



READING GUILD OF ARTISTS

ANNUAL REVIEW 2025 - 2026

www.rga-artists.org.uk

Reading Guild of Artists CIO | Founded 1930 | Reg. Charity No. 1182221

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Introduction

Jane Somner - Editor

Welcome to the Annual Review 2025-26. Once again it has been my pleasure to work with John Percy on this latest edition of our Annual Review, thank you to him for his invaluable help. Our Monthly Bulletin, compiled by Kerry Webb, is an up-to-the-minute source of 'What's On' together with members' news and information and you will read in the following pages, a 'round-up' of what has been happening in the life of the RGA and its members, and whilst we haven't the space to record all these events, exhibitions and artistic happenings, I hope you will enjoy what we have been able to include. There are a few surprises waiting for you! Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this Annual Review. Thank you too for telling us about your artistic endeavours, your successes, sending your photos and for your articles and reports. It is a lovely thing to share and contribute to RGA life and to play your part as a member of Reading's oldest active art group. As we know, the RGA is its members – we are a guild, a group, a community that supports one another and good news is always an encouragement and often an inspiration. Here you can read about our exhibitions and summer workshops, our Christmas lecture and also 'experience' Summer Painting Days, RGA Fridays and Earley Painters and perhaps be inspired to 'join in' during the year ahead, not only as an artist but as someone that makes these events happen. Our upcoming AGM could be the opportunity for you to volunteer to help support the RGA as we get ever closer to the celebration of our Centenary in 2030.

Obituary - Andrea White

by Anthony Wilder

I was very sorry to hear that RGA member Andrea White died on 9th March 2026 after several years of ill health. Andrea had a strong creative instinct throughout her life, but she pursued a very successful career in business and only took up painting after she had sold her business and retired. She applied herself to painting with focused enthusiasm and became an exhibiting member of RGA in 2016. Her first love was landscape, characterised by carefully considered vibrant colour, but she was also in demand as a portrait painter, especially of animals. She will be greatly missed by her family, and friends in the many organisations in which she played an active role.

View from the Chair

by Connell McMenamin

As the incoming Chair, it falls to me to look back and reflect on the past year. Having been a member of the RGA for some time, and a Council member for a few years before stepping into this role, I thought I had a fairly good understanding of what the RGA does.

It turns out I really didn't.

So, what does the RGA do anyway? Not a lot, really...

We ran our 94th Annual Exhibition, once again working with our generous hosts, the Institute of Education at the University of Reading, to deliver a stunning show where the quality of work just gets better and better. We were also delighted to welcome the Mayor of Reading, Councillor Dr Alice Mpofu-Coles, to the Private View. Later in the year, building on a very successful first outing, we hosted another outstanding Small Works sale at St Luke's Parish Hall on Erleigh Road. In both cases, sales and visitor numbers were up, and we worked hard to minimise costs to members by reducing commissions wherever possible.

To make that happen, of course, one or two small things had to be done.

Dates were agreed. The University liaised with. Security briefed. Parking arranged and permits issued. Work collected, registered, curated, hung, labelled, taken down and returned. Refreshments organised. Halls hired. Licences drafted and signed. Insurance paid. Flyers and posters designed, printed and distributed. Social media posts written. Videos recorded. Browsers borrowed and returned. Hanging systems sourced. Walls filled (and repainted!). Payments calculated, sales proceeds distributed, expenses processed. Communications sent. Websites updated. Press releases written, edited and submitted. Banners and signs designed, printed, installed and removed afterwards (we'll aim for more this year!). Radio and television interviews given. Stewarding rotas compiled. Countless miscellaneous issues handled.

Alongside all that, we ran a series of workshops – organising venues, managing bookings, hiring tutors, and answering enquiries.

So yes, a couple of exhibitions... but is that it?

Not quite.

Beyond exhibitions, we continue to host regular creative sessions open to members and non-members alike: Summer Painting Days, RGA Fridays and Earley Painters. There's also our monthly Tea Time Social. After a somewhat nomadic existence across various venues in Reading and Caversham, this now has a permanent home on the third Tuesday of each month at the Back of Beyond in Reading, a relaxed space to talk all things art, meet new people, and welcome prospective members. We're also working on an exciting opportunity with Honesty Group to open up a new exhibition venue.

Behind the scenes, the work continues. Monthly newsletters were written, edited and distributed. Council meetings attended and minuted. Officer reports submitted. Memberships administered. Accounts compiled and audited. Charity Commission returns completed. Mentoring and critique sessions facilitated. Upgrading sessions organised and feedback provided. Archives updated and expanded. A fantastic Christmas Social arranged. This year's Christmas Lecture, Alex Abbott from Dauphin on The Art of Displaying Art, was both informative and entertaining, with lively questions and a particularly competitive quiz! Finally, although I'm bound to have missed something, the AGM was organised, and with special thanks to Jane Somner and John Percy, this Annual Review was written, designed, edited, printed and posted to over 250 members.



Impressive, but surely you have a well established team and everything works like a well oiled machine at this point?

Well... yes and no.

We do have a strong team, and much runs smoothly. However, all of this has taken place during a year of significant change: a new Treasurer (Gareth Jones), Vice Chair (Liz Baldin), Membership Secretary (Tizzy Cottingham), Exhibitions Secretary (Cath Baldwin), Webmaster (Linda Saul), and, of course, a new Chair who claims he didn't entirely know what he was letting himself in for.

That everything above has been achieved during such a period of transition is, to my mind, remarkable. It speaks volumes about the commitment, knowledge and enthusiasm of our officers, councillors, and the many volunteers who give their time so generously.

Thank you to everyone who has helped in any way, however small. None of this happens without you.

So, what's next?

Planning is already underway for our 95th Annual Exhibition, which I'm delighted will once again take place at the University of Reading from 26 June to 12 July. St Luke's is booked for the next Small Works sale at the end of October/beginning of November. Earley Painters, RGA Fridays and Summer Painting Days are all in full swing.

Beyond that, our Centenary is fast approaching in 2030. We're beginning to think about how we mark this major milestone and how we celebrate 100 years of the RGA.

It's been an absolute joy to be a part of such an incredible organisation this year and I'd encourage anyone who feels like getting a little more involved, particularly on the Council, to let us know. We'd love to welcome you.

The RGA Annual Review was produced and edited by Jane Somner and designed by John Percy

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Cover Photo: Harris Garden July Summer Painting Day

About Us

The Reading Guild of Artists (RGA), founded in 1930, is a diverse group of professional and part-time artists in the Berkshire area. Membership is open to all and new members are very welcome, from complete beginners to experienced professionals or those who just enjoy art. Run on a voluntary basis by our members for our members.

Your elected RGA Council Members for 2025-2026 were:

Officers:

President:	Fiona Talkington
Chair:	Connell McMenamin
Vice Chair:	Liz Baldin
Secretary:	Shelagh Casebourne
Exhibition Secretary:	Cath Baldwin
Treasurer:	Gareth Jones
Membership Secretary:	Tizzy Cottingham
Publicity Officer:	Paul Whitehouse
Webmaster:	Linda Saul
Administrative Secretary:	Kerry Webb
Education Secretary:	Kate Ellison-Bourne

Councillors:

Martina Hildebrandt
Trish Roberts
Liz Real
Clare Buchta
Lesley Redmond

Non-council posts:

Archivist: Martina Hildebrandt
Upgrade Secretary: Paul Whitehouse
Earley Painters: Clare Buchta, Carole Stephens
RGA Fridays: Kate Ellison-Bourne, Jane Somner, Clare Buchta
Summer Painting Days: Shelagh Casebourne, Kate Ellison-Bourne, Tizzy Cottingham
Annual Review: Editor, Jane Somner. Designer, John Percy

There are three main sources of up-to-date news and information available to RGA members.

RGA Website: www.rga-artists.org.uk

The Monthly Bulletin: – sent to individual members by email at the beginning of each month

Members' Wiki: <https://members.rga-artists.org.uk/wiki>

Previous Annual Reviews and the RGA CIO Constitution can be found on the RGA website.

Exhibition Secretary's Report

by Cath Baldwin

This year in May the RGA held their Annual General Meeting and from this date I became the new Exhibition Secretary. I was not unprepared for this, having helped with both RGA exhibitions in 2024 and having previously organised and hosted many student exhibitions during my time as a full-time art teacher. However, I was not ready for just how busy things were going to become at points!

Once again, we were fortunate enough to be invited back to the Institute of Education within Reading University as the location for our 94th Annual exhibition. As Reading Guild of Artists, it feels essential that we celebrate the skill and creativity of our members within our hometown and I cannot think of another space in Reading that would allow us access to such beautiful, historic grounds, workshop spaces or, indeed, such a large and light gallery space.

100 artists answered the call for submissions, and we quickly realised there was a possibility we would be handling and curating up to 500 pieces of work - a huge undertaking!



Connell with Dr. Alice Mpofu-Coles, the Mayor of Reading

The Annual exhibition ran from Friday 13th to Monday the 30th of June. The whole event began with a very well attended Private View to which we were delighted to invite many guests including Dr. Alice Mpofu-Coles, the Mayor of Reading and Sarah Marston, Head of the Institute of Education at the University of Reading. Over the two weeks of the exhibition, we welcomed over 800 visitors and re-homed over 40 pieces of artwork.

This year, Dr. Hannah Lyons, the Curator of the Reading University Art Collection, was our independent assessor for our annual awards for 2-D and 3-D work. She spoke at the private view and was positive in her praise for both the quality of works on show and the Guild's continuing community engagement. Award winners were Antoinette Brown and Roger Smalley with special mention given to Sri Nambiar, Kit Yan Chong and Paul Whitehouse.

Our sincere thanks again must be given to Mel Jay, from the Institute of Education, for supporting us in this endeavour, Baz

James, for his hard work and support in managing and installing the exhibition and Molli Cleaver, University Community Engagement officer. Special thanks, of course, go to our very own Kerry Webb, who dealt with all sorts of queries and emails covering everything from car parking to how much wine we would need for the Private View!



November ushered in our Annual Small Works Exhibition which again was held at St Luke's Parish Hall. We first used this space, at very short notice, in 2024 when it became clear the Turbine House was no longer a viable option. This year, we deliberately chose to return! If you have not yet visited, the Hall is a beautiful red brick Victorian building with an interesting and varied past. The main room offers plentiful space and a lovely long hanging wall as well as great natural light from the ceiling high windows. It soon became clear that space was going to be needed when over 60 artists replied to the call out for submissions.



This year we decided to make a few changes to benefit our exhibiting artists. We reduced the commission taken on pieces of artwork sold - waiving the fee completely on published books (many of our members do have work in print) and on cards. We also began the weekend with a very well attended Friday evening Private View at which many sales were made.



Over the course of the event, we welcomed in excess of 260 visitors, sold an incredible 35 pieces of work and many, many cards, books and calendars. Once again, we need to pass our thanks on to Jane, the hall manager, as she not only goes above and beyond in helping us set up and hang the exhibition but also runs a café over the weekend, the proceeds of which are given to local good causes.

So, in hindsight, I think the highlights of this year for me were: meeting and working with so many wonderful Guild members, seeing all the incredible work submitted for our exhibitions, feeling the buzz and excitement of visitors at our private views and walking around the gallery space at the Annual Exhibition thinking 'Look what we have achieved!'

Marie Dyson & Pauline Mercier Awards 2025

by Hannah Lyons



Antoinette Brown
Marie Dyson Award Winner

Roger Smalley
Pauline Mercier Award Winner

I was delighted that in my capacity as Curator of the University of Reading Art Collection, I was invited to judge the Reading Guild of Artists 94th Annual Exhibition Awards. Many of you might remember that I first judged the RGA awards in 2023, when the Annual Exhibition was held in Henley. I was delighted that this year's award was once again taking place on University soil, at the Institute of Education's Art Department, which many of us know has deep roots not only in the University's art history, but also in that of Reading.

Firstly I would like to say thank you to the Exhibition team members for organising such a stellar hang. To curate and hang over 450 works of art from 99 artists into an exhibition is a monumental task. Their decisions made my experience wandering around the exhibition, pouring over each piece, very pleasant! I awarded the Marie Dyson Award for work in 2-D to Antoinette Brown. As I mentioned on the evening, museums and galleries are full of paintings and sculptures of mothers. However, art which communicates the actual experience of motherhood is much rarer. I think Antoinette has done an incredible job of articulating the unspoken aspects of motherhood in these beautiful, sensitive drawings.

I awarded the Pauline Mercier Award for work in 3-D to Roger Smalley. I have admired Roger's limestone sculptures for a long time; his collection of 9 caught my eye as soon as I arrived at the exhibition. I love the way he is able to manipulate the limestone into such distinct forms, which is a real testament to his skill as a sculptor.

I awarded two Highly Commended Awards in 2-D to Sri Nambiar for her exquisite and evocative charcoal landscapes and Kit Yan

Finally, at the end of my first year, I would like to give my personal thanks to everyone who helped to make the handover of this role so easy. Notably, Trish Roberts, for co-curating the Annual Exhibition and giving lots of helpful advice and support. Linda Saul, for managing the entire computer based clever stuff that I find such a chore. Connell McMenamain, who became my co-conspirator for the November Small Works exhibition. And, of course, all the many members who came and helped hang the two shows, man the steward's desk, deliver the flyers and help publicise the events. Special mention also goes to those who baked cakes for the St Luke's café!

The continuation of the RGA depends solely on the goodwill and support of all members and every person who volunteers to enable exciting things to happen; I am very much looking forward to 2026 and seeing what more opportunities come our way. Perhaps, you too would like to get involved?

Chong for her really innovative, kinetic drawings. I awarded Paul Whitehouse the Highly Commended Award in 3-D, particularly for his carvings in alabaster, a material which he uses to create intricate and beautifully translucent pieces. I'm really excited to follow the development of all of these very talented artists and hope that this recognition bolsters their practice.

As I mentioned in my speech, things have changed a little since 2023, when I last presented the award. At that point, I was new to the University, and also new to the town. But what I have learned since then - and what the RGA exhibition chiefly instills in me - is how much artistic energy there is in Reading and our surrounding areas. As an art curator, it may come as no surprise that I strongly believe that access to and engagement with the visual arts adds colour, texture and movement to our everyday lives. The RGA 94th Annual Exhibition was also a wonderful and critical opportunity for RGA members (award winners or not!) to continue to make and exhibit their work, building on those historic relationships between 'town and gown', and forging more community connections - something, which in our current climate, is particularly important.



Dr. Hannah Lyons, Curator of the Reading University Art Collection

Summer 2025 Workshops

by Carole Stephens and Tutors

During the 94th Annual Exhibition in the summer of 2025 we were pleased to be able to offer, both RGA members and the broader public, a range of workshops. We hoped these would be of interest to, amongst others, painters, printmakers, illustrators and those who enjoy figure and portrait drawing. We are very lucky to have RGA members with expertise in these areas who were able to deliver these workshops.

The Reading University building LO4 provided the ideal space for our exhibition (it was the original Fine Art department within the University), with the large print studio, the adjoining drawing studio and the grounds around the London Road site all available to us during the period of the Annual Exhibition.

Workshops took place from 16 - 26 June with those delivered including the Clothed Figure workshop with Jenny Halstead and a Portrait workshop with Mick McNicholas; several print sessions with Cath Baldwin and Janina Maher. Illustration and Urban sketching sessions were delivered by Tizzy Cottingham and Liz Chaderton respectively and watercolour and collage workshops by Richard Cave and Clare Buchta.

Mick said of his workshop - "Great to teach an enthusiastic, crowded, portrait workshop, as part of the RGA's Annual Exhibition. It was interesting to discover that not all the participants were RGA members!"

Tizzy tutored a small group on illustration and visual storytelling. After various expressive warm up exercises, participants chose from a selection of Haikus - short poems of seventeen syllables which traditionally capture a moment in time and invoke images of the natural world. Participants were provided with a variety of mediums to work with, several of which were new to some. Textured papers and collage materials were also provided, all of which encouraged illustrative rather than figurative representation. The aim being to replace textual information with images that would tell a story if viewed on their own. Much beautiful and varied work was created by the end of the day.



Visual Storytelling

Janina Mayer and Cath Baldwin's two day 'Print Fest' was a delight. On the first day participants had the opportunity to try a variety of printmaking approaches including lino cutting, Gelli printing and rubber stamp carving. A great deal of fun was had (and a great deal of mess was made!)



Summer Workshops - Print Fest

On day two, the workshop attendees used the prints made earlier to construct bespoke concertina sketchbooks. It was

really interesting to see the differences in these and, despite the identical starting point, how they reflected each person's artistic approach. The last part of the second day was used to work further into the sketchbooks and to revisit some of the printing techniques introduced earlier.

Liz Chaderton's urban sketching workshop was in the perfect location - making use of the Arts and Crafts red brick architecture, a hidden gem in Reading. The covered cloisters meant there could be no excuse to avoid outside sketching, whatever the British weather! And as it wasn't term time, it was quiet and not intimidating for anyone on their first foray into sketching in public.



Urban Sketching

After a brief introduction to possible materials, techniques and considerations, the group headed outside to a terrace location, with nice simple perspective. Liz did a quick demonstration and then everyone got on. After another demo, people found shady spots and sketched under the encouragement of the tutor. The clock tower drew the eye, as it dominates the quad, but the students also learned to look for hidden corners, understanding that the process of seeing the 'everyday' with fresh eyes is a crucial benefit of urban sketching.

In Clare's collage workshop, participants began by creating their own collage papers, this ensured the final works would have an individual style and colour choices that would reflect their chosen ideas and composition. As this was a whole day workshop there was time to make quite a few papers throughout the morning with wet strength tissue on silicone mats using acrylic paint.



Collaged Landscape

The afternoon session saw the construction of the collaged land and seascapes by cutting and arranging pieces of tissue. These were finally glued down on board or canvas after much deliberation on colour and composition. With this method, ideas could be tested, rearranged or new layers added. The results spoke for themselves - some really beautiful pieces of art.

Suggestions for future workshops are always appreciated so do get in touch with the RGA if there is an area you'd like to explore, before the programme for the Annual Exhibition Summer Workshops 2026 is put together.

Reading Four get Life!

Much to their surprise and delight, four RGA members were made 'honorary' at the 90th RGA AGM, 7th May 2025. During 'Any Other Business' the outgoing Chair Linda Saul, with the support of fellow council officers, nominated four people, who fulfilled the criteria to become Honorary Life Members under the Constitution, "having distinguished themselves or having served the Reading Guild of Artists in some special or important way."

Nominated were: Clare Buchta - for being Treasurer for many years; for being part of the Earley Painters and the RGA Friday Workshop teams; organising refreshments at meetings; dealing with the Charity Commission.

Martina Hildebrandt - for doing a superb job as Webmaster for over 10 years; for continuing in the role of Archivist; for designing the Annual Reviews 2018-2024; for being a great source of wisdom and knowledge of the RGA and its history.

Jane Somner - for being a previous Vice-Chair (under Anthony Wilder), for being a very effective Publicity Officer for several years (some of them unofficially when nobody was willing to take on the role), for editing the Annual Review since 2018. For being part of the RGA Friday and Critique Workshops teams; for still doing so much for the RGA that we forget she isn't on Council.

Carole Stephens - for being a very hard-working and effective Exhibition Secretary for many years, for continuing to give us the benefit of her wisdom and experience on educational and exhibition issues and for being part of the Earley Painters' team. This year she helped to put together the summer workshop programme.

Proposed by Linda and seconded by incoming Chair, Connell McMenamin, each proposed candidate for Honorary Life Membership was voted for separately and approved unanimously.

Clare is the longest-serving of the four having joined the RGA in 1997. Carole joined in 2005. Both became part of the RGA Council at approximately the same time taking on key roles, as quoted from "Words from the Chair" by Jenny Halstead at the AGM 2011: "Firstly, I should like to formally welcome Carole Stephens as RGA Exhibition Secretary, and say what a fantastic job she is doing. With the RBH Corridor Exhibition, the December 'RGA Unwrapped' and currently our 81st Annual Exhibition 'On the Edge' under her belt, and fresh ideas for the future." The Chair went on to "welcome Clare Buchta who had taken on the role of RGA Treasurer". The position had been vacant for a short while, with Elizabeth Heydeman reporting in 2012 that

Tom Heydeman (Elizabeth's husband and RGA Bookkeeper) had enjoyed working with the Treasurer. After 15 years of payments, statements, financial reports and countless trips to the bank, Clare stepped down as Treasurer in 2025, she continues to liaise with the Charity Commission and is supporting the transition to our new Treasurer, Gareth Jones. Clare remains co-ordinator of Earley Painters and also RGA Fridays.

Carole's eight years as Exhibition Secretary saw exhibitions and accompanying workshops held in a large variety of different venues, including Reading Museum and a return to Reading University. She continued to support and play a key role within our exhibition and publicity teams, and now co-ordinates Earley Painters with Clare.

Martina joined the RGA in 2009. A keen RGA Friday attendant, in 2012, having exhibited for only the second time with the RGA she was co-opted onto the RGA Council. Soon she volunteered to become the Webmaster. Having been part of Carole's exhibition team she was building up the content and redesigning the RGA website with new technologies for over 10 years. She continues to work behind the scenes as the RGA Archivist, recording and researching our history.

Jane, the most recent member, joining in 2013 attending RGA Fridays, soon became an RGA Councillor and then Vice-Chair. Her natural abilities for communication and organising lead her to be part of the publicity team for many years, formally taking the role of Publicity Officer in possibly the most difficult of times mid-pandemic in 2021. Jointly organising RGA Fridays and Critique evenings, Jane worked closely with Martina in creating the Annual Reviews for many years. All four are still active within the RGA having worked in roles that often overlapped and relied on one another, forming long-lasting friendships, it was fitting to honour them together.

The first Honorary Members, as they were established in 1953, were RGA founder and President, Professor Allen Seaby, and Gilbert Spencer (younger brother of Stanley). Renamed Life Members in 1979, they are now known as Honorary Life Members. There followed: William Smallcombe, Frank Ormrod, Eleanor Skrimshire, Gertrude Jebb, Gilbert Adams, Cyril Hosmer, Jack Orford, Robert Gillmor, Eric Stanford and Donald Hamilton Fraser, Eric Watson, Daphne Walker and Jean Aust. Our four join with current honorarys Elizabeth Heydeman, Martin Andrews, Anthony Wilder, and Clive Duncan. Long may their enjoyment of and commitment to the RGA continue.



L-R, Carole, Clare, Jane, Martina

Christmas Lecture & Social 2025

by Paul Whitehouse & Jane Somner

This year's Christmas lecture was entitled 'The Art of Displaying Art' by Alex Abbott, Director of Dauphin, based in South Oxfordshire. As mount makers, Dauphin provides displays for objects and artefacts working with museums, institutions, artists and collectors worldwide, working on everything from contemporary sculpture to ancient archaeological findings. For more fascinating examples of the work Dauphin do for clients visit <https://www.instagram.com/dauphinacrylic>.

Alex delivered a fascinating and lively explanation of the principles behind displaying an object or artwork. He explained that the purposes behind mount making were not only to display an object to best visual effect but to ensure it is conserved, understood and is secure. Alex highlighted the delicate balance between displaying an object and ensuring its safety, but also to create mounts that are sympathetic to the object in terms of the material used or its colour. Sometimes this will mean a discrete - almost invisible - mount while in other cases the mount can contribute to the overall display in a more assertive way, even becoming an integral part of the artwork.

Although our Exhibitions Team is strong on creativity and resourcefulness, RGA resources are more modest. The best advice seems to be "put it on a plinth but don't overdo it". This draws attention to the artwork but a group of objects can also benefit from only one of the group being raised on a plinth.

Alex's talk prompted many questions which continued long into the 'wine and nibbles' part of the evening. Many people commented on the fascinating subject matter and engaging style of Alex's talk. The creativity continued in Mick McNicholas' art quiz which prompted the now-traditional arguments and challenges to Mick who brushed them aside to assert his role as question master! Thanks are due to Clare Buchta who organised and delivered the refreshments, even though she was too unwell to attend the evening's festivities. Thank you once again to Mick for attempting to educate us in colour theory, print-making and ceramics by way of his quiz and thank you to Kerry Webb who helped us organise 'overflow' parking on the campus at the University. And thank you to everyone who attended - it was a very happy and enjoyable evening.



More than just a membership

by Shelagh Casebourne

Some of the most rewarding moments I've had in recent years have come through being part of an artistic community. For me, the RGA has been at the heart of this - from workshops and exhibitions to unexpected conversations that have sparked ideas, shared knowledge, and opened doors to opportunities I couldn't have imagined.



Of course, a creative life isn't always smooth sailing - there are frustrations and disappointments along the way. That's when I'm most grateful for the RGA network: of friends who understand the ups and downs of making art, and who provide encouragement, perspective, and inspiration.

I've been RGA Secretary for several years now, working alongside a council of dedicated, enthusiastic people who bring ideas, practical skills, and a real can-do spirit. They organise, plan, and make things happen - from exhibitions and social events to the RGA Friday workshops, Earley Painters, Summer Painting Days, helping with refreshments, lectures, accounts, publicity, mentoring, website management, and monthly bulletins. Quite simply, without volunteers, the RGA wouldn't exist in the vibrant form it does today.

But beyond the organisation and events, there's something just as important: the friendships, connections, and creative collaborations that grow out of being involved.

At the AGM in May, there will be vacancies on the council, as tenures come to an end and some long-serving members step down. Councillors serve for three years, while officers are re-elected annually (or choose to stand down).

As a member, you're warmly welcome to simply enjoy all that the RGA has to offer. But stepping into a council role - or helping in other ways, such as with exhibitions or publicity - is a chance to shape what we do, strengthen our community, and discover the satisfaction of working alongside like-minded artists.

So, how about you? If you'd like to be part of the team, we'd love to hear from you - so do get in touch.

A Lifetime of Art: Elizabeth Heydeman Retrospective

by Jane Somner

I met Elizabeth Heydeman's daughter Tess at our 94th Annual Exhibition at UoR last summer. Tess wanted to spread the word about her mother's upcoming retrospective exhibition and asked if we could let RGA members know. The monthly bulletin once again came into its own and in August and September we spread the word.

I was delighted to be able to visit the Setting Gallery at Three Storeys in Nailsworth where Elizabeth's work was beautifully displayed. In Elizabeth's own words "I have drawn, painted and made linocuts ever since I can remember. Weaving (became) a discipline which fascinates me, the play of colour and textures, the restrictions of warp and weft".

On display were works in oils, watercolours, pen and wash, and even poster paints from her school days. Linocuts were produced over many decades, with textiles mainly created since the 1990s and experimental pieces using mixed media, collage and even bleach. It was a joy and a privilege for me to see Elizabeth's fine body of work created over her lifetime of art.

Elizabeth's Retrospective comes to Reading

Following a visit to the retrospective in Gloucester it was made possible by Annette and Jenny of RGSpaces <https://rgspaces.or.uk/> to mount an additional exhibition of Elizabeth's work at Acacias, University of Reading London Road campus on 6-7th December 2025. This gave those RGA members who couldn't make the journey to Nailsworth to view the previous exhibition, a chance to see the range of Elizabeth's work, and the opportunity to purchase an artwork in aid of the Student Support Fund of Reading University.



An Unknown Artist

by Martina Hildebrandt

The RGA has very nearly 100 years of history, with thousands of members, so it is unsurprising that we often receive enquiries about past members, or questions about a painting that someone has inherited or bought. Some enquiries are straightforward where we can provide some biographical details and perhaps track down a painting in our catalogues. On this occasion however, when an enquiry about a past member came from the Aldermaston History Group, it concerned an artist of which we knew very little. Indeed, at that point it turned out that they knew more about her than we did, pointing us to a work on the ArtUK website, 'Portrait of a Woman'. The artist's name was unknown to the RGA - a bit of detective work was needed!

'Portrait of a Woman' was painted by Marie Florence Chant in 1946 while studying at the Slade School of Art (the first to admit women students). The title is more a description of the work rather than a title given by the artist, and whilst the sitter is unknown, she was most likely to have been a fellow student as it is known that they would often sit for each other. The painting won the second prize in the 'Head Painting' category as part of the Slade Prize system and was added to their collection.

Born in Rugby in 1917, Marie Chant's father George was killed in action in Flanders before she was even four months old. Her mother Alice soon remarried and, along with a half-sister, the new family remained living in the same family house in Rugby. At the start of the Second World War, Marie worked as a Commercial Clerk in Engineering, but newspaper cuttings show her to be an active member of the Rugby and District Art Society, exhibiting with the group several times at the local library.



Portrait of a Woman
UCL Art Museum, University College London

Marie entered the Slade in January 1945 at the age of 27. The Slade had been evacuated to the Ruskin School in Oxford at the beginning of the war where she started her studies, completing them back in London 1947-48. She was the recipient of several more Slade Prizes, with a First for Design, including textiles and book jackets.

She was an assistant in a research laboratory in Rugby when she met her future husband, an optical scientist, and they married in 1948. Her husband was appointed to work for Associated Electrical Industries (AEI), at its plasma research laboratory at Aldermaston Court. Living in former army quarters in the grounds of the Court, we know from her husband's biography that Marie "played a full part in village life, helping the Vicar and the W.I. with art classes for wives and children". Indeed the Aldermaston History Group's interest in Marie lay in that "Aldermaston is specially in her debt: in its 12th-century church, St Mary the Virgin, were four ancient hatchments which were by then in very poor condition. There was also a very rare painting of a coat of arms of Charles I which had been stowed away secretly from Cromwellian eyes. Marie restored these fine specimens to their original glowing colours where they now enhance the walls of the nave."

When the couple moved to Cockney Hill, Tilehurst, Marie was designing fabrics and wallpapers, having work reproduced in a number of magazines including *Vogue* and *House and Garden*. It was in 1959 that Marie joined the Reading Guild of Artists and was soon making her presence felt when at the AGM in 1960 this "relatively new and unknown member" accused the Guild "of doing far too little for its members compared with what other societies managed to do. It needed a 'shot in the arm'; and it certainly received one." as is recorded by EV Watson's A

History of the Reading Guild of Artists 1930-1980. She was well experienced at what other art societies offered having been a member of the Rugby and District Art Society and exhibiting alongside Alan Caiger-Smith and Christopher Hall with the Padworth and Aldermaston group.

Described by fellow artist Jack Orford as having "indefatigable zest, initiative and enthusiasm, which not surprisingly found its reflection and response in all those around her. Amongst the events for which she was the moving force were the Fancy Dress Annual Parties, of which many of us who took part have happy memories. The Abbey Gateway parties will also be remembered by many as very enjoyable occasions. Some splendid outdoor sketching days, followed by set teas and chats over the work produced during the day, were also planned, organised and run by her." The latter a forerunner to the Summer Painting Days the RGA now hosts.

Our catalogues show that she mainly exhibited oil paintings of landscapes, portraits and still-life, but also worked in gouache, watercolour and lithograph, although no examples of these are known to exist.

Our History, however, goes on to say, "At a Council meeting on 29 October 1966 the disquieting news was heard that Marie had been ill for about a year."

"Her condition did not improve, and in June 1967, very tragically, she died. Thus the Guild stood bereft not only of its brightest spirit but of an outstanding innovator whose initiative and enthusiasm had in large measure been instrumental in transforming the very nature of our society - and this all in the short period of less than seven years. It was a most grievous blow". She was aged just 49.

"Happily her memory is kept alive for members of the present day, and the future, by virtue of the Marie Dyson Award..."

For Marie Florence Chant, an artist it was said to be of "considerable merit, and was engaged in printing, drawing, lithography and in textile design, for which branch of art she became widely known" is the Marie Dyson of the RGA Award in her name. Founded 1967 by her husband Dr James Dyson FRS and a group of friends, it is presented at the Annual Exhibition for a piece of work judged to be of outstanding merit by an invited assessor. Today's generation of RGA members knew nothing of her life or work. Seemingly only to be known within the RGA archives as Mrs. Marie Dyson, the name Marie Chant was never mentioned. The link between Marie Florence Chant, an artist listed in the Artists in Britain Since 1945 by David Buckman, with Marie Dyson of the RGA has been missed over the years.

It had always seemed a little odd how little we knew of her. Perhaps at the time of her death everyone was well aware of her work and enthusiasm and it is over time no one thought to record any details of it for the future. We are now correcting this oversight. A fuller biography of Marie Dyson is being compiled. If you do have any further information about the artist and her work please contact archivist@rga-artists.org.uk

The recipients of the Marie Dyson Award since 1968 can be found on the RGA website.

With many thanks to Julia Cox from the Aldermaston History Group, and Lucy Waitt at UCL Art Museum, University College London for all their help in finding Marie.

Remembering Janet Walton

by Gill Goodwin

Janet Walton passed away peacefully on August 12th 2025. She was 97. She had been a member of the Reading Guild of Artists for many years and made many friends. It was through the Guild I got to know Janet and her work. Her skills in pottery were impressive, particularly her use of raku techniques which she evidently loved. Fortunately perhaps, she could not fire raku work using the small kiln in her back garden, but only in somewhat safer circumstances elsewhere - almost certainly to the relief of her family! A number of my friends and family alike have work of hers which they treasure and visitors to our Open Studios events and to the many other exhibitions she took part in also appreciated her work, which was often highly inventive and full of character as well as beautifully finished.



I have a lovely rather 'Grecian' blue-glazed head she made which is looking over my head as I sit here typing.



Her piece 'Tree of Life' expresses something of the great vitality she had well into her nineties.

Feedback Sessions

by Paul Whitehouse

Over the past year, we have again run several workshops where Affiliate Members are invited to share their work and take part in a group discussion. We follow a structured 4-step process that aims to provide a critique of the artists' work in a positive and supportive way. The idea is that artists go away from the session with an understanding of how their work is seen by others and pointers for the way it might be developed.

Each session involves four or five artists who contribute to a group discussion of each artist's work in turn, facilitated by two RGA Council Members. Another participant takes detailed notes on behalf of the artist whose work is being discussed. For the first half of the 20 minute session, the artist listens to the discussion and only then responds to what they have heard. The final part moves to a discussion about ideas the artist might want to consider for the future.

The principle behind these workshops is to offer feedback and insights in an objective and supportive way. It's an opportunity to get constructive feedback and it's fascinating to see just how perceptive people can be. Participating artists have found these workshops really helpful, not only for their artistic practice, but also in forming relationships with other artists within the RGA. It was decided to extend the invitation to take part in the feedback sessions to all members. Future sessions will be publicised in the monthly bulletin and on the members' website.

If you'd like to find out more or take part in one of these workshops then please email whitehousepam@gmail.com.

Delphine Sym

by Julie Gehring

Art was a lifelong passion for Delphine and she liked to challenge herself with new ideas and techniques. Even in her later years she attended professionally run workshops, with the motto: It's never too late to learn!



Travel was a big inspiration in Delphine's work which used a variety of media and techniques. Her preference was for acrylic and gouache combined with collage, and she also enjoyed ceramics and wood carving.

Delphine sold her first painting in 1972 and exhibited in Ayrshire and throughout Berkshire. She was an active member of the RGA and the Woodley and Earley Arts Group.

In May 2025 Delphine moved back to Scotland to be near her family and continued to paint, joining the local art group in June and selling her newest painting only days before her sudden and unexpected death in July 2025.



Obituary

Memories of Jean Aust by Joan Sawdon-Smith Memories of Jean Aust by Anthony Wilder

Jean and I were at school together, over the years we've been to evening classes (life) on painting holidays, one well remembered was in Padstow tutored by Thelma Adams (wife of Gilbert Adams).

We both joined the RGA at much the same time and won the Marie Dyson award (Jean 2011, myself 1986).

Jean was a very enthusiastic artist and tutor with always good words to say to her students about their work. She is going to be missed.



As I gradually got more involved in membership of RGA, a long time ago now, people and their work slowly came into sharper focus. Jean was one of the first to stand out to me. She always seemed to be a warm and encouraging presence to a newcomer like me and I very much appreciated that.

Early on, I was hugely impressed by the range and vitality of her work, her great sense of colour and the adventurous way she would explore new media, as well as new ways of using established ones. It seemed to me that she managed to do this in a way which helped to move the whole RGA forward into new ways of doing things - a contribution which one might have expected from someone much younger than her. She never seemed to run out of ideas, energy and enthusiasm, but all expressed through a quiet determination as well as great kindness.

One of my outstanding memories dates back to 2012 when we were searching for a new Chair. I was Secretary and certainly didn't feel ready for the role myself. Martin Andrews was President and Jean was on the Council. She had been Chair in the past but didn't want to take it on again as her hearing was beginning to be troublesome to her. In the end, the Council decided that the three of us would 'hold the fort' for the year, with Martin as President and Acting Chair and Jean as Vice Chair. We all did our best, but it led to some hilarious phone calls. Jean would call me and she usually opened with the word 'Whoops...!!' and then amid great mirth and good humour, we would find a way through.

She will be greatly missed.

Thirty years of service, forty years of company

by Martina Hildebrandt

Jean Aust joined the Reading Guild of Artists in 1980 and became an RGA Councillor for the first time in 1984. She stayed a member of the Council in one capacity or another until 2014.

Having been the Vice-Chair for 3 years from 1987, Jean was then the Exhibition Secretary in the early 1990s at the time when the RGA exhibition venue since 1930, The Reading Municipal Art Gallery, was closed for extensive refurbishment. We can imagine that organising an exhibition at a new venue, The Hexagon, was a challenge for the RGA and Exhibition Secretary, with the familiarity and support of what had gone before, gone!

Remaining as Councillor and listed as the Assistant Exhibition Secretary, Jean then spent a couple of years in the late 1990s as Chair, before resuming her Vice-Chair roll (perhaps a position she favoured over the others?), then back to being a Councillor. Having been made a Life Member in 2010, Jean did a final stint as Vice-Chair when there was no Chair at all!

And running a workshop here and there was commonplace. A regular at RGA Fridays and at its predecessor at the Arthur Legge Centre Caversham, Jean instigated several elements of today's RGA. With this extract from the Earley Painters article from the RGA Annual Review 2021-2022 it says: "The 'Earley Painters' group was set up in autumn 1996 by Jean Aust as a response to her and painting/teacher friends' retirements, as a way to meet up and enjoy painting together. Bringing it under the wing of RGA in 2012, this helped attract more participants and therefore secure its future."

Much she did at a time before email became commonplace, and RGA business was done by telephone and letters through the post! Although she didn't shy away from technology when it came along, and was often the first to write with her appreciation from her tablet.

Indeed I had more conversations with Jean by email than in person. Jean was one of my "go to" people for help in archive requests, and it was Jean who came up with the idea of the "Picture of the Month" for the RGA website when I took on the Webmaster roll in 2012. Her last message to me (an extract shown here with her permission) truly showed her love of art, her support of others and genuine appreciation for the RGA.

Hello Martina,

I've so enjoyed this recent Guild Review ... my thanks to you and Markus for your input.

I felt very connected to your article "an apple a day". We at Early Painters did exactly this some years ago with Hilary P. We explored apples over a three week project. I eventually pasted some of my apple-efforts into a scrap book and used others for greeting card - it occupied me for months... Thanks for the reminder!

I have time to sit about more now and in so doing I remember so many guild events ... like, (before your time, in the 1990s) when I had taken on being (a rather wobbly) Exhibition Secretary for a few months ... standing up to make a welcoming speech at the opening of a Guild Exhibition held at the Hexagon in Reading. Feeling somewhat nervous I started by introducing myself - very badly! ... "for those of you who don't know me, I'm Jean Aust the Guild's Treasurer..." Fortunately those few friends near me started to giggle which helped me to recover my equilibrium and continue with renewed confidence!

Over the past 40 years I've spent so many creative hours in guild members' company - which (on a good day) could produce a painting which hangs on my walls to this day.

I do still bless the RGA for providing me with so much pleasure and friendship, which has now become - not my past but very much in my present. These reminiscences are enlivened regularly by receiving the very colourful and interesting Guild Review.

Thank you Martina and all those other industrious Guild members - those of today and many in the past for generating all this rich tapestry of colour and company I now carry in my head.

Love from Jean. X

Memory of Jean Aust by Liz Real

I first met Jean when I joined the Reading Guild of Artists way back in 2014 (?). I remember her being particularly kind to me after the 'upgrading process' when she was on the panel. Even though I doubted my artistic ability, Jean was so encouraging about my work, and for someone who had not been through any formal art training, this gave me the confidence I needed. I think back to that time with fondness.

I enjoyed various workshops that she ran for the RGA and they were always fun and interesting. In the dark days of lockdown the Guild organised an online exhibition. I immediately fell in love with one of Jean's works that she had submitted and asked my Dad if he would like to buy it for me for a Christmas present! My husband collected it from her house and it was kept a secret until the actual day.

This is it: signed by Jean Aust 2019 - we bought it in December 2020. It has given me great pleasure.



Reading Weekend **POST**, Friday February 20 1998

ARTS

Exhibition gilds the lily for local artists

TALENTED members from the Reading Guild of Artists are putting the finishing touches to another stunning exhibition.

The select band of 104 full members have been asked to choose two contributions for the show at Reading Library. It promises to be an exciting month for the Guild, because it has never exhibited at the venue before. They will show their work at the library's second floor in Kings Road from Tuesday to Friday, March 20. Included in the full-time ranks is adult education teacher, Jean Aust, who was elected chairman of the Guild at its AGM last night. Other local names exhibiting include Robert Gillmor, the Guild's past chairman and president. His work follows the tradition set by his grandfather Allen Seaby,

By **GRAEME EVANS**

who was formerly professor of Fine Art at Reading university and one of the founder members of the Guild in 1930. The organisation also stages demonstrations, including tonight (Friday) when Ron Ripley visits the Caversham Centre to display portraits in pastel. Wendy Jelbert will demonstrate mixed media at the Arthur Legge Centre, Caversham, on March 6. Both events start at 7.30pm and are open to the public.



▶ **PUTTING ON A SHOW** - Robert Gillmore, (left to right) Elizabeth Heydeman and Jean Aust, of Reading Guild of Artists, with work from the exhibition
Picture: JAMES ASHFORD (Tel 439/98)

RBH Bereavement Viewing Suite Mural

by Amanda Paradine



As a regular participant in the 'art in the corridor' exhibitions at Reading's Royal Berks Hospital, I was keen to respond to the Hospital Charity's call for help, published in June's RGA bulletin, for volunteers to paint a mural by the Bereavement Viewing Suite.

Also, as a member of the Mixed Media Monday Group that meets at Reading's Biscuit Factory (which also has several RGA members), I felt the wealth of skills and enthusiasm within the group would be a great fit for the project.

After contacting RBH Charity Director Jo Warrior and meeting with her and RBH Head of Estates Helen Cole and Morgue Manager Dave, I was delighted they liked my idea of the theme of seasons and gave the go ahead. Fellow 'MMMers' Tizzy Cottingham and her son Peter designed a beautiful seasonal pastoral scene which I embellished with flora and fauna. The MMM group responded brilliantly to the call for help with 18 people working on the mural over the 5 weekends in October and November it took to complete. Everyone was very generous sharing their time and skills whilst the RBH Charity provided the materials: Dulux water based matt emulsion paints and Seawhites' acrylics. (Thanks to Janina Maher for her help with the Seawhites order!) Once the mural was finished we varnished it with two coats of Polyvine Decorators Flat Clear Varnish to protect it and to make it 'wipe clean' as the hospital had requested.

It was such a pleasure to work on the mural; transforming a blank wall into a work of art which people waiting to see loved ones in the Bereavement Viewing Suite can contemplate and to hopefully gain a little comfort. Sited as it is near a link corridor the mural also attracts the attention of RBH staff walking past.



Over the time we worked on it we got fabulous feedback from passersby which both encouraged us and also showed what an uplifting effect such a work of art can have.

Thanks again are due to the RBH Charity for not just reaching out to us for help to create the mural but also for their support and for supplying the materials, in particular Charity Director Jo Warrior, RBH Head of Estates Helen Cole and Morgue Manager Dave. Thanks too to RBH Estates staff Steve, Tim, the Estates 'on call' staff who helped us access the paints and the Housekeeping staff who gave us the use of their sink to clean up!

Thanks, especially, to the brilliant MMM crew who created the mural: Tizzy Cottingham, Peter Broomfield, Sue Bridge, Maria Darby, John Mitchell, Nina O'Connell, Jane Greiner, Janet Myall, Sue Breakwell, Ruth Hilbourne, Gloria Pitt, Kate Ellison-Bourne, Helen Lansdown, Hinal Tanna, Lesley Redmond, Jade Turner and Julia Hopkinson.



Summer Painting Days 2025

by Tizzy Cottingham

We had another very successful season of Summer Days in 2025, visiting a new venue as well as some old favourite locations in and around Reading.



Whiteknights May Throwdown

The first day out in May was at the ever popular Reading University's Community Festival at Whiteknights Campus. As always it was a day of fun, families, food and live music enjoyed by all. Traditionally, the Vice Chancellor chooses one piece of work from the 'throwdown' at the end of the day and this year Belinda Millar's work was selected by Professor Van de Noort CBE and she received a bouquet of flowers from him - congratulations to Belinda! She said "RGA painting days are a fantastic day out, meeting and being inspired by fellow artists, all whilst exploring new places to paint. It was a real shock and pleasure to be chosen by Reading Uni's Vice Chancellor as his 'best in show' in May!"



Professor Van de Noort & Belinda Millar.

In June we had a wonderful welcome from Kate Ellison-Bourne at her walled garden at Monks Pond Cottage. In full summer splendour, the garden offered a variety of interesting subjects to paint: summer blooms, potted plants, shrubbery, a large pond and garden buildings. One participant said "wouldn't it be great if we could bottle this beautiful painting day in this wonderful garden and prescribe it on the NHS?" - it was a day that was good for the soul.



Monks Pond Cottage June Summer Painting Day - throwdown

The day at Harris Gardens in July was well attended, and even though we had to battle with intermittent and quite heavy showers, a lot of great work was produced. Balancing an umbrella and all the painting paraphernalia was quite a challenge. Watercolour took on a new meaning!

Our most well attended painting day was in August at the new venue of Loddon Brewery in Dunsden, Oxfordshire. The brewery staff members were very hospitable and everyone appreciated the food and drink that was available. Using the brewery as a base, the majority of people spaced themselves out along the nearby field, captivated by the yellow of the harvested cornfield. It was an unseasonably cool overcast day but there was still an intense glow captured in the finished works. One painter said "Such a friendly venue"; people asked "When can we go back?" The team at the Brewery can't wait to have the RGA back for a return visit. The word has spread, and those who couldn't go last time, have put it on their wish list!



Loddon Brewery August

In September Taplow Court was to have been another new venue coinciding with their Open Day. However, an ominous weather forecast led us to cancel our part in the day's events. As it was the second year running that we had to cancel the September venue due to bad weather we have decided that in 2026 we will start Summer Painting Days in April and finish with the last one in August.

Look out for information about our 2026 Summer Painting Days in the monthly RGA Monthly Bulletin. We are excited to return to some regular favourites, reintroduce others, and bring you to another new venue!

Portrait Artist of the Year 2025

by Sayani Drury, edited by Kate Ellison-Bourne

On a grey day in February, I missed a call from Storyvault Productions. When I called back, I was told I'd been accepted onto Portrait Artist of the Year 2025! I really didn't expect to get onto the show.

To apply, applicants need to submit a self-portrait so one evening I thought I'd at least see what I could create. I stuck on some music and started painting. I love painting portraits. I hate painting self-portraits. I don't consider myself vain but something about analysing my own face for so long makes me frustrated. Possibly in the same way that it is harder to capture your loved ones or someone you know well - because you know them so well you never feel like you've got it right.

There was a lot of frustration in my painting and in the end I was very dissatisfied with it. It went on a shelf to dry and I didn't come back to it until the day of the PAOTY application deadline.

After finding out I'd be in the show, I analysed that portrait so many times. What had the judges seen in this painting? Was it the colour palette? Was it the textured background (which by the way wasn't intentional as I'd painted over a failed painting)? Was it the expression? Was it the nose (my favourite bit)? I think I figured it out but only the day after the filming of my heat.



My guess was that the painting felt contemporary in style. That it had an artistic hand that was different to something they'd seen before and that it wasn't hyper-realised.

Immediately after hearing the news that I had been selected to participate in PAOTY I conveniently forgot how to paint. It was mind-blowingly frustrating that I barely remembered basic colour theory, proportions of the face or even how to hold my paintbrush. I believe these symptoms are quite common!

The practice hours in the studio were long. I painted face after face, often painting over previous studies. Not knowing who my sitter would be I ensured my references were of a wide variety of ethnicities, genders and ages.

These weeks of practice were the most productive and useful of my life. I learned so much and I wouldn't swap this time for anything. It was the most useful gift PAOTY could give me.

On the day, the production team were very excited about one celebrity in particular and everyone was buzzing. I was over the moon to hear Billy Porter's name being read out by Stephen Mangan. It was a strange coincidence that I had painted my self-portrait whilst listening to Billy singing!

As soon as the clock started I headed in to chat with Billy. I had known for weeks that I wanted to create a portrait that spoke to

the character of the sitter and I could only do that by getting to know him. After other artists had taken photos, I chatted to Billy who told me about his mother and how inspiring she had been. He told me of the pain of losing her and the strength of his sister. He was open and warm and I, honestly, could have spent the full 4 hours chatting with him. But I had to remind myself that I was there for another reason. At a particularly poignant moment I asked Billy if he wouldn't mind me taking a photo and that photo was a saving grace for me because not long after that Billy promptly fell asleep!

Around the 3.5 hour mark a fellow RGA member, Liz Chaderton, who had kindly come to support me, tapped me on the shoulder and told me 'you don't have to use the full time. It's ok to stop at any time'. I took the hint and switched focus by tidying up Billy's metallic jacket. I'd done a lot of preparation and practiced painting different types of people and clothing. I hadn't even considered practicing metallic clothing!

And in no time at all it was done.

Billy's reaction to all of our paintings was wonderful. I had made a conscious decision not to look at anyone else's work throughout the day so it was the first time I'd seen the other paintings too.

When Billy then came to me he didn't say anything at first. And then when he started speaking and struggled to find the words, I was thinking, 'plaster on your smile because he hates your painting and you can't let everyone see how upset you are'. When he uttered the memorable words 'you've captured my grief' the tears came flooding down my cheeks, he actually chose my painting to take home with him! Thankfully the cameras didn't pick up on the sheer amount of silent crying there was from me, but I had just attained the goal of all artists - to move someone with their work! His words and obvious reaction to my painting were the best thing I could have hoped for, and, in my head, I had won in life - it was the most important artistic moment in my entire career, and it moved me beyond mere words.

He cried, I cried, a member of the audience told me they were all crying behind me, and he gave me the best hug - one that I'll remember forever. I also got his autograph.

When it came to the shortlist announcement I came away from the experience in shock. I hadn't expected to get shortlisted; I hadn't even expected to get through to the show in the first place. Although it was disappointing not to go on to the next round, all of us felt a massive weight lift off our shoulders.

It was, all round, a fantastic experience and one I will not forget. The main benefit from my perspective was the focused hours of practice which have not only stepped up my painting but also given me an entirely new perspective on my art and the art of others.



Upgrading in 2025-26

by Paul Whitehouse

Affiliate Members of the RGA are able to submit a dossier of their work to apply to 'upgrade' to an Exhibiting Member of the RGA. The dossiers include examples of the artists' work, several 'final pieces' and a personal statement describing their artistic practice. Each dossier is reviewed by a panel of Council members and officers of the RGA.

We now run a review session every quarter and in the past year we have received 23 applications. Fourteen applicants were successful this year: Sarah Luton, Syani Drury, Mark Webber, Duncan Eggleton, Jennifer Starnes, Wendy Henderson, Julie Gardner, Caroline Gatfield, Belinda Millar, Jane Vincent, Phoebe Logan, Clair Harrington, John Mitchell and Carolyn Holding. We congratulate them all and look forward to seeing their work in RGA exhibitions and also in the artists' gallery page on the RGA website.

We welcome applications to upgrade. You can find details of the process and the requirements for an application in the members area of the website. There are four deadlines each year, in March, June, September and December - look out for dates in the RGA Monthly Bulletin.

Upgraded

by Julie Gardner

I joined the RGA as an affiliate member in June 2025 and decided I should apply for upgrading straightaway to an exhibiting member so that I could take part in exhibitions. The process was very easy - I just had to send over an artist statement as well as images of six of my prints and photos of my work in progress (I'm a lino printer so I sent photos of the drawings from which I worked and the lino blocks). I set up a folder of everything and then shared it all online.

I missed the submission date for the Annual Exhibition but did go and have a look at the wonderful work on display at the University of Reading - I hope I can take part this year! I don't know many practising artists so it's nice to be a member of a group for the workshops, exhibitions and socials.

I attend South Hill Park printmaking every Monday and have done so for a couple of years now (amazing teachers and a beautiful, ancient printing press for lino). I recently made the decision to keep Thursday afternoons free for art - it's great to have time in the week dedicated to being creative (life gets so busy!) I'm very lucky I can fit it around my other work (I make lampshades for interior designers and also work in a clothes shop).

So far I have exhibited my lino prints at various galleries including Bankside Gallery in London, home to the Royal Society of Painter-Printmakers. I also teach lino printing workshops from my garden studio in Maidenhead.



Publicity Report

by Paul Whitehouse

Publicity of RGA events - the Annual Exhibition and Small Works' Show - requires careful work behind the scenes from a team of people including our poster designer (Liz Baldin) and social media lead (Liz Real). Thanks are due to Emily Gillmor (Annual Exhibition) and Sue Bridge (Small Works) for allowing us to incorporate their art works into our poster designs. In this increasingly digital world there is still a place for old-fashioned 'analogue' activities like distributing flyers in Reading and beyond, through members' exhibitions, local art trails, noticeboards, libraries, coffee shops, letterboxes and shops. Many thanks go to our Exhibition Team and colleagues for their work in distributing flyers ahead of our two exhibitions in 2025.



These activities are supported by Press Releases to local and national magazines, radio and TV. In the lead up to the 94th Annual Exhibition, our chair, Connell McMenemy was invited to be interviewed on BBC Radio Berkshire and That's TV, and Paul Whitehouse was interviewed on Hospital Radio at the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

Keep your eye on the 'Press' page on the RGA website to see recent Press Releases. The physical distribution of flyers and posters is such an effective way of advertising RGA exhibitions; we would really appreciate it if you could "step up" and offer a couple of hours of your time to help distribute flyers in the lead up to exhibitions, to share the news on social media and to make sure that RGA Exhibitions are well and truly 'in the news!' Thank you.



Earley Painters

by Carole Stephens & Clare Buchta

If you are looking for some inspiration and variety in your artwork, come and join us at a session of Earley Painters. Although not 'compulsory', each session is themed with a still life set up in the centre of the room. The themes are derived from ideas from participants and collated by the Earley Painters Team of Carole, Clare and Lesley Redmond.



An amazingly diverse range of objects is provided (by Clare) and also ideas of what techniques and materials to use – perhaps collage, mono-print, pen and ink or perhaps watercolour or maybe experience the art of ink blowing?? Experimentation is encouraged and any safe medium is acceptable.



We've had some very exciting and busy sessions since September, and it's particularly pleasing to have new people joining us almost every time. The aim is to enjoy a relaxed and welcoming art afternoon, to encourage new artists or those returning to art, as well as more experienced artists. As a group of artists we tend to be quite engrossed in our own piece of work, once the session has started, each of us choosing to make something very personal from the still life or session title. However, our now well established tea breaks give us a chance to catch up with fellow artists!



So this season we have covered subjects from vintage vehicles to sheep, dramatic florals to poster art, Mexican traditional festivals to a typical English champagne picnic. Along the way we have seen winter trees and been on a summer holiday and created crazy Surrealist - inspired collage and we still have some sessions to look forward to, so keep your eye on the website for details. Everyone is welcome in the spirit of the RGA's charitable remit as an art educator, and for that same reason fees are kept low to allow everyone to enjoy making art together at Earley Painters.



RGA Fridays

by Jane Somner, Kate Ellison-Bourne & Clare Buchta

The final workshop of our 24/25 season took place at the end of April 2025 with another sell-out session with Mick McNicholas in the tutor's chair. Mick demonstrated a number of techniques to approach drawing a portrait from life; a more measured approach, and a looser, mass-drawing technique. It was wonderful to see portraits appear as a charcoal ground was erased to define highlights and mid tones.



In September, for the start of our new season, we crowded in to the hall at Earley St. Peter's just to see what 'mono-printing with a mangle' was all about! Clare Buchta had set the room up in the style of an old school classroom and at the head of the class was the mangle (well Clare too of course who was our teacher for the evening). We were provided with all the materials to create an image on an acetate 'plate' using printing inks, rollers and different types of mark-making tools. We then

passed our plates through the mangle (in the absence of a traditional press) together with dampened paper on which our image appeared. It was messy, exciting and the results, quite frankly, came as a wonderful surprise!



Liz Chaderton presented our October workshop as 'scribble!' Well, that was the starting point but what an amazing evening as we were taught how to use 'scribble' as the foundation of creating images of animals and birds. A simple pencil outline of a fox was drawn by Liz in her demo and then by scribbling (apparently) randomly she built up form and tone using a scribbling action with her waterproof ink pen. Permanent ink was important as we eventually used watercolour washes to enhance our drawings and to lend a sense of realism. The eye of the fox brought the creature to life. We finished the evening with a roomful of colourful creatures - goats, gorillas, rams, dogs, sheep, pigs and, of course, Mr Fox!



'Sweets Unwrapped' was the name of the game in November in Janina Maher's workshop. Perhaps an early taste of Christmas treats with tubs of Quality Street? Working in a 'small concertina' format, sweets were painted in 4 stages of being unwrapped using pen, pencil and watercolour and were then eaten!

In January, an evening of 'Playful Drawing' with Cath Baldwin was a light-hearted, relaxing way of getting back

to basics. It included mark making, alternative hand drawing, continuous line drawing, and 'blind drawing' where we focused on the still life set up for us and forbidden to look at the paper! (All against the clock by the way!) It provided an excellent opportunity for loosening up and embracing free style, encouraging artists to get in touch with their inner child and to enjoy experimentation.



On to poetry and illustration in February with Tizzy Cottingham - some students were ahead of the game as they had attended Tizzy's Summer Workshop at the University during our Annual Exhibition. We explored the art of 'visual storytelling' - using our imaginations and our creativity under Tizzy's guidance we had a really happy evening illustrating a spring time poem - 'tulips budding and daffodils bursting and robins building' bloomed all around!

The March workshop that was to be lead by Mick was in fact tutored by Connell McMenamin as Mick was unable to come. Connell stepped in on the day - so many thanks are due to him and his model Warren for coming at such short notice. A full house enjoyed Connell's approach to portraiture and students gave Connell good feedback on the night.

In April, for our last session of the season, Shelagh Casebourne will guide us in painting a still life using water-mixable oils, flat brushes, a smooth board, and with only three colours we will explore the potential of a limited palette.

It has been a really interesting season of RGA Fridays - we have enjoyed a varied and well-attended programme. Thank you to all our tutors and to everyone for participating.

More photos from the RGA Annual Exhibition

