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## The London Group February Newsletter 2016

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### Forthcoming dates for the Diary

**'The London Group Between the Wars'** an illustrated talk by David Redfern and the second of his talks on the history of The London Group

22 March at 6.30

16 Theed Street

London SE1 8ST

### Full members exhibition

20 - 28 April, Private View 21 April (with pay bar), Seminar 26 April

Kensington and Chelsea College

Hortensia Road

London SW10 0QS

### The London Group Film Night

an evening of video shorts made by London Group members

2 May at 6.30

The Cello Factory

### The London Group Annual

12 - 21 October, Private View 11 October, Artists' talks 18 October

The Cello Factory

33 - 34 Cornwall Road

London SE1 8TJ

### The London Group Open Exhibition Prize

Cadi Froehlich, Martin Heron and Darren Nisbett

4-10 November, Private View 3 November

The Cello Factory

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Craven, Jeff Dellow, Cadi Froehlich, Martin Heron and Judith Jones, all of whom showed in our recent Open.

I keep thinking The London Group needs a quiet year, but it never seems to happen. This is the third year since the centenary that this had been in my mind, but we'll see! Our next exhibition is at Kensington and Chelsea College in April, by kind invitation of Matthew Kolakowski. It is a full members' exhibition as is our Annual which is at The Cello Factory in October and this is followed by the Open Exhibition Prize, won by Cadi Froehlich, Martin Heron (both now members) and Darren Nisbett, in November and we have various other unconfirmed exhibitions in the pipeline.



*London Group Open 2015*

We've certainly had a busy time recently with our 82nd Open Exhibition and we have every reason to be very proud of its immense success. Both Parts 1 and 2 received a great deal of compliments, the catalogue was very well received and the talks were excellent and particularly well attended. The show was dedicated to Bert Irvin (elected 1965) and a special moment was his two daughters, Celia and Priscilla, opening Part 1. Awarding prizes adds a layer to the Open that is of major significance offering the winners something that could make a big difference to their careers – not only did Judith Jones win the GX Gallery prize but the directors bought her piece, then invited her to have an exhibition and now she has been elected to the Group.



*'The Measure (of sense objects and thought things --- a noumenon' Clive Burton (foreground),  
'The Artist's Father' Charlie Schaffer (behind), London Group Open 2015*

We owe all our generous prize sponsors sincere thanks for enabling us to offer the awards and it was very good having so many of the prize givers making presentations and they thoroughly enjoyed being involved with proceedings. Grateful thanks to the Chelsea Arts Club Trust, The Ingram Collection, Jeff Lowe, Winsor & Newton, the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers, GX Gallery, and Patrick Gorman. Hats-off to Chris Ingram for selecting a video for his prize and showing our commitment to new-media and we look forward to the Group exhibiting alongside the Ingram Collection in the future.

I expect it is a rare thing to give open submission exhibitors a chance to interact so



*Albert Irvin's daughters, Celia and Priscilla, London Group Open 2015*

Then we hardly drew breath before we had 'Combines', a Small Group exhibition of 13 members working in mixed media, curated by Mark Dickens. It was a flamboyant exhibition with some very unlikely materials including a lot of vegetation, insects, reuse of rubbish and detritus... There was much animated discussion amongst the artists during the installation and in the exhibition and like Bridge, our last SGE, it demonstrated what a rich and valuable meeting of minds is made possible by SGEs. Both exhibitions highlighted what can be achieved in an SGE, something very different to a full Group exhibition and crucial to the Group's flourishing in the future. 'Combines' stood out in its coverage in social media and video documentation and the latter can be seen on YouTube or our website, [click here](#) and enjoy!

Susan Haire

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Dear London Group,

I'm writing to say thank you and that I'm grateful to have been involved in The London Group Open exhibition. I appreciate all the hard work, time and organisation that the members put in voluntarily. Admittedly I knew very little of the Group previously and

organised, emails and correspondence very clear. My first visit to The Cello Factory was to see the Part 1 show, and I was impressed by the show, its huge variety of work and by the exhibition space itself. There was a buzzy atmosphere at each event, and it was easy to meet and talk to other artists at the Part 2 private view and prize giving, with a friendly welcome at the door and helpful bar staff! The talks evening was also very good, and again, a large turn out and supportive atmosphere, hearing both members and selected artists talking about their work was enriching. I really enjoyed invigilating with Victoria, (thanks Suzan for organising), it was such an interesting few hours talking to Victoria and the visitors and having time to look at the work again. The colour catalogue is also a lovely thing to take away from the exhibition, and thanks Charlotte for all the tweeting and retweeting.

I know there is currently a great deal of discussion surrounding the value of Opens, and particularly perhaps with artists and organisations being challenged financially (and increasingly squeezed out of London) but I am very glad I entered the LG Open, reflecting on the value and experience I gained from a £20 entrance fee, I feel very fortunate that my work was selected.

With thanks and best wishes,

Gemma Cossey

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### **A personal response to the exhibition 'Combines'**

The recent London Group exhibition 'Combines' held an interesting evening of artists' talks on the final day of the show. It was a time for artists and viewers alike to share their thoughts, concepts and the processes of making 'Combines'.

The references made to Rauschenberg's work during this evening led me to take a look at this American artist's mixed media work. He is often referred to as using 'trash' within his constructs. A word that to me has far harsher tones than the English words 'rubbish' or 'detritus' used by Eric Moody and Susan Haire to describe the discarded objects, media and materials used within London Group artists' work shown in 'Combines'. This similarity between the works in the show goes further; it was, as one member pointed out, surprising how the concepts of the pieces had similar notions. Susan Haire remarked how many of the artists utilised similar motifs within their work even though there was no formal discussion prior to the show concerning what each member was to exhibit.



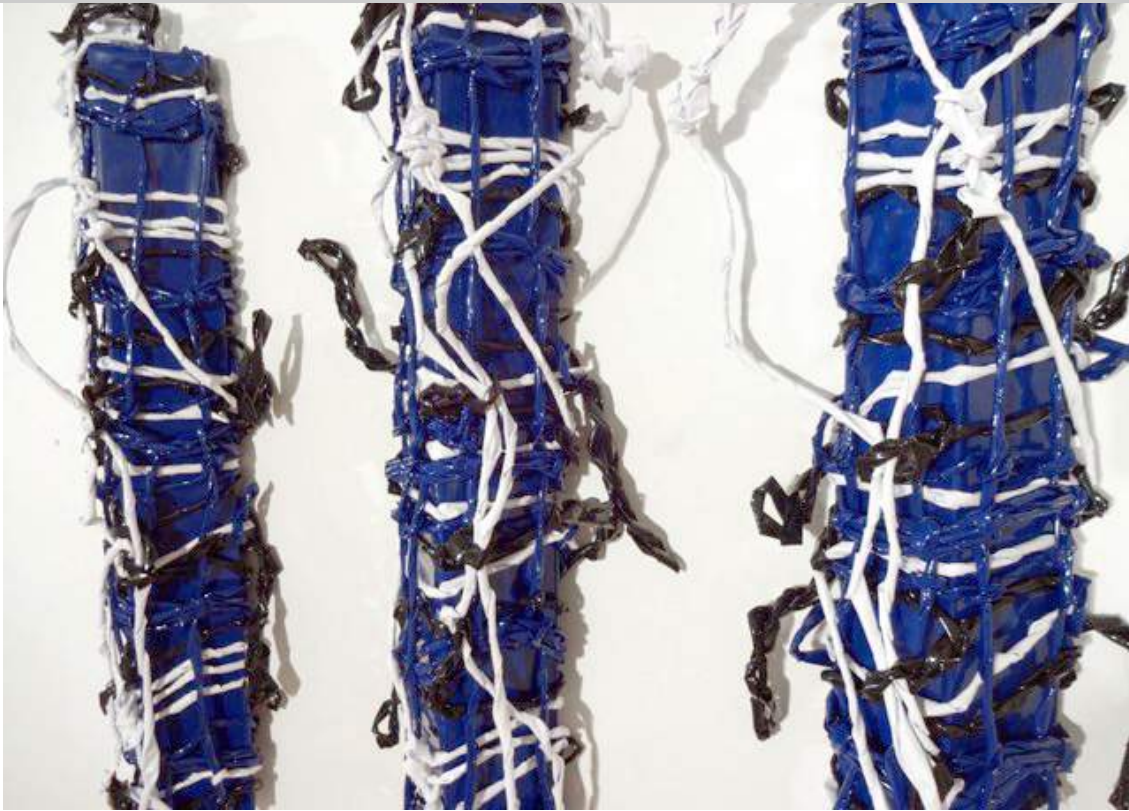
*Mark Dickens curator of 'Combines' during artists' talks*

For me, many of the works held symbols or narratives of evolution or personal concepts of transience within the construction of the pieces. By utilising objects or materials that have been discarded by another brought a deeper level of meaning to each work, as though the provenance of the 'pre-loved' objects added the artist's own personal narrative in that their own unique history was contained within the work, just as the artist also created their own layers of meaning or narrative.

Michael Phillipson's piece 'hobbled Hermes virtually grounded' consisted of three main found objects (a keyboard, walkman and horseshoes) which to my mind symbolise the evolution of forms of communication. These were painted entirely in a matte grey—the sense of aged dullness this colour gave added to the sense of times past.

Annie Johns' touching almost sculptural piece, utilising weighing scales balancing a letter to her former self, makes us wonder what the passage of time has meant for her and leads us to question ourselves. What letter would we write to our former selves? I was also very intrigued and tempted to open the letters but also scared to do so, nervous of delving into another's secret past, just as we are often reticent to look too deeply within our own subconscious feelings and memories.

Charlotte Mortenson's use of corrugated metal sheets from Jamaica in 'Bauxite' illustrated how this material is actually a precious commodity used repeatedly by the islands' inhabitants. The patina of time etched within the mottled metal. For us as affluent western viewers, and probably in Rauschenberg's American culture, this commodity would soon become rubbish or trash—no longer desirable or thought to be of any use. Charlotte's images of the metal being used as borders to private spaces were combined and welded onto actual sections of mottled corrugated metal pieces creating a large mixed media installation. For me this signifies a culture that has different values and economic systems to our Western societies. Aesthetically



*'Curlicue In Black, White And Blue' Tommy Seaward*

The making of all work involves a journey into pre-visualisation of the proposed concept or concepts being considered and explored, through to the evolving creative act and final realisation of the artwork. As many of the artists involved in this show pointed out it is the creative journey that is important not the ultimate value of the final piece of artwork. I feel the totality of this process is far more obvious to the viewer in this show than many others I have recently seen and to my mind this was its greatest strength. For me, personally, I can see the exploration of the notion of transience held within these works and this was the intrinsic value of the show not merely its decorative or aesthetic qualities.

Judith Jones

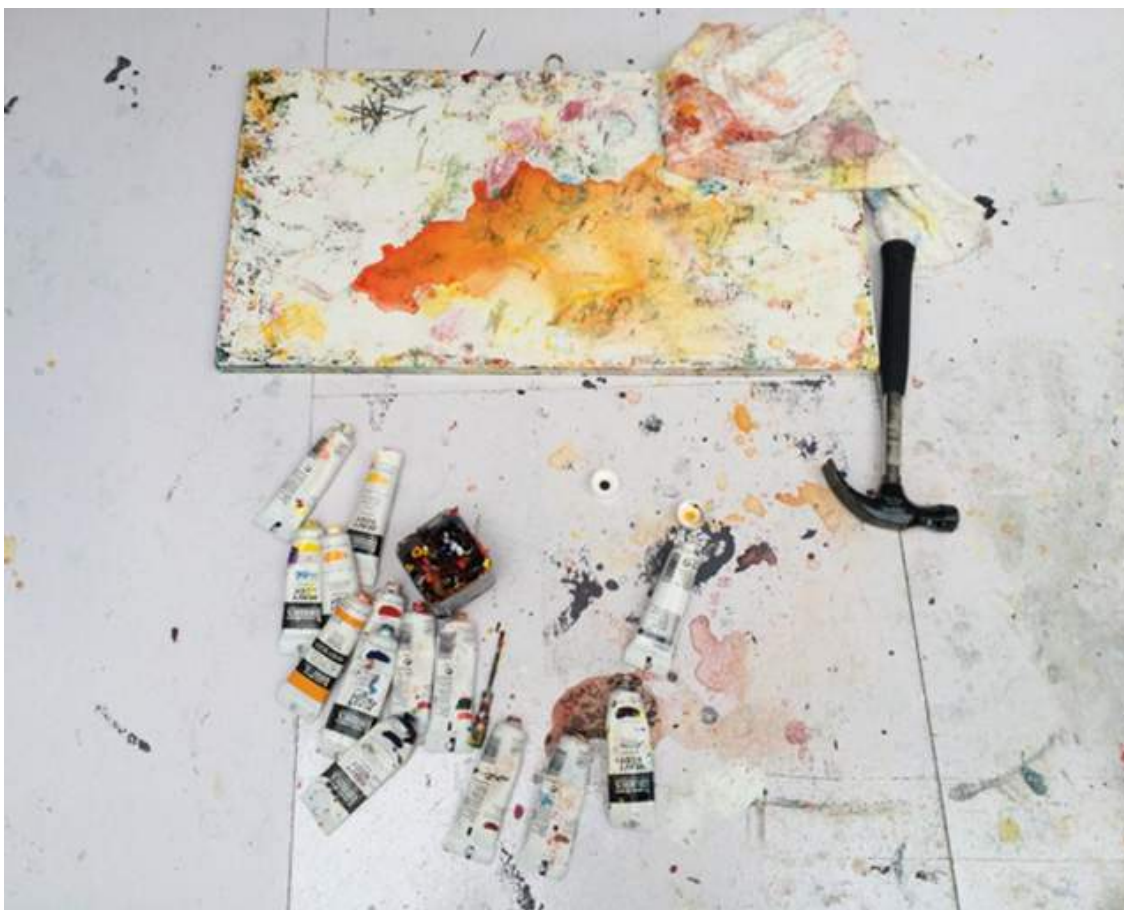
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### **A day in the life of Bill Henderson - in the studio**

My studio is at the end of the garden. It is a great place to make paintings, with plenty of strong day light, storage space at the back, there is no rent to pay and it gets warm quickly in winter. I make abstract paintings, as I have done for the past fifty odd years, that explore analogies with sound and music, with references to urban landscape – like a sort of visual film score perhaps?

Looking back over the years, I have had many and various studios to work in. The first

houses, three months squatting a disused piano factory in Chalk Farm, moving, eventually to another studio complex close by. Then off to a warehouse space in Wapping for a couple of years until the property developers arrived and the 'creatives' moved out! A converted shed in Brixton, studios at home with family in West Norwood, and then finally a studio in a big industrial estate just behind where we were living, before we moved here to Beckenham.



On the wall in my studio I have a quote from Philip Guston: "When you go into the studio, everybody's in there with you. The Dealers, the Public, all those great artists, they're all looking over your shoulder. One by one they leave, then you leave, then the painting can begin". Perhaps the most difficult part of making a painting is actually getting yourself to leave, to overcome the doubts, to get to that new place you've never been to before.

I am in my studio most days, for varying amounts of time, depending on what is happening in there. I work with the canvas or paper laid down on the floor, or raised up flat on a board. I like the idea of a painting being built, having a kind of structure that you find in the course of making it, as it develops, layer upon layer, until it reaches a conclusion. I use acrylic paint, I have used this paint for over forty years now, I know what it will do for me and I enjoy its plasticity.





Over the past year or so, I have been working on canvases or paper, primed with a dark grey colour, made from my own mixes, with fine pale coloured lines drawn across the ground, as individual strands, one on top of another, like an open mesh. I have also started reintroducing polychrome bars or bands of colour that I used back in the late '70s/'80s. I want that stridency back again, like sharp chords in a piece of music.

The most recent paintings have usually started with this open mesh, like a net running across the painting. The bars are painted in over the mesh, combining with all sorts of staining brush marks. Acrylic paint will behave in a whole variety of ways, from a glaze with a dry brush and a very small amount of pigment, through to delicate stains and layerings with the addition of water. I use a small amount of acrylic medium mixed in for adhesion.



In these paintings, the polychrome bars, motifs, marks and shapes have been combined with intricate linear structures. Each line develops its own character and rhythm, as it travels across the surface of the canvas. These individual elements become incorporated, layer upon layer, to form visually complex, and occasionally cacophonous, paintings.

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### Responses from new members on being elected

#### Tim Craven

I am thrilled to have been elected a member of The London Group and still can't quite believe it. As a curator (at Southampton City Art Gallery), I have been looking after a superb collection that includes nearly a hundred past members for over 30 years. I am amazed and delighted to be connected through The London Group with all my heroes of the past. I am equally exhilarated to be showing my own work in such prestigious and supportive company. The London Group is certainly my future and where I want to be.

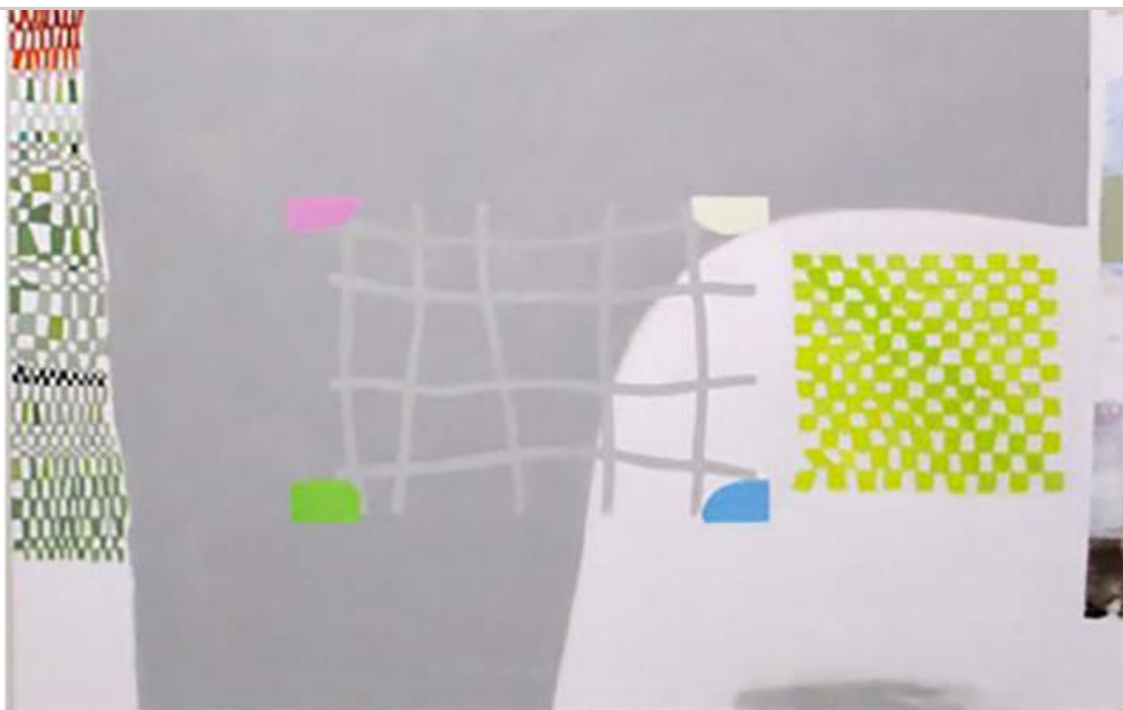


*Clun Castle (2015)*

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### **Jeff Dellow**

The London Group interview and nomination process was engaging and interesting as it allowed a dual flow of information about the dynamic direction the Group is taking, whilst offering a chance of exhibiting in a good context. It allowed a meeting of candidates and members in a natural social setting where questions and answers could be given freely. I was very pleased to be engaging with the Group and felt this was a vibrant and purposeful thing to do, something I hope will be beneficial for me as an individual.

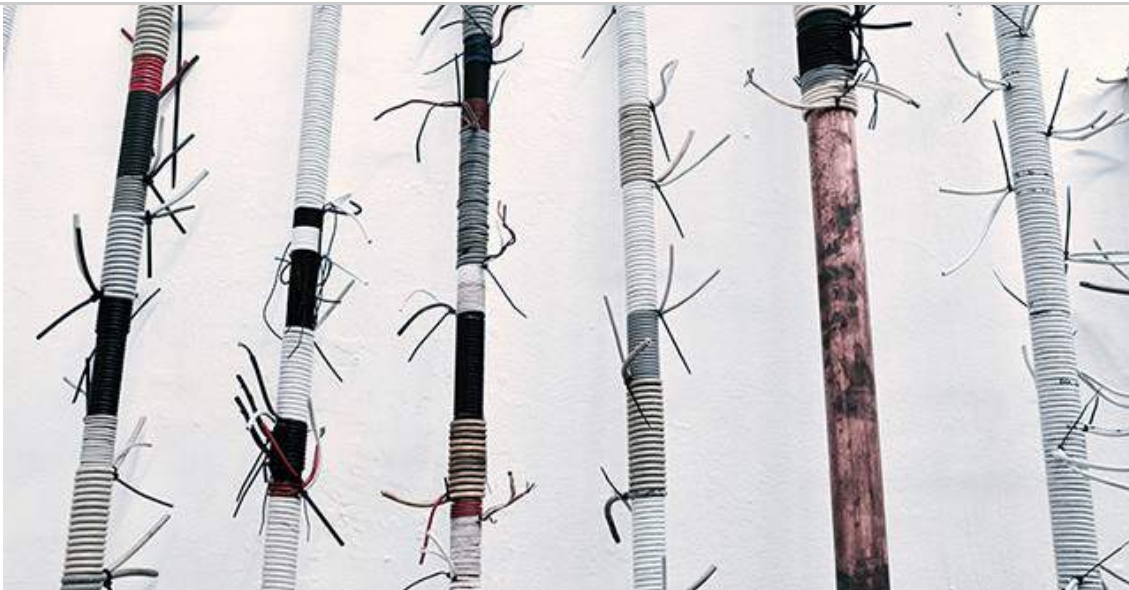


*Fissure (2016)*

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### **Cadi Froehlich**

In the years since art college the projects come and go, and I find working as an artist is quite a solitary profession. With my network of alumni and colleagues, planning projects and discussing work is vital. The opportunity to join the active and enthusiastic London Group has come at what feels like a pivotal time for me: moving my practice into the wider arena beyond art school. The warmth and energy with which I have been welcomed so far has been really encouraging and I'm looking forward to working with you one and all for years to come.



*AQI (2015)*

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### **Martin Heron**

It's an honour to be elected to such an illustrious group. Being part of this prestigious collective has already given me a new found confidence in my work and I am excited about the future opportunities for collaboration, discourse and exhibition. I hope to be a very active and engaged member of The London Group.



*Loitering with Intent No.4*

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### **Judith Jones**

I am delighted and honoured to be elected as a member of The London Group whose

world. I want to play a part in the life of The London Group because I'm proud to carry on this collective's tradition of openness and its willingness to foster and showcase its artists' work.



*Night Windows 22*

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### **Tribute to Vic Kuell given by Susan Haire at his funeral**

Vic died on 30 September 2015 aged 91

Vic will be deeply missed by all of us but I would like to think that we are gathered here to celebrate his life. Margaret asked me to talk particularly about Vic the artist but it will be impossible to do him justice. As you will know, Vic was the master of the anecdote so there's far more to say about him than we have time for. First, I briefly want to mention the family he loved so much. Vic was lucky to have such an understanding wife as his beloved Margaret, he often told me how extremely proud he was of his children



Vic couldn't have lived his focused and committed life without Margaret. Apart from looking after him she tolerated a great deal and she did this because she wholeheartedly believed in Vic's art and in everything Vic did that came out of his being an artist.

Vic never missed a day in the studio. What an example he is to us all in living his life fully with an unerring and total commitment to his painting that he addressed every day up to the age of 91 and until shortly before he died. When Vic stopped going into the studio in July Margaret knew immediately it was serious. His final outing was to deliver his last painting for The London Group Open. Vic always felt it was important to make new work for an exhibition and this was no exception.

I think the first experience Vic had on his journey as an artist was when he was three and living in the last house before the desert in pre-Partition Karachi. This snake-infested desert was his playground and his life-long preoccupation with space started there. Many of you will know one of Vic's favourite anecdotes about his first day in a life-drawing class when he won a scholarship to Bromley College at only 14. He cowered behind his drawing board overcome with embarrassment at the nude model so close to him and made a tiny, scratchy, awkward drawing. In looking back he thought it was the strongest drawing in the room because it was so honest.

Bromley College became Ravensbourne College of Art and Design and after going to the Royal College Vic became a lecturer at Ravensbourne and stayed there for his whole teaching career. He ran our foundation in 1969 and his favourite saying was 'it's all in the making'. Vic's tutorials would be intentionally ambiguous, rather than giving guidance, and he was quick to question any of our preconceptions. We had to learn to

that the studio discussion continued in the student bar every night until 11 o'clock and then there would be a half hour drive home. This was despite having Margaret and two young children at home who saw very little of him at that time. And of course there were some drunken escapades. Once driving in separate cars with John Brine, Head of Painting, he found that John had driven his car up a lamp post and Vic was very proud of the time the steeple of Chislehurst Church was being repaired and he climbed up to the roof and pinched a tile which is still in his house today. This was reminiscent of when as a student he climbed up the Albert Memorial.

In 1981 Vic was elected to The London Group. He was Treasurer from 1990 and later became an Honorary Member having done so much for the Group. Vic was in charge of hanging the Group's exhibitions for many years and he used to say the work wouldn't be positioned correctly until each piece had been moved at least nine times. And in The London Group we again see Vic's unparalleled loyalty. He made it his business to go to every exhibition that a member was in despite having to travel from Kent and Vic considered this very important. The Group meant so much to him that he wanted to give something back and in 2010 he gave a body of paintings on paper to the Group to raffle one work a month for a year and almost 700 pounds was raised.

I am very pleased to take this opportunity to announce that Vic has left a valuable legacy to The London Group. After the family have chosen the works they would like, Vic has left all his paintings to the Group. We will hold a memorial exhibition for Vic at The Cello Factory in Waterloo and the work will be sold to raise funds for the Group and Vic particularly wanted members to be able to buy paintings at sums they can afford. What a testament this is to Vic's exceptional thoughtfulness and to what the Group meant to him.

Vic gave the world an extraordinary and deeply rewarding gift in his paintings. Large numbers of people have bought his works over the years and their lives have been profoundly and continually enriched by them. Others have experienced the beauty and intensity of Vic's paintings many times over in numerous exhibitions. Vic considered himself lucky in all the opportunities he had to show throughout his life, not just in the UK, but he also showed a lot in France.

Vic's work was derived from the most rigorous and demanding values, always completely uncompromising and I feel that his genius lay in upholding all of this but at the same time producing the most unbelievably lyrical paintings with breath-taking colour of the utmost beauty, in his words 'embracing feelings of wonder'.

Vic insisted that paintings should stand for themselves. He didn't like artist's statements and when obliged to write one he mostly said the same thing, that his painting was like Miles Davis jazz improvisations, and I quote Vic, 'I would compare my approach to painting to that of a jazzman's to music – who, by just an "on the road"



an intrigue by a journey into the unfamiliar.' 'My work is made on the spot, in the moment. I have no subject or objective. If the intrigue does not arise – just throw it away! Whenever a goal appears, it is useless!'

A well-known anecdote of Vic's is about his time as a pilot. I think his flying connected very closely to his philosophy. He loved doing loop the loops and one of the most significant and perhaps best moments of his life was when his plane had stalled and he was falling to his death and he had to restart the engine to come out of the free fall. Being so completely in the moment like this accorded entirely with his Zen thinking and this was so fundamental to him in the act of painting.

When I heard that Vic had died I was dazed. I had felt that Vic was timeless, ageless. He looked the same as on my foundation 46 years ago, particularly his hair, which hadn't changed at all. There was a boyishness about him, that I always like to think came from his Gypsy background, which he never lost. He always spoke about the importance of the childlike and this was a key element of his Zen approach to his painting and to life. Seven years ago Vic was in hospital with chest pains and while there he had a cardiac arrest and he firmly believed he had died and been reborn but despite this notion Vic celebrated his 90th birthday with an exhibition in Edenbridge and with his typical generosity he invited some of his old students to show with him. An earlier birthday present from Duncan and Alison was a chance to fly a plane and he was permitted to do a loop the loop. I picture Vic now, not reborn, but in his own kind of nirvana flying a plane, looping the loop and in a free fall, endlessly, and loving it and laughing all the time.

Susan Haire



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