

MILEIN COSMAN

A Centenary Exhibition of the Hampstead artist



Milein in Sarajevo, 1959; photographer unknown

'Being and Being Inspired'

Foreword by Isabel H Langtry,
Principal Hampstead School of Art

Remarkable lives are made so because they move us. Milein Cosman embraced so much of what makes Hampstead School of Art the community-minded Charity that it is. I met Milein, who was a long-time resident of Hampstead, eight years ago when I was invited via Julian Hogg to join her for tea. This was a delightful meeting - including homemade cake, during which she told me about meeting Henry Moore, who was the lifelong Patron of HSoA (then called Hampstead Artists Council), Francis Bacon and so many Hampstead artists whom she was inspired to draw. We met on several other occasions, each time the richness of her life stories and ways of working have since become art school legend. We are proud to own many beautifully illustrated books which display Milein's drawings and prints of musicians, dancers, composers, as well as Milein's equally extraordinary husband, the musician, writer, broadcaster and teacher Hans Keller; these books are much borrowed from the art school library.

We are delighted to have inherited Milein's painting easel and palette - on display in the entrance foyer - and many still life objects which inspire our everyday art school life.

I am delighted that an exhibition to celebrate the centenary of Milein Cosman's life and work, displaying a range of her drawings, prints, illustrated books, sketch books, and a bust of her husband is included. When Milein sadly died, The Cosman Keller Art and Music Trust continued its relationship with the art school. The Trust's support has been crucial to the Charity over the Covid years and it is wonderful to have such a close connection with Milein's representatives, with whom we have exciting plans for the future. Milein lives through us all.



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Biography

Milein was born in Gotha, Germany, 100 years ago but the family moved to Düsseldorf a few years later where she started school. She enjoyed her childhood days there, with the Rhine proving to be a regular source of inspiration for her art. Because of her family's Jewish background and the threat of National Socialism, however, she was sent to school in Switzerland for the last two years of her education. Milein loved drawing from a very early age: "Whenever I was bored during lessons, I would scribble in my sketchbook underneath my desk, and the teachers learnt to tolerate it". Her parents encouraged this interest in art and her father, who had wished to become an artist himself, often drew with her when she was a child.

In the summer of 1939, having finished school in Geneva, Milein came to England and immediately gained a place at the Slade School of Fine Art which was evacuated to Oxford during the war. In the summer vacation after her first year at the Slade Milein stayed with her mother who was living alone then in north London; her father had been interned as an enemy alien. Her parents had fled the Nazi regime just before war was declared and managed to reach London from Düsseldorf via Holland.

Milein loved to experiment with all sorts of media and each image in this exhibition is unique in that respect; there is a glossary of terms used here that can be found at the back of this booklet. A pencil or Conté stick were her favoured drawing implements in her early career, with pen and ink being added a little later at the suggestion of the editor of the BBC's *Radio Times* art editor for better reproduction purposes.

Milein continued to produce art until around the turn of the century when her eyesight began to deteriorate badly. Her work is represented in many leading museums in the UK and abroad; these include the British Museum, National Portrait Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum and the Hampstead Museum in London, as well as the Ashmolean

Museum in Oxford and the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. The Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf, Akademie der Künste and the Bundestag art collection in Berlin also have many fine examples of her work. All her extant drawings of musicians are now held in the Royal College of Music Museum, London, with her drawings of dancers in Salzburg University. In 2006 Milein founded The Cosman Keller Art and Music Trust whose aims and objects include supporting artists and musicians in need; there is a recently established scholarship in Milein's name at the Slade supported by the Trust.

MILEIN'S EASEL

This was a gift to the Hampstead School of Art from the Milein Cosman Estate. It was given to Milein by the American artist Bob Clark whom she met and befriended in Positano in the 1950s; he later came to London where she helped him find lodgings with a sculptor friend of hers. When he returned to the US a few months later he offered her this home-made easel as thanks for her assistance. He later called himself Robert Indiana, famed for his iconic screenprint sign LOVE.

HAMPSTEAD

On visits from Oxford to see her mother in north London, Milein fell in love with Hampstead and in the mid 1940s managed to rent various rooms in the area, often dilapidated and ill-equipped, before finding somewhere more suitable in Willow Road; she moved to Frognaal Gardens in 1967 with her husband Hans Keller where she remained for the rest of her life. Hans was a well-known musician, writer, teacher and broadcaster, also from a Jewish family; he had also escaped from the National Socialists in Vienna at the very last minute, having been arrested, tortured and threatened with his life. He worked in the BBC's Music Division for 20 years from 1959 but died of Motor Neurone disease in 1985.

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The Chef (Guy Monnier)
Oil on canvas, mid 1970's

The oil painting of the chef was created in Milein's kitchen in Frogmal Gardens. His name was Guy Monnier who worked at Le Cellier du Midi in Church Row, around the corner from Frogmal Gardens.



Hans Keller
Bronze resin, c.1960

HANS IN HAMPSTEAD

Hans Keller in the garden

Oil on board, c.1980

Unsurprisingly, Milein depicted Hans more than any other subject and this painting of him in their garden was done while he worked just outside the kitchen door.

Hans Keller

Bronze resin, c.1960

Milein didn't produce many sculptures but this is a striking example of one of the few. Her Art Executor Peter Black describes "... the pose of this powerfully modelled head with downward gaze is typical of Milein's focus on Hans' constant application to his work - whether reading, writing or speaking". The sculpture will be housed in the Cambridge University Library in future where the Hans Keller Archive has been held since 1996.

Hans Keller

Woodcut, late 1990's

This woodcut of Hans shows Milein experimenting again to depict her husband in a different light. The woodcut is, unusually, cut from plywood rather than the more common plank of wood where the grain is evident. Milein would happily draw, paint or create different images on the nearest suitable material to hand.



Henry Wood
Lithograph, 1940

OTHER MUSICIANS

Henry Wood

Lithograph, 1940

Milein was very musical as well as having a rare talent for art and had been drawing musicians before she met Hans in 1947. The previous year, she had regular commissions from the BBC's *Radio Times* who offered her frequent assignments to draw at rehearsals and concerts. Sir Henry Wood, best known for his association with the BBC Promenade Concerts, was also a keen painter and studied for a while at the Slade, Milein's alma mater. The sketch for this print was made at a wartime Prom in Queen's Hall. Lithography was the first printing technique Milein learnt, having been introduced to the process when at the Slade by Harold Jones; he was well known for his illustrations to Oscar Wilde's fairy tales.

Igor Stravinsky

Lavis, 1982

Stravinsky was the musician Milein drew more than anybody other than Hans. She confessed to being obsessed by his conducting: "I loved not only the intensive, athletic way in which he moved as he conducted, but the incessant changes of his face, in turn that of an absorbed musician, a bespectacled horse and a cuddly toy mouse". 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of his death.



Noh Demons
Screenprint, c. 1969

DANCERS

Fighting dance

Etching and watercolour with wash, c. 1979

Milein is almost as well known for her drawings and prints of dancers as she is for those of musicians, having received commissions from Ballet magazine to draw dancers, as she had from the Radio Times to draw musicians. The fact that both occupations necessarily involve movement is significant in that the depiction (or illusion) of movement was something that played an enormous part in the reputation she was acquiring. "In 1946 I discovered Javanese dancers who performed in a small theatre in Hampstead and who started my everlasting fascination with drawing dancers. I had been lucky to have known John Coast, who had invited the troupe to come over from Holland, and am eternally grateful to him for allowing me to go whenever I wanted, either in the wings or to the front of the theatre, to catch them, as it were, in flight".

Noh Demons

Screenprint, c. 1969

Milein started printing again after a lengthy gap since her lithography days at the Slade when she enthusiastically attended screen printing classes at the Camden Institute in Kentish Town in 1969.

Manipuri

Etching, c. 1979

A couple of years later she took up etching in Dolf Rieser's studio in West Hampstead followed by more classes at the Camden Institute. Neither she nor Hans ever drove but they had two garages at their house in one of which she installed her own printing press; the other housed a table-tennis table, a game both enjoyed playing together and with friends.



Francis Bacon
Drypoint and monotype, 1984

ARTISTS

In 1960, Milein's work was included in an exhibition in Hampstead Town Hall entitled 'Hampstead Artists'. Eight years later her series of portraits *Sculptors at Work* was shown as part of the City of London Festival and later that year at the Camden Arts Centre; this series had been commissioned by the Hampstead Artists Council. Milein was later a very keen and industrious member of the Camden Printmakers for many years.

Barbara Hepworth Drypoint, mid 1980's

Milein first met Barbara Hepworth in St Ives, Cornwall and they got on extremely well, with Hepworth inviting Milein to come and see her and continue the drawings when they were both back in north London.

Henry Moore Drypoint and wash, 1984

Henry Moore was a Hampstead artist whose work had come to define British modernism. He was an influential figure in the Hampstead Artists Council – the mother organisation of the Hampstead School of Art, founded in 1946.

Francis Bacon Drypoint and monotype, 1984

Milein met Francis Bacon once at a party and was surprised and impressed when he came to ask if she was alright because he thought she looked a bit forlorn; she was, untypically, sitting alone at that moment. Her portrait of him displayed here is referred to by Ines Schlenker, Milein's biographer, who wrote: "She reveals a profound knowledge of Bacon's work, employing a bold composition that echoes his own and a blood-red background reminiscent of the mutilated figures in his paintings".



Mozart's house, Salzburg

Pencil, c.1953

Hans and Milein went to the Salzburg Festival numerous times in the early 1950s; she would have found it impossible not to capture this scene. To draw people from behind was a very typical trait of hers, starting when she was a budding artist as a child. She much preferred this way of creating work, rather than having her subjects "sit" for her more formally.

MILEIN'S TRAVELS

Milein loved to travel and was never without a sketchbook when out and about - here or abroad. She visited many European countries, often accompanying Hans when he was attending festivals or conferences; they also visited Israel, Canada and South Africa together. She was an adventurous explorer herself, going to Nepal, India and Tunisia alone. Her output from these travels was prolific, drawing incessantly wherever she was.

La Garde-Freinet

Pen and ink with wash, 1953

A typical subject for Milein while on holiday, drawing an everyday scene in Provence that happened to catch her eye.

Utrecht

Conté, 1953

Milein visited Holland on many occasions - the home of Rembrandt, the artist she most admired. Again, she would frequently draw people going about their daily business as well as buildings and the numerous canals. She captured this canal in Utrecht several times using a conté stick to good effect.

Willow Cottages, Hampstead

Oil pastel, 1965

A charming drawing of cottages Milein must have seen hundreds of times from her house. There is a 'sister' oil pastel drawing of workmen in Willow Road that is now held in Burgh House, Hampstead.

Pulling in the boats

Watercolour and chalk on plywood, mid 1980's

An unusual medium for Milein gives a different feel to capturing the essence and mood of this early evening seashore scene. Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael and Rembrandt were early artists to have mentioned the use of chalk pastels.



Venetian masks
Drypoint and watercolour, c.1986

IN COSTUME

Circus clown
Pencil and watercolour, 1949

Coco [the clown]
Conté and watercolour, 1949

Milein loved going to the circus when a child and even longed to perform in one. Her drawings of clowns are legendary and they were ideal subjects to be captured, unaware of her presence.

Blue Pierrot
Etching and aquatint, 1976

Pierrot
Mixed media, c.1976

Milein was fascinated by the Pierrot character, a sorrowful, lovelorn clown, as were Watteau, Seurat and Picasso among other artists. This is a good example of how she depicted the same subject in different media; Milein used papier maché, paint, a slender wood "spill" and cut paper for this evocative, poignant figure.

Venetian masks
Drypoint and watercolour, c.1986

Clearly this characterful print came from a drawing made a long time earlier on one of Milein's trips to Venice.

GLOSSARY OF MEDIA TERMS

Aquatint

A variety of etching used to create tone, originally to imitate the effect of a watercolour wash. Within a dust-box, fine resin particles are shaken and allowed to fall as a thin layer on to a metal plate; this is then heated until the resin melts and fuses to the surface, forming a porous ground. During immersion in an acid bath, the acid bites into the minute channels around each resin particle. These hold sufficient ink to print as an even tone. Highlights can be obtained by 'stopping out' with an acid-resistant varnish (see under etching), or by burnishing down.

Bronze resin

Also known as cold cast bronze, a bronze resin sculpture is a cast made from a mould in exactly the same way as a traditional (hot) bronze cast, only using polyester, epoxy or another resin. Bronze powder is added to the resin or applied to the sculpture afterwards.

Chalk

A white form of limestone is a well-known art medium which is also the main ingredient of chalk pastels, coloured sticks made up of binder and pure powdered pigment. Both can be applied to dry paper or wood and then smudged and blended to create a diffuse, atmospheric effect.

Conté

A conté stick is a waxy drawing medium: it is square in section with a broad tip, with which tones can be created, while its sharp corners and edges permit the artist to draw precise and fine detail. The flat sides of the stick can be used 'broadside' to make gestural sweeps, swiftly marking out areas of tone, or even form.

Drypoint

The line is drawn directly into a metal plate with a sharp point held like a pencil, which throws up a metal burr along the incision. Ink is retained in the burr, producing a rich, feathery line when printed. Because the burr wears down easily under pressure from the press, only a few impressions showing the full richness of the drypoint can be pulled.

Etching

A needle is used to draw freely through a hard, waxy acid-resistant ground covering the metal plate. The exposed metal is then 'bitten' by acid, creating the lines. This is done by immersing the plate in an acid bath; the longer the acid bites, the deeper the lines become and hence the darker they print. The plate can be bitten to different depths by 'stopping out' the lighter lines with a varnish before returning the plate to the bath. The ground is then cleaned off before printing.

Lavis

Lavis is an intaglio process in which acid is brushed onto unprotected areas of the plate. Biting of the acid creates pitting in the surface which produces a light tone in printing.

Lithography

This technique of printing from stone or specially prepared zinc plates relies on the fact that grease and water repel each other. An image is drawn on the printing surface with a greasy medium, such as crayon or a lithographic ink containing grease. The printing surface is then dampened so that when greasy ink is applied it will adhere only to the drawn image and will be repelled by water covering the rest of the stone or plate. The ink is transferred to a sheet of paper by passing paper and printing surface together through a flat-bed scraper press.

Mixed media

In visual art, mixed media describes an artwork in which more than one medium or material has been employed. Materials used to create mixed media art include, but are not limited to, paint, paper, wood, cloth and found objects.

Monotype

Monotype indicates that it is a unique print, typically painterly in effect, made by applying paint or printing ink to a flat sheet of metal, glass or plastic. The painted image is transferred to paper by manually rubbing or using a press.

Oil

Oil paint consists of ground pigment bound with a medium of drying oil such as linseed, poppyseed, safflower or walnut; different oils affect drying time and yellowing. Oil paints can be used on wood, hardboard or canvas and were traditionally thinned down with turpentine. Before the 19th century, oil painting was confined to the studio because of its preparation process. This changed when tubes of oil paint became widely available (following the American portrait painter John Goffe Rand's invention of the squeezable metal tube in 1841) and it was possible to work in oils out of doors, most famously by the French Impressionists.

Oil pastel

Oil pastel is a painting and drawing medium formed into a stick of pigment mixed with a binder mixture of non-drying oil and wax, in contrast to other sticks which are made with a gum binder. The surface of an oil pastel artwork is less powdery than one from gum pastels, but more difficult to protect with a fixative. In 1947 Pablo Picasso (unable to procure oil pastels during the war), convinced the French manufacturer Henri Sennelier, to develop a fine art version.

Pencil

A cylindrical instrument consisting of an encased rod of graphite which can be used in varying degrees of softness to delineate swiftly and suggest movement, light and shade.

Pen and ink

Both nib and home-made reed pens can be used with Black Indian, blue-black and sepia inks. Water can be added to create a wash to add atmosphere or depth. Cross-hatching uses fine parallel lines drawn closely together to create the illusion of shade or texture.

Screenprint (also called Silkscreen)

A mesh is attached to a frame to form a screen, and a stencil, made of cut paper or film, or a photographically developed film of gelatine, is fixed to the mesh, masking it in some places and leaving it open elsewhere for the passage of ink. To make a print, a sheet of paper is placed underneath the frame, and ink is forced through the screen with a rubber blade known as a squeegee. Most screenprints use multiple screens to build up colour.

Wash

A semi-transparent layer of diluted ink or watercolour is spread over the paper surface with a brush, evenly enough to ensure there are no visible brush marks.

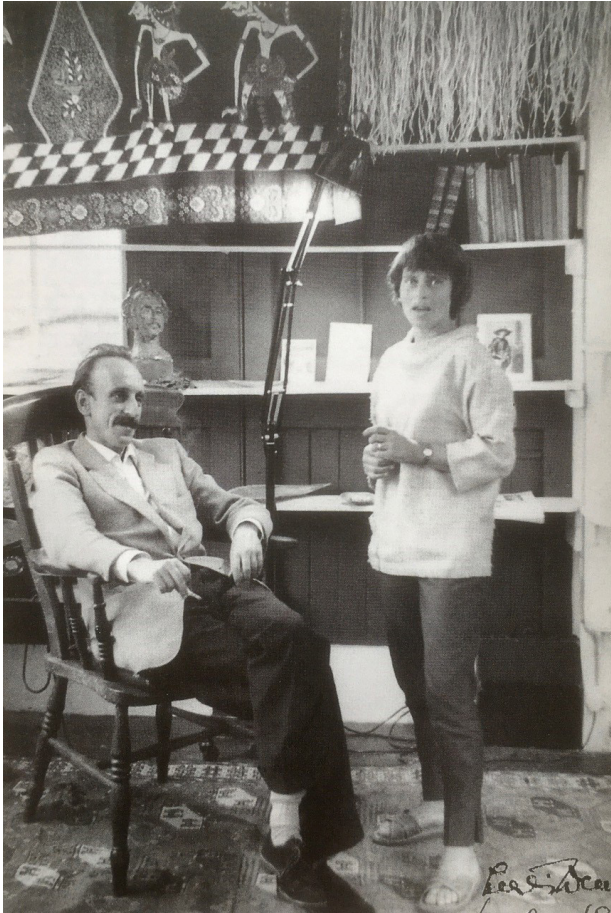
Watercolour

Watercolour paint consists of fine pigment particles suspended in a water-based solution. Usually used on paper, it is semi-transparent so the white paper gives a natural luminosity. Watercolour can refer to both the medium and resulting artwork.

Woodcut

A block, usually of plank wood revealing the grain, which is cut with chisels and gouges so that the areas to be inked stand in relief. Ink is then rolled on to the surface of the block, which is printed on a sheet of paper, either in a press under vertical pressure or by hand-rubbing the back of the paper.

Exhibition open from **15 December 2021 - 21 January**
To confirm your visit please call HSoA Office on **020 7794 1439**



Milein and Hans in Willow Road, London, 1961.
Photograph by Gerti Deutsch

"Drawings such as Milein Cosman's are... more than the sum of a talent for acute observation and an exceptional visual memory. To present a 'living, speaking image' of a human being requires above all an intuitive capacity for empathy, an inner resonance.")

Ernst Gombrich (1988)

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