

Rose Hilton
The Beauty of Ordinary Things
Rose Hilton *Artists on Artists*
Spring 2008
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Notes for Teachers

Information and practical ideas for groups
Written by Angie MacDonald

This selected retrospective includes nearly forty paintings by Rose Hilton. It includes work from throughout her career including early work as well as some new works. The exhibition offers us a close look at the world of Rose Hilton revealing her preoccupations with colour and light and the themes of landscape, still life, interior and figure painting.

Work in focus

Rose Hilton
***Lynda in the Yellow Dress* 2000**
Oil on Canvas
From the Collection of John & Angela Howe
© the Artist



Things to think about

Ordinary things. As the title of this exhibition suggests Rose Hilton finds beauty in ordinary things. It is not so much about the discovery of hidden beauty but rather the ability to extract an intensity from the everyday. Her subjects focus on her everyday surroundings, tables, screens, a figure in a room or a landscape near her home. She admits her obsession is still life painting and throughout her career she has returned to this subject to experiment and develop her work.

The fall of light. The working title for this exhibition was 'a fall of light' referring to a comment made by the artist Sandra Blow who described Hilton's painting as having the ability to hold those transient moments 'when a fall of light, colours and shapes takes our breath away'. Hilton's ordinary subjects and familiar things become extraordinary as she captures these moments.

The female nude. Hilton loves to paint the female figure. She says she prefers to paint women because of their 'curves' and because she can 'dress them in colour'. Some of her models are friends or family but she does also work with professional life models. When working with a model she will start by putting her in different poses to make quick sketches. She will often continue to work on the emerging painting when the model isn't there, combining direct observation with memory. Hilton always says she doesn't want the focus to be on the model only but the whole interior.

Intimacy and domesticity. There is a sense of intimacy with her figure paintings, as if we are observing a private world. Her still life paintings offer a glimpse of personal domesticity – of much loved and used objects around the home. These are sensitive, gentle paintings where the figure or object blends and merges with the space of the interior around them.

Interior and exterior. Hilton loves to combine interior and exterior. In her early paintings such as *Life Painting* 1954 you see her grappling with this sense of space, of defining in paint the envelope of interior space. In later, more colourful paintings, you find her playing with the illusion of space within different interior spaces. She will often include a screen or a view through a window or a doorway to confuse the space.

Dreamy moments. Hilton's paintings convey a sense of warmth and tranquility – even when the colours are quite subdued. Whether vibrant or calm, they have an extraordinary quality of grace, elegance, delicacy and sensuality to them. Not only do they capture the fall of light, they give the illusion of capturing a moment of poise, pleasure or delight.

Colour as atmosphere. Hilton's paintings are all about colour. She explores the relationship between one colour against another. She explores the moods or atmosphere colour can evoke. This exhibition reveals her distinctive and contrasting palettes of smoky greys and blues or stronger pinks, reds and yellows. In many of her paintings the images seem to dissolve within the colour. The paintings hover between abstraction and figuration.

Colour as ornament. Colour not only functions as atmosphere but also as ornament. Hilton's paintings are characterised by the decorative use of 'passages' or areas of glowing, jewel-like colour that create an 'all-over pattern'. Shadows are simply another colour shape and interior and exterior spaces are painted on the same colour plane. She generally prefers to paint loose shapes, rather than definite form; in her most recent and most abstract work colour has almost become free of the objects.

Portraits. The exhibition includes an informal series of portraits. Often these portraits were made when friends such as Bob Bourne and Sydney Graham, visited Rose and Roger at

Botallack. Although based on sketches done at the time, she painted partly from memory allowing a looser, more atmospheric and lyrical quality to dominate.

Landscape. Although Hilton prefers to paint interiors, she does paint landscapes. Included in this exhibition are paintings that capture the Cornish landscape around her home. As revealed by her sketchbook studies, Hilton regularly makes sketches in the landscape.

Drawings and studies. Hilton draws regularly, she also likes to make quick ink and wash, charcoal and pastel drawings. Her daily routine involves an early morning walk when she will often make sketches in situ. When she begins a figure painting, Hilton will often start with a series of drawings on paper just to get the feeling of the model. Then she will draw on canvas in light charcoal or soft blue paint. Hilton also loves to make etchings and monotypes.

Rose Hilton Artists on Artists (Gallery 3)

In Gallery 3 you will find an exciting selection of early twentieth century French and Modern British works of art that have been chosen by Rose Hilton from the Tate Collection. This display is intended to complement Rose Hilton's own exhibition and offer further insight into her work. Rose has chosen artists who have inspired and influenced her and they include Henri Matisse, Pierre Bonnard, Ivon Hitchens, Adrian Stokes, Cecil Collins, Mary Potter, Roger Hilton, Victor Pasmore, Ben Nicholson, Winifred Nicholson and David Bomberg.

Work in focus



Pierre Bonnard

***Coffee* 1915**

Oil on canvas, 73 x 106.4 cm

Tate Gallery

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For discussion

- In this painting you can see the artist's wife, Marthe, sipping coffee with her pet dog at her side. Who do you think the other person is?
- Describe the different objects that you can see on the table.
- What is unusual about the viewpoint in this painting?
- What effect does the pattern of the tablecloth and the different bands of colour at the borders of the table, wall and floor have?
- Imagine stepping inside this painting. What do you think would happen next?
- Why do you think Rose Hilton chose this work for her display?
- What does it tell us about her own interests as a painter?
- Compare this work with others in the display – do they share things in common?

Things to think about

Domesticity. Many of the works in this display focus on domestic scenes such as still life, figures or nudes in interiors. Even those works that focus on outdoor scenes convey a sense of intimacy and quietness.

The family. Not only are these works domestic, some focus on family scenes. For example in Bonnard's *Coffee* 1915 or Bomberg's *The Artist's Wife and Baby* 1937.

The figure. Many of the works depict figures such as Matisse's *The Inattentive Reader* 1919 or Collins' *The Sleeping Fool* 1943. Some focus on the female nude such as Matisse's *Draped Figure* 1936, Laurens' *Bather (Fragment)* 1931 or Pasmore's *Nude* 1941.

Colour and abstraction. Consider the range of colours used by these artists. Is there an overall mood to the room? Hilton is clearly drawn to those artists to whom she has an affinity with in terms of the way they use colour. Some of the works are abstract and it is interesting to relate this to her own interest in creating paintings that hover somewhere between abstraction and figuration.

Stillness and movement. Hilton's own work is often characterised by a sense of calm and stillness. This same mood seems to dominate a number of works her selection from the Tate Collection. However, there are a couple of works, including Roger Hilton's painting *January* 1957 and Barbara Hepworth's *Pelagos* 1946 that do convey a sense of movement and energy. Why do you think she selected these?

Framed or unframed. How does a frame affect the way we look at a painting? You will notice that some of Hilton's most recent works are unframed. Why do you think this is? In what ways does it affect the way we view the paintings? Compare the types of frames used for works in Gallery 3.

The artist's eye. This display is based on the personal choices of one artist. Consider in what ways this is different to the way most exhibitions are selected. What insights can an individual's choice, especially if they are an artist, offer to us? What problems might it also present?

Hilton's inspiration. Hilton's selection reveals some of her influences and inspirations. Above all, Hilton has been inspired by Modern French painting, particularly the work of Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard. Her own work is often described as 'Mediterranean' and her use of luminous warm colours, as well as her figure and still life subjects, can be directly compared to these artists. Hilton was, of course, influenced by her husband Roger and it is interesting that she has included a painting by him in the display. She has also talked about the inspirational teaching of artist Cecil Collins whose life drawing classes she attended in the 1980s. Hilton also says one of her favourite paintings is J.A.D. Ingres' *The Bather, known as the Valpincon Bather* 1808 in the Louvre. Recently she says she has been looking at American artists such as Milton Avery and Richard Debenkorn.

Practical ideas

Quick/ simple activities

1. **Quick figure drawings.** Ask a student to 'strike a pose' for the group to draw. Contrast still and dynamic poses. Ensure students look closely at Hilton's drawings in *The Apse*.
2. **Step inside.** Look closely at one work. Ask students to imagine stepping inside the painting and to think about what might happen next. This activity can be discussion based or students could write, draw or 'act out' their responses.
3. **Inside/outside drawings.** Invite students to make quick sketches which combine figures/objects with inside and outside spaces or views through a window.
4. **Exploring tone and colour.** Explore how colours can change the mood – use transparent coloured materials such as architects trace, tissue paper etc. to transform an image. Also experiment using complementary colours.

Extended projects

1. **Intimate/ domestic objects and spaces.** Place domestic objects in different 'still life' settings. Develop a range of art work based on observation, including drawing, painting and printmaking.
2. **Studio figures.** Develop project work on the theme of the 'figure in space'. Encourage students to create a context or mood for their figure. You could link this project to a visit to the *Barbara Hepworth Museum and Garden*, and use the garden as an example of a context.
3. **Colour, pattern and ornament.** Develop landscape, still life or figure paintings exploring the idea of creating an 'all over pattern'. Extend to other media such as textile or print work. Compare works by Hilton with her chosen artists in Gallery 3 such as Bonnard or Matisse. Debate the positive and negative ideas associated with the word 'decorative'.
4. **Representations of women past and present.** Compare Hilton's treatment of the female figure with other artists. Contrast with the work of contemporary artists such as Sonia Boyce, Paula Rego, Sarah Lucas or Sam Taylor-Wood, for example. Extend further to consider global issues and this idea of 'the female view' or 'dream'.

Further research

Rose Hilton (born 1931) was born in Kent, one of seven children, her parents were devout Plymouth Brethren. She studied at Beckenham Art School and the Royal College of Art in London in the 1950s, apart from a years' interlude which she spent in a sanatorium recovering from TB. In 1958 she won a scholarship to Rome. Back in London in 1959 teaching art, she met and married Roger Hilton. In 1965 she and Roger and their two sons moved to Botallack Moor, St Just in Cornwall. For the next ten years Rose only painted intermittently while she focused on bringing up her children and caring for Roger, who died after a long illness in 1975. Since Roger's death she has devoted herself to her own painting, continuing to live and work in Botallack. She has exhibited widely in the UK. Today she works between a studio at her home and another in Penzance.

Pierre Bonnard (1867 -1947) was born at Fontenay-aux-Roses in France. He studied law before attending the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Academy Julian in the 1880s. He became associated with the group known as the Nabis. He had his first one-man show in Paris in 1896. His early work included paintings and lithographs that focused on scenes of Parisian life. In 1912 he moved to a villa near Vernon in the Seine Valley and from then on divided his time between here and the South of France. His later works, landscapes, interiors, nudes and still lifes, became increasingly rich in colour and decoration.

Artists on Artists

www.tate.org.uk/collection for information on works in the Tate Collection

Pierre Bonnard

Bois, Yves-Alain, *Pierre Bonnard: The Work of Art: Suspending Time*, 2006

Hyman, Timothy, *Bonnard*, World Art Series, 1998

Whitfield, Sarah & Elderfield, John, *Bonnard*, Exhibition Catalogue, Tate Gallery 1998

Rose Hilton

Rose Hilton The Beauty of Ordinary Things A Selected Retrospective, 1950-2007, Tate St Ives, 2008

www.strovergallery.co.uk/artists/rose-hilton/works.htm Lynn Stover Gallery, images of Rose Hilton's work

Roger Hilton, exhibition catalogue, Tate St Ives, 2006

Stephens, Chris, *Roger Hilton*, Tate Gallery, 2006

www.rogerhilton.com Roger Hilton information and images

www.jonathanclarkfine.com Roger Hilton information and images

www.tate.org.uk/learning/schools/rogerhilton2426.shtm Teacher Resource Notes from recent *Rose Hilton* exhibition at Tate St Ives.