

Harry Holcroft: retrospective and unseen works

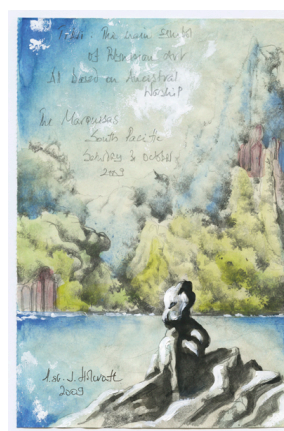
London, 23 - 28 February 2015



The Shard, London



Cayman on oxbow lake, Challala, Bolivia



The Marquesas, South Pacific

When Harry Holcroft died suddenly in November 2013, after falling down a flight of steps in an ancient Indian palace, he was in the midst of another adventure. He had just spent a month exploring and sketching around Oman, at one point stranding himself in quicksand, surrounded by turtles “300km from any sign of humanity”, as he noted in his diary. Using his twenty-two years of military training, he dug the car out of the quicksand with bits of wood and it would seem implausible to many that such a well-travelled artist might meet his maker falling down a flight of steps at Ahilya Fort just a week later.

Harry had been in the middle of exciting discussions with Princess Susan Al Said of Oman about an exhibition to be held in one of the palaces, which they were planning for spring 2014. He would have shown a new series of paintings that documented the breathtaking Omani local landscape, wildlife and culture. He was simultaneously writing a book to accompany his illustrations of the South Seas and the Pacific. What turned out to be his fatal trip to India began as his second ‘Artist in Residence’ season, at the request of Prince Richard Holkar, with a view to setting up an art school and art classes for the children of the local weaving community, the ‘Rehwa Society’ in Maheshwar.

Paintings found in his studios and sketchbooks will be **on show for the first time in La Galleria, in London's Pall Mall, alongside some of Harry's Rainforest paintings, and other European architectural works**. Visitors will also be able to see annotated watercolours from the artist's diaries, drawn on location, which he would take back to his studios in Provence or London and re-work into larger oils.

In 2004 whilst travelling through Malaysia, researching another book, Harry was horror struck by what he saw first-hand as the appalling devastation of the rainforests. Haunted by this image, he was determined to capture in his work, the ‘light and spirit’, the very ‘essence’, of these dwindling forests. He made a total of five trips to the Amazon and travelled through Borneo and the Madagascan Rainforests. His experiences and works finally published in *Rainforest: Light and Spirit* (2009), written in collaboration with the renowned botanist and ecologist Professor Sir Ghillean Prance. The Prince of Wales, in his foreword of the book, referred to it as a “call to arms.” His rainforest paintings were shown in London's West End, New York, and Provence and a number of these will be included in the 2015 exhibition.

One very special painting, the last oil that Harry painted in September 2013, was commissioned to draw attention to the work of the Amazon Charitable Trust, and in particular a proposed Amazon Science Research Village in the Xixuau Xiparina Reserve, which will assist in the study of the preservation of these forests. Managing Trustee Robert Pasley-Tyler says: "Harry's tragic untimely death meant that he was robbed of the opportunity to fulfil more of his immense ambitions to bring to light the plight of the world's rainforests. After creating a unique book about the rainforests, and a wonderful artist's impression of our plans for an Amazon based 'Research Village', he would have had so much more to contribute in helping our first major project come to fruition. It is a great tribute to his life and work, and a great honour for us that his wife Sarah is exhibiting this painting and donating the proceeds to the Trust's work."

This painting will be auctioned during the exhibition to raise funds for the Trust's Amazon boat, which is fundamental to the charity's operation.

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Notes to editors

Harry Holcroft was educated at Worth Abbey and Downside. He read Geography at Hertford College, Oxford, and Art at the Ruskin School of Drawing. After twenty-five years in the Household Cavalry, he left to paint full time. During the 1970s he had various exhibitions of his travels of the Middle East and the Sinai, as well as private commissions for companies as diverse as Drambuie, Bear Stearns, BP Oil and The Economist. He has had over twenty exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, Provence and London, based on his worldwide travels of the Middle East, Russia, Europe, India, China, Africa and the Amazon. Following the publication of his trilogy of books: *The Silk Route*, *The Spice Route* and *The Slave Route*, his latest book was *Rainforest Light and Spirit*, the result of having spent eight years focusing exclusively on studying and painting the rainforests. His travels to the South Pacific and India were 'books in progress'.

The Amazon Charitable Trust

Set up in January 2009, the Amazon Charitable Trust's mission is the conservation and improvement of the natural environment of the Amazon Rainforest, focusing on the Xixuau Xiparina Reserve, by promoting biological diversity. Working with indigenous communities, the Trust's aim is to relieve poverty by supporting their projects to become self sufficient, while at the same time protecting the natural resources around them.
<http://www.amazoncharitabletrust.org/>

The Harry Holcroft Art Fund was set up by Prince Richard Holkar at Ahilya Fort in Maheshwar as a tribute to the artist. Two students in the fifth year (11 year olds) are awarded with inscribed cups and certificates, annually, for their artwork, along with a savings certificate of RS1000. There are 230 pupils in the school.
See http://www.rehwasociety.org/rehwa_society.html and www.ahilyafort.com

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