Mall Galleries when there was no model to be had and yours truly had to sit in – every cloud, as they say.

Wishing you all a productive and prosperous 2023.

Don’t forget to visit our website at www.thepastelsociety.org.uk

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