

Iconic music & media

PO Box 1957, Eathorpe, Warwickshire, CV33 9YG
01926 632946 / 07879 844397

stevie@iconicmusic.com

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With A Little Help From My Friends

ArtsTrail Studios and Gallery re-opens with John Lennon's good friend's fiftieth anniversary exhibition

Leamington Spa's pioneering ArtsTrail Studios and Gallery will re-open in its new home at The Old Main Post Office on Monday 4 December at 7.30pm with a major exhibition by renowned local artist Jonathan Hague. Exactly fifty years ago to the day Hague's friend, John Lennon (with Paul McCartney and Revolution Records), sponsored what turned out to be the artist's last exhibition in his lifetime at the Royal Institute Galleries in London. The 1967 show included Hague's iconic painting of the fab four in their Sergeant Pepper costumes.

Hague and Lennon's connection began in the late fifties when they met at Liverpool College of Art. The 'two Johns' as they became known, grew to be close friends supporting each other throughout their college days. Their friendship continued during the early days of the Beatles and the band's subsequent rise to fame. The individual band members became the subject of a number of Hague's paintings. Lennon's kindness towards Hague manifested itself in a number of ways with him sponsoring several one-man exhibitions and later by buying a house in Leamington for his artist friend.

ArtsTrail's new gallery is a fitting space for Hague's very large paintings. The show will feature his paintings of the Beatles and others from the original London exhibition. Hague's personal collection of band memorabilia including letters from John Lennon will also be on display.

Artist/curator Gerry Smith is delighted to have the opportunity to host this show. "Our ambition when we moved ArtsTrail was to be able to host major local exhibitions as well as provide a larger space for artists to display their work" he explains. It was a chance discussion with Jonathan Hague's daughter about the provenance of the paintings she wanted framing that intrigued Gerry to explore the history of the artist. "Finding the local connection helped make the decision and with a little help of many friends we have put this exhibition together in a very short space of time to host it on the same day as the 1967 original show".

Hague's children are equally excited about the forthcoming exhibition. "It will be the first time we have ever seen our dad's pictures in a public exhibition" explained Josh Hague. "Dad lost interest in painting so the pictures were just stored in his cellar at home – we were told to take any we fancied!"

The exhibition preview will take place on Monday 4 December from 7.30pm to 9.0pm and will open to the public on Tuesday 5 December. Opening hours will be 11am to 6pm every day until Christmas Eve, (closed Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day), then 11am to 6pm Monday to Saturday until 7 January 2018 when the exhibition will close. More information about ArtsTrail, its services, opening times and other events can be made by visiting the gallery in person during opening hours 11am-6pm Monday to Saturday or by visiting the website: <http://www.artstrail.co.uk>

ENDS

WORDS 511

Editors Notes

The preview for this exhibition will take place from 7.30pm – 9.0pm on Monday 4 December. Please contact Stevie Horton to register for your invitation.

Please contact us on the numbers below for photos or to arrange interviews.

Contact:

Stevie Horton, Iconic Music & Media

Email: stevie@iconicmusic.com

Phone: 07879 844397

ArtsTrail Studios and Gallery: The Old Main Post Office, Priory Terrace, Leamington Spa, CV31 1AA

Gerry Smith

Email: gerry@artstrail.co.uk

Phone: 07450 990389

<http://www.artstrail.co.uk/>

BACKGROUND

ArtsTrail Studios and Gallery

The pioneering Leamington Spa gallery and in-house studios relocated to The Old Main Post Office in September 2017. The venue has since undergone a major transformation inside and now provides a stylish, light and spacious gallery area to display an extensive collection of art by well-known and up-and-coming local artists. The Old Main Post Office also provides seven open studios.

The gallery space is also available to hire for private exhibitors and plans are already underway for ArtsTrail itself to host more major exhibitions in the forthcoming months. "The plan" Gerry explains "is to provide Leamington with a vibrant hub for the arts that is both inspirational and welcoming to everyone from all walks of life who wants to use it whether they are artists themselves or simply enjoy looking".

Gerry Smith BA (Hons) Fine Art, PGCE

Since 2010 Gerry Smith has been a creative force behind the visual arts in Leamington Spa. From an original concept in January 2010 using the open space beneath the glass roof in the Old Library to accommodate the needs of Leamington Studio Artists he set up Gallery 150 in the centre of town. A not-for-profit organisation, Gallery 150 provides support and services to the local artistic community. When the gallery moved to Livery Street Gerry set up the highly successful monthly Arts Fairs.

In October 2012 Gerry stepped down as Chair of the LSA. A year later he handed over the reins of Gallery 150 to concentrate on setting up ArtsTrail Studios. The new venture stood distinct from Gallery 150 and the LSA and has been incorporated as a charity. Moving several times around the town and now set up in The Old Main Post Office it now provides even greater services to the local arts community, and creates more opportunities for artists to both work from and exhibit their work from the premises. "Our aim is to help continue to put Leamington Spa on the map as a must visit town for the arts in the county – this exhibition is certainly one not to be missed".

Jonathan Hague

18 November 1938 - 22nd March 2015 (Age 76)

Jonathan Hague was a figurative painter specialising in extremely large oil paintings which filled the walls with colour. He was born in Llandudno in 1938 North Wales to Anderson and Doris Hague, the younger brother to sister Georgina (Georgie). His parents had met in Llandudno, his dad, whilst staying at a local hotel where his mum Doris was working. Jonathan, known as Jon, loved growing up in Llandudno.

Art has a strong history in the family, both his granddad and father painted and the talent was passed to Jon himself. His grandfather was renowned artist, Joshua Anderson Hague (1850-1916), a landscape oil painter and watercolourist who specialised in quiet pastoral scenes. He brought to life the idyllic village setting of Deganway, his home. His work was regularly exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, the Royal Cambrian Academy, the Royal Society of British Artists, Manchester Academy of Fine Arts and many others. His paintings can be found in the permanent collections of many major art galleries in this country.

Jon's father, Anderson (Dick) Hague also exhibited his work from 1908-1916 at The Royal Academy, the Royal Cambrian Academy, Manchester Academy of Fine Arts and The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

Jon's sister Georgie, remembers Jon's first day of school - 'He came home with a drawing he had done. Our parents took one look at it and declared "He's going to be an artist." How right they were. They kept that drawing for many years'

Jon went on to the Liverpool School of Art from 1957 – 1963 where he met and made friends with John Lennon who was in the same class. The two 'Johns' saw art college through together. As a result of his village life and boarding school upbringing Hague was not very streetwise so Lennon took it upon himself to teach him to become more so. He taught Hague how to dress and how to have his hair. But much more than that they shared the same great attitudes towards life and took care of each other. So much so that rumour has it that they once resorted to surviving on sugar and water and friendship to get by when their budget had run out on partying.

While still at art college Lennon tried to persuade Jon to be a drummer in his band The Quarrymen. Jon couldn't afford drums and said he had no musical talent. Lennon replied him saying 'none of us do'. As the Beatles were forming, Hague allowed them to practice in his flat but said "I always had to move out - the music seemed so bad".

In 1964 Jon won the Netherland State Painting Art scholarship and moved to Holland, where he lived in The Hague for three years. In 1965 he had a summer scholarship to study at Academie Belli Arti, Perugia. He had a one-man exhibition in The Royal Academy of Fine Arts, The Hague, and exhibited in many other group exhibitions in Amsterdam, the Redfern Gallery, London, Creative Art Patrons Gallery, London, the Talens Touring Exhibition and the Molenstraat Gallery. More locally he had exhibitions at The Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry and Leamington Spa Art Gallery in 1967. Many of his paintings were sold into private collections.

His last and extremely successful exhibition was in December 1967 at the Royal Institute Gallery, Piccadilly, London – sponsored by John Lennon, Paul McCartney and Revolution. The opening on 4th December was done by the then much famous John Lennon because he wanted Hague to get noticed. But the paparazzi, the television interviews and general media attention overwhelmed Hague. It became a turning point for the artist who decided he wasn't good enough.

Lennon said he always remembered how much Hague had looked after him in the college days and would give him everything he had, even his chips! So when Hague asked Lennon if he would lend him £500, to help with a deposit to buy a house. Lennon replied "I will buy you a house, go and choose one. You can pay me back if I am poor one day"

Hague decided to settle in Leamington Spa choosing 21 Leam Terrace as his home and became an art lecturer at Coventry and Birmingham University helping other young artists to develop their talent.

He met and married Rosemary, mother to 3 of his children - Jasper, Sadie and Eliza. He started a successful antique business called Hague Antiques and played golf most days. When he and

Rosemary split up he married Christine and had Joshua, his youngest son. He was a good father to all four of the children – taking them all out together on Sundays for lunch and outings.

Although his art was no longer his core focus, he always maintained a personal studio in each home he ever lived in. He died of Parkinson's disease and cancer at home in 2015 at the age 76.

Further reading:

<http://www.leafingtoncourier.co.uk/news/john-lennon-bought-house-in-leafington-1-1046300>

<http://babylonwales.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/jonathan-hague-and-john-lennon.html>

<http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/john-lennon-talking-with-the-painter-jonathan-hague-in-the-news-photo/104412044#john-lennon-talking-with-the-painter-jonathan-hague-in-the-royal-picture-id104412044>