



1. MARINE LANDSCAPE
pastel drawing 30.5 x 40.6 cms 12 x 16 ins

Rose Hilton

A Passionate Painter

THERE IS RARELY equality in close relationships between artists. Perhaps friendship survives best - particularly when the artists are of different persuasions (abstract and figurative, say), and the natural feeling of competitiveness is diffused if not entirely de-fused through a difference of aims. But when two artists marry, or establish a similarly binding relationship, one is bound to suffer. Think of Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, or Robert Motherwell and Helen Frankenthaler. Both women had to escape the dominance of their husbands in order to develop as artists. An example nearer to home might be Cedric Morris and Lett Haines. Lett was the more radical and experimental artist, yet he sacrificed his own career in order to promote Cedric's. Later in life he was to regret this self-denial.

It seems then that the balance of power in a relationship often blights or restricts the talent of one participant. In this

connection it's always rather encouraging to discover that the alliance between Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth - two distinctly self-willed and powerful artistic personalities - lasted nearly 20 years and resulted in some remarkable work on both sides. In that house, no one's work was seriously compromised. But there are always exceptions to the general rule that in close relationships the art of one partner usually goes to the wall.

Anyone at all familiar with the outline of Rose Hilton's life will at once recognize the pattern. Rose was an exceptionally talented young painter when she met and fell in love with Roger Hilton, an established and respected modernist artist at the height of his career. Understandably, he didn't want competition at home as well as from the art world, and made it clear to Rose that there was only room for one painter in their household. (And there was no possibility of doubting



2. BIRD AT THE WINDOW
pastel drawing 40.6 x 31.5 cms 16 x 12¼ ins

who he meant by that.)

Rose behaved with exemplary self-control: she acquiesced to Roger's demands, and put her own work firmly in the background. (This wasn't quite as extreme as voluntarily relinquishing her work entirely; nor did Roger forbid her ever to pick up a paintbrush. But the caution was there.) Remarkably, and unlike others in a similar position, she has never felt any bitterness about this. After all, she had the compensatory diversions of a young family, but equally importantly she had continual access to a first-rate artist. She looks upon this period of her life as an extended learning zone, in which she experienced at first hand the trials and triumphs of one of the leading British painters of the century. In the process she became indispensable to Roger, but she also enjoyed an unparalleled training in the making of great

art. As she says, it wasn't Roger's actual artistic achievement that was so important - though she loves his work - as much as his attitude to making art. It was his philosophy that she absorbed, his lack of compromise towards art and life. That has continued to be an inspiration.

If her own creativity was forced underground for a while, it by no means ceased to spring within her. From time to time Rose simply had to make a painting, and on occasion she even persuaded Roger to model for her. Recognizing that she had to have this outlet, towards the end of his life he encouraged her to paint in his room, where by now he was confined to bed with alcoholic debilitation. At least then he could see what she was doing and give her advice and instruction when she asked for it. This renewed closeness resulted in a memorable group of paintings and drawings of Roger in bed, made in 1974-5. We see Rose experimenting with colour and with ways of drawing what she saw in front of her, in order to increase the emotional thrust of the image. This is not naturalism so much as carefully nuanced interpretation.

The blankness and desolation Rose experienced after Roger's death took some getting over, and it was to be five years or more before she felt able to give herself to work which celebrated the world once again. Roger had always said that it would be a struggle for her to get down on canvas what she truly had to give, the vision of the world that was Rose Hilton's and no one else's, and it was indeed a long haul. She remembers her tutor at the Royal College, Carel Weight, who was generally encouraging and praised her colour-sense, saying that she either did a good painting or 'they fell into being nebulous'. That has been her battle

3. THE MACHINE ROOM
oil on canvas 91.4 x 91.4 cms 36 x 36 ins





5. THE FLORAL DRESS I

etching; edition of ten 25 x 18 cms 10 x 7 ins

ever since - imbuing the image with enough formal values without stifling its poetry.

In an interview given in July 1987 to the Penzance-based monthly *Peninsula Voice*, Rose discussed the success of her recent exhibition at the Newlyn Art Gallery and looked to the future. She was on the brink of her mature career, success was already holding out its blandishments, and she was full of energy and a confidence that has been amply rewarded in the two decades since. The interviewer, Mercia Kemp, described Rose's approach: 'She paints what's around her, but her interest is with the way of the paint and the volumes and colours. It is through these that she wants to reach people's sensibilities, the subject matter, charming though it is, is less important to her. She prefers her more ambiguous work to what she calls her "pictorial" paintings.' Nothing

changes: Rose is still more interested in her own more extreme work - those paintings in which she pushes further towards abstraction from the solid base of observed reality. But I suspect she couldn't do one without the other, and the beautiful pictures of people and places she makes in response to the visual glories of the world are essential to launch her more risky flights of imagination and formal invention.

Mercia Kemp concluded her profile thus: 'Rose looks at the future with eagerness and optimism. Her children have grown up, her work as keeper and curator of Roger Hilton's paintings looks after itself, thanks to her caring ministrations, and she has rented a studio away from her home at

6. BOTALLACK NUDE

monotype 33 x 28 cms 13 x 11 ins





7. THE SINGING LESSON
oil on canvas 51 x 51 cms 20 x 20 ins



8. WINDOW AT ST IVES
oil on canvas 50 x 60 cms 20 x 24 ins