

1967

Article in the Southport Visiter

"Boy (16) sells painting to a doctor for £35"

Boy (16) sells painting to doctor for £35

A large oil painting by a 16-year-old Southport schoolboy has astounded experts, and been bought by a local doctor for £35. It is a landscape of yachts on a river, over five feet by three feet, painted from the imagination of Alan Halliday, a sixth former at King George V Grammar School, Southport.

Mr. John Howard, a partner in Giddens and Co., the local art dealers who framed the picture, commented: "The work has been admired by art experts who have seen it here and assumed it to be the work of a mature artist. They have been astonished to learn it was done by a 16-year-old."

"It's certainly a bold venture and a remarkable painting for someone so young. He shows a lot of care in the medium he uses, and I feel he has a very promising future."

Extra tuition

Alan, of Moss Road, who has been painting since he was a toddler, took nine

months to complete the painting. "I suppose I must have sold about 30 paintings over the past three years," he said, "but most of them for only a pound or so."

He has already passed his G.C.E. "O" and "A" levels in art, and has been receiving extra tuition in the subject from Mr. Norris Harrison, senior art master at the school, who has encouraged Alan to develop his painting talent. Apart from landscapes, he paints still life and portraits.

Art critic

The son of a civil servant, Alan hopes to go to Courtauld's Institute of Art at London University to study the history of art. "You can't paint unless you know how others paint," he declared, adding, "I would like to be an art critic or writer, but my main aim is to paint."

He is also an enthusiastic student of literature and music, and last year was a member of the National Youth Theatre group which toured Germany.



Sixteen-year-old Alan Halliday putting finishing touches to his remarkable landscape.

1976

The Oxford Times, “Actor or Artist?”

Alan Halliday publicity photograph for the Oxford Playhouse Theatre, 1976.



1984

Alistair Hicks, art critic and author, ‘Mercury Magazine’ 1984.

“As long as there is light, Alan Halliday will paint. His watercolours have brought him considerable attention but are deceptive in their facility; their alarmingly simple appearance disguises an adroit use of paper.

It is, however, his oils that will startle. Some possess a near Munchian concentration of emotion - we will see more of this painter”.

1987



Alan Halliday lecturing with David Hockney in Los Angeles.

1993

Report in *India Weekly*, March 1993 following the Alan Halliday Exhibition at Bruton Street Gallery, Mayfair, London.

“Ramola Bachchan, irrepressible TV Asia and Radio Asia interviewer and reporter launched the “Centre for the Promotion of Indo-Western Contemporary Art” in England.

Mr K. V. Rajan Acting High Commissioner for India inaugurated the Centre at London’s Bruton Street Gallery last Tuesday where an exhibition of Alan Halliday’s paintings, resulting from his recent trip to India, was unveiled.

An exceptional talent

Mr K. V. Rajan in his inauguration address said:

“I had heard of Alan Halliday but had never been fortunate enough to see his work or meet him until today. I knew that he was an artist of exceptional talent, who had already made an impact

in art circles in London as well as a number of other countries: that he had risen to his present position apparently without formal training (a born artist if ever there was one); and that his affair with India began on his first, brief visit last year, when he created some of the works that we see today, and is likely to continue in the years ahead. I think that it is quite remarkable that a person can, on his very first contact with a country as large and as confusing as India, recapture not only India's colours but also India's ethos. It speaks volumes for Alan Halliday's sensitivity and artistic receptivity.

I also find it reassuring that Alan Halliday's favourite Indian God is GANESH. He happens to be mine too, and even though I completely lack artistic talent, I presume that this means that there must be some for me too!

The sale of Halliday's paintings this evening will, I am told, not only mean that the buyer will acquire a work of art by a distinguished British artist (which will, undoubtedly, also be a good investment). Apart from bringing satisfaction to the heart and to the eye, it will also directly help an Indian artist in dramatically changing his future by giving him international exposure. This is a message of great importance and creativity which today's private view must encourage".

2000

Moira Petty reviews the Halliday Exhibition 'Performers and Performances' at Collins & Hastie, Park Walk, London in *The Times*, 4th November.

"A performance artist in the wings"



photograph: *The Times*.

The best seat in the house for the "theatre and ballet-mad" artist Alan Halliday is perching on his foldaway stool in the wings, from which vantage point he can smell the greasepaint and the adrenalin. On a pad of A3 paper propped up on his drawing board, and using a stubby Japanese bamboo pen, Halliday makes decisive ink marks that capture the effervescent performances. Later in his studio, he creates his paintings.

The artist in the wings is a century-old tradition in Russia, and one warmly supported by the Kirov and Bolshoi ballets but little known here. Halliday began, as a student in the Seventies, taking the cheap standing room at the back of the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, from where he made his drawings, "freezing the pose in my mind" after the performer had moved on.

"Opera singers stand and deliver but most of the time their mouths are open, which doesn't look attractive, so I concentrate on body language, using light and shade".

After he launched himself as an artist in 1979, Halliday built up a portfolio of work and took it to Sir John Tooley, then chairman of the ROH. "One was of Sir Frederick Ashton in the grand tier watching one of his productions and Sir John really liked it"

He takes a box or, at Covent Garden, sits in the third row of the orchestra stalls where there is somewhere to rest his drawing board. He pays for his own ticket. "I can afford the best seats now", he says.

Halliday also works on film and television productions, such as *Shakespeare in Love*, where he renewed his acquaintance with Joseph Fiennes whom he had drawn in the RSC's production of *Troilus and Cressida*. "After the play's dress rehearsal he jumped into the stalls and asked to see what I'd done".

Halliday believes he may have inspired a memorable sequence in the film. "I use my pen like a quill and my hands get covered in Indian ink. The director was always watching me. In the film there is a scene where Shakespeare is practising his signature over and over again, and his hands become smeared with ink".

His prodigious output of over 500 paintings a year includes portraits-in-action of the opera singers Luciano Pavarotti and Bryn Terfel, ballet stars Irek Mukhamedov and Maurice Bejart and actors Sir John Gielgud, Alan Bates and Nigel Hawthorne. The BBC gave one of his paintings of Nicholas Lyndhurst as Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* to the actor as a wedding present, and Richard Briers's wife has bought four featuring her husband.

Halliday's pictures of Nureyev are in the Theatre Museum and an exhibition of his new works has just opened at Collins & Hastie in Chelsea.

Amiable, Halliday lives and works in Fulham, south-west London, where his companions are two beguiling Siberian husky dogs. Far from the paint-spattered anarchy of most artist's studios, Halliday is neat and methodical. Studies on paper are filed away, each given a reference number. He shudders: "I can't work in chaos".

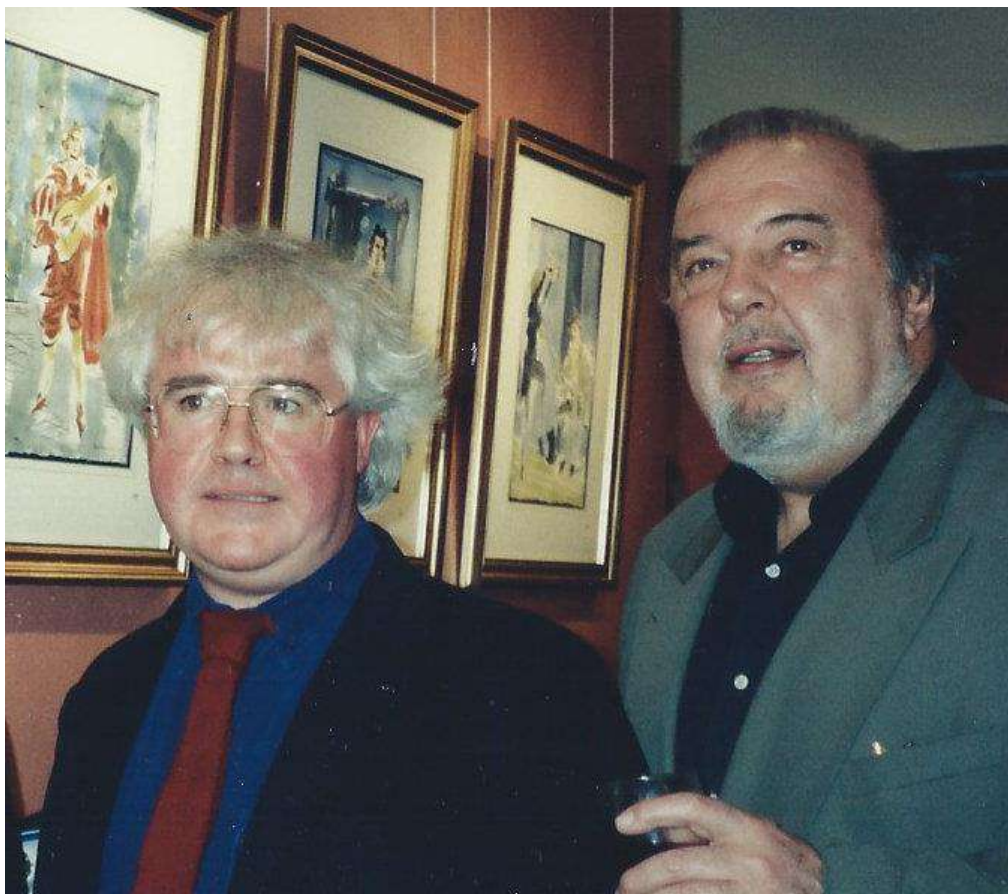
He is something of an enigma. He makes a good living but still works seven days a week. He enrolled at the Courtauld Institute, where his tutor was the novelist Anita Brookner. The director was Sir Anthony Blunt, Keeper of the Queen's Pictures, who was exposed in 1979 as a Soviet spy. "Every Friday afternoon a man in a raincoat would be shown up the staircase", says Halliday.

"It's often said that Blunt's students were his adoring apostles but that was not the case. He was a tyrant, unpleasant and vindictive. He would pick on people and it was like a KGB interrogation. I had a contract with Paul Hamlyn to write a short monograph of Renoir and Blunt had that cancelled. He also had my scholarship taken away".

Halliday moved to Oxford to write his doctorate on English artists working in Paris during the Napoleon period, under Professor Francis Haskell (Trinity), Miss Rachel Trickett (St Hugh's) and Dr Kenneth Garlick (Balliol).

After gaining his doctorate, Halliday "dropped academic life like a stone" and began painting on ambitious, six-foot canvases. He follows a non-linear style, with outlines left particularly open. He drew Sir John Gielgud while filming *The Tichborne Claimant*. "He didn't say anything, he just fixed with me with a fierce and beady eye".

Halliday says that the director Peter Hall understood the value of what the artist was doing. "He said that at the end of a run, it all disappeared into the ether but when I made my paintings from his productions, it was still there".



Alan Halliday with his mentor Sir Peter Hall.

Photograph, Brian Angel.

Alan Halliday Private View hosted by the Actors' Centre at the Spotlight Rooms in Leicester Square, London.

The Tatler, November, 2000

THE ACTORS CENTRE
RECEPTION AND PRIVATE ART VIEW AT SPOTLIGHT ROOMS

Mark Stephens – chairman of The Actors' Centre advisory board – and actress Rosalind Knight, who plays outrageous neighbour Beryl Merrit in *Gimme, Gimme, Gimme*, hosted a private view of the art of Alan Halliday at the Spotlight Rooms. Alan specialises in paintings of actors, and the event was held to raise funds for The Actors' Centre Development Appeal.

Above left: Sarah-Jane Strachan and Philip Day, who are currently appearing in Agatha Christie's record-breaking play *The Mousetrap*. Above right: Prunella Scales, one of Britain's best-loved actresses

Above: Actress Rachel Pickup. Left: Jane Campbell and Terri Seymour. Top left: Mal Fraser and his mother, Paddy Glynnne

In the Tatler, November 2001

The Private View of the Halliday Exhibition at Collins & Hastie, Chelsea, 2001.



2002

An abridged version of the review by Dr Thomas Tuohy of Alan Halliday's retrospective exhibition in 2001 at **Renishaw Hall, the seat of Lord and Lady Sitwell.**

The review appeared in *The British Art Journal*, Volume III, no. 2 in 2002

Alan Halliday
a mini-retrospective
at
RENISHAW HALL
Nr. Sheffield, Derbyshire
Exhibition open 10.30 - 4.30
Friday, Saturday, Sunday

SEPTEMBER	29th 30th
OCTOBER	5th 6th 7th
	12th 13th 14th
	19th 20th 21st
2001	26th & 27th

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Sir Reresby and Lady Sitwell

Alaric: *The Taming of the Shrew*

Alan Halliday at Renishaw

This autumn, in a new initiative, the gallery at Renishaw served as the space for a small retrospective exhibition dedicated to a contemporary artist, Alan Halliday.

Alan Halliday has long been established as the leading graphic interpreter of theatrical performances and his works seem particularly appropriate within the theatrical, literary and artistic context of the other attractions at Renishaw. Dr Halliday studied history of art at the Courtauld Institute in London before transferring to Oxford for his DPhil, which examined English artists visiting Paris between 1801-3 to study the Old Master painting that had been looted by Napoleon and put on display in the Louvre. This provided Halliday ample opportunity to investigate artists' techniques, which would hardly have been encouraged at any conventional Art School during the 1970s, and Halliday as a painter is essentially self-taught. To his already acute visual sensibilities were added further layers of understanding through art historical investigation. In Oxford he was also able to expand his personal theatrical experiences, already begun some years earlier with the National Youth Theatre. He played Iago, Bottom, Sir Toby Belch and Jack Worthing while at Oxford and productions he designed included *Twelfth Night*, Racine's *Britannicus* and Benjamin Britten's opera *The Rape of Lucretia* (for the premiere of which John Piper had provided designs).

Over the past 20 years Halliday has painted the major opera, ballet and theatre companies in England, and abroad his subjects have included the Bolshoi, Kirov and Bejart ballet companies, as well as the Metropolitan Opera in New York. His bear-like figure can regularly be seen with his drawing-board at the front of the stalls during rehearsals at Covent Garden, where eight exhibitions of his work have been shown, and he has regularly painted productions of the Royal Shakespeare Company and at the National Theatre, most recently Harold Pinter's adaptation of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Some paintings from this production are included in the exhibition at Renishaw, as are a number taken at the production of *Edward II*, with Joseph Fiennes, at the Crucible Theatre in nearby Sheffield.

The exhibition was densely hung as if echoing an earlier academic tradition. Although the works ranged over a period of more than 20 years, with oils and watercolours, there was a predominant vibrancy of tone, with emphasis on unscumbled primary colours, and while the subject matter ranged from early abstracts inspired by music, through topographical and theatrical subjects, the watercolours shared a fluency and lightness that characterise Halliday's work in this medium. The earliest works on display were densely coloured abstracts *Le sacre d'automne* dating from 1979 and 1980, followed by some still lifes, of which *Spring Still Life* of 1985, with a blue and white oriental vase juxtaposed with a bright yellow lemon serves as a good example of his bold colour contrasts that give such positive sensual pleasure. But a better example of Halliday's controlled reduced drawing style was *Dancer*, dating from 1986, a black space with a bold red surround, in which the outlines of a relaxed male standing figure is created by dragging a few sparse lines with the handle of the brush through thick black wet paint. Such economy recalls the vigorous drawing style of Gaudier-Brzeska.

Topographical views included works created in Venice and St Petersburg, to both of which Halliday has made frequent visits, and in Aldeburgh. Two small watercolours of the Venice Lido painted in 1998 have a light informal grace. Halliday's success in the topographical field is reflected in the commission by Christie's to record the damage of Kew Gardens caused by the great storm in 1987, and by the Barbican of interiors in Prague and Vienna to celebrate the Mozart Centenary in 1991. These were not represented in the Renishaw exhibition, but a visit to India in 1993, encouraged by Sonia Ghandi, was represented by a large oil of Humayun's Tomb in Delhi.

It is, however, as an interpreter of theatrical experience that Halliday makes his greatest impact. Any audience watching the same spectacle will see something different at any given moment, and what Halliday manages to create is not a literal, photographic record - indeed he eschews photography as an aid to painting - but rather a masterly suggestion of a given moment or mood into which, in the absence of too rigid a delineation, viewers can project their own detail. He provides the bones of memory that can be fleshed out with the participation of the viewer. It is regrettable that none of the finer watercolours of ballet dancers was represented here. Models have included Makarova and Mukhamedov and in his best examples Halliday has been able to capture the sense of atmosphere, movement and the elegance of balletic line. Ballet is represented here with two oils of the Kirov ballet taken in 1996, *The Firebird* having a distinctively bold and decorative Russian feel.

Halliday works from life at rehearsals with black ink applied with a Japanese bamboo brush which allows for great subtlety in the fattening and narrowing of the marks on the paper, but his drawing style owes more to the distinctive technique of Rembrandt than to oriental models. 'I do not delineate; I build in terms of drawn marks which I develop with tone and colour in the studio. The challenge is to capture in ink the sensation of the performance in the theatre while it is on the wing and to hold onto it until the painting is finished. This requires speed, accuracy - fierce concentration - and memory, which though selective, retains the essence of the image on the stage'. Among the most accomplished examples of this technique in this exhibition was a figure drawn at a performance of *Observe the Sons of Ulster marching towards the Somme*, a production of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, seen at the Barbican in 1996. A strongly defined figure of a soldier seen from the rear, described by a combination of flexible yet fragmented black lines, and by leaving the white of the paper surrounded by coloured wash, provides a surprisingly solid and enduring image. It is generally with these works of one or at most two figures that Halliday best succeeds in his difficult task of distilling the fleeting essence of theatrical experience.

This was Halliday's first retrospective and provided a good indication of his style but, as he would define it, this is a 'mini-retrospective'; and a more considered grouping, with more loans from private collections than have been possible here would show him to yet greater advantage.

2007

Article in 'Russian Life', April 2007

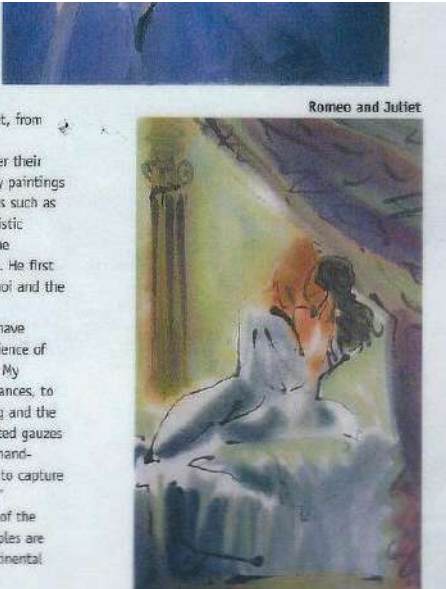
Ballet Artist

British artist Alan Halliday has become famous for his paintings from life of ballet dancers and of film and actors on location. His work has taken him all over the world, from Australia to Beirut, from Montreal to St. Petersburg.

Halliday began painting the Bolshoi in 1984, after their first tour in many years to the UK. "When he saw my paintings of his dancers, Yuri Grigorovich, the creator of ballets such as *Spartacus* and *The Golden Age*, and then still the Artistic Director of the Bolshoi Ballet, invited me to paint the company on a more regular basis," Halliday recounts. He first visited Russia in 1989, after painting both the Bolshoi and the Kirov on their international tours.

"Since then," Halliday continued, "my paintings have continued to increase in size and detail as my experience of the Kirov and the Bolshoi has grown and developed. My intended wish is to capture the spirit of the performances, to suggest the atmosphere created by the stage lighting and the audience in the darkened auditorium, the hand-painted gauzes that make up the stage-settings, the hand-painted, hand-stitched costumes, wigs and makeup, and above all to capture the lightning movement of the dancers on the wing."

A world premiere showing of Halliday's paintings of the Bolshoi and Kirov over the past 20 years (a few samples are shown here) will open March 9 at London's Intercontinental Hotel, Hyde Park Corner. For more information, visit:



Romeo and Juliet

"The art of movement"

Article in Square Mile Magazine, 2007

DR GURDON WATTLES OF DEUTSCHE BANK, EXPLAINS HIS LONG ASSOCIATION WITH, AND APPRECIATION OF, ARTIST ALAN HALLIDAY

DR GURDON WATTLES OF DEUTSCHE BANK, EXPLAINS HIS LONG ASSOCIATION WITH, AND APPRECIATION OF, ARTIST ALAN HALLIDAY



I first met Alan Halliday in 1983, when he was completing a series of sports paintings called 'Rugger Blues'. He had recently come to Oxford from the Courtauld Institute, where his teachers included Anthony Blunt and Anifa Brookner. Alan explained the deal: if you sat for him, you could take your pick between an hourly wage, or one of the paintings at the end of the series. As a hard-up student, the cash was tempting, but I opted for a painting. I'm glad I did: Alan went on to become a successful and well-known artist, and I have since bought a number of his paintings.

'Rugger Blues' was, as it turned out, only the first of Alan's many series of sports paintings. He has painted horses and riders at Royal Ascot and at the Cartier polo tournament at Windsor, and has done many rowing paintings at the Royal Regatta at Henley, where he lived for six years and twice exhibited at the Henley Festival.

As a sports painter, Alan developed a brilliant ability to capture the human form in movement. None of his sporting subjects ever stand still for him. With a few strokes of a bamboo reed pen and black India ink, Alan captures the energy and the poise of an athlete or a galloping horse. Alan also developed a passion for theatre, opera and dance. He was given access to dress rehearsals at the Royal Opera House, where he staged nine exhibitions during the 1980s, and has painted

at the National Theatre, the Old Vic, and many other houses. Actors and dancers, like athletes, come alive with a few fast, assured, compelling lines. Alan has no choice; he has to capture the moment of drama before it disappears. Grace, passion, tension and humanity are frozen in the immediacy of the performance. Alan may add the colours and the fine details months, or even years, later. As his paintings come together, he

He has a rare ability to capture human form in movement

paints in a style more French than English, relying for effect on brushwork and touch. It is painstaking; it is accurate; it is authentic.

Alan's work takes him across the world, but he captures the exact quality of light wherever he paints. He captures the big East Anglian skies over the flats of Aldeburgh, in Suffolk, where he painted at the music festival; the light off the water in Venice; or the cold, eerie glow of the snow in a Russian winter landscape. Buildings, trees, wavelets and shadows all appear - literally - in their true light.

Alan sometimes has to work fast. He once told me



how, sitting in the Lodhi Gardens in Delhi, a young boy strode proudly up through the early morning mist, leading a bear recently captured in the Himalayas with a ring through its nose. The confidence of the young bear tamer and the huddled fear and misery of the captive beast were too great an opportunity to miss for a painter like Alan. Here was drama, pride and pain, in an instant.

'The Bear Tamer' now hangs in my hallway. ■

For further information about the paintings of Alan Halliday (including private commissions), or to be invited to exhibitions, go to www.alanhalliday.com

2016

Review in *La Nouvelle République* of an exhibition of paintings of the Chateaux of the Loire Valley by Alan Halliday held at the **Chateau de Villandry** in March- May, 2016

“Villandry, Alan Halliday, un peintre anglais au château »

« C’est aujourd’hui que le château de Villandry, ouvert à la visite depuis ses vacances de février, lance sa saison culturelle avec le peintre anglais Alan Halliday. Un début de saison culturel de haut niveau avec ce peintre formé au Courtauld Institute of Art de Londres, également diplômé d’un doctorat d’histoire de l’art de l’université d’Oxford. Lui qui aurait pu être artiste de théâtre a décidé d’assouvir sa passion pour la peinture et de s’y consacrer à 100% en explorant l’art pictural sous toutes ses formes.

Ainsi se joue-t-il des thèmes, des dimensions, du support, de la technique, passant avec aisance de la peinture à l’huile, à la gouache sur papier mais aussi à l’encre de Chine. Son inspiration, il la puise partout et la transmet sur la toile en nature morte, paysages ou voyages dans l’abstrait. Artiste international, il a exposé ses œuvres en Grande Bretagne bien sur, mais aussi en Inde, en Allemagne, aux Etats-Unis, en France, aux Pays-Bas et en Belgique et certaines de ses oeuvres on trouvé refuge au Museum of London et la Folger Shakespeare Library, à Washington. Mais cette fois-ci, c’est Villandry qui sera sa galerie d’exposition, au dernier étage du château. Il y expose jusqu’au 30 mai, sa vision du val de Loire, de ses paysages et de son patrimoine, mais aussi sa vision du château de Villandry et de ses jardins ».

2016

A review of an exhibition of theatre paintings by Alan Halliday which was held at St. John's College Oxford in 2015, forty years after the artist went to St John's for five years as a research graduate in the history of art, starting in January 1975.



This review by Jennifer Rushworth appeared in *Benefactors* magazine in 2016.

"Vive le théâtre!"

"Alan Halliday has been a professional artist for over 35 years. His paintings interpret theatre performances, and can be found in the collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Theatre Museum, the Museum of London and the Folger Shakespeare Library as well as in a number of Oxford colleges. Alan generously gave St. John's both an exhibition and a painting. Here, Dr Jennifer Rushworth, Junior Research Fellow in Modern Languages and self-confessed Proustian, reviews *Vive le théâtre!* An exhibition held in the Kendrew Barn in February 2015.

It was a pleasure to welcome Alan Halliday back to St John's College where he was awarded a DPhil in 1982 on English artists in Paris during the first few years of the nineteenth century. (Another St John's alumnus and an Honorary Fellow, the singer Ian Bostridge, graced the exhibition with his tall, svelte figure depicted in 'Death in Venice', which Halliday has now given as a gift to the College). Halliday's academic interests in Anglo-French relationships were reflected in this exhibition, which drew on many canonical operatic and literary works from either side of the Channel: on the one hand, Shakespearean classics such as *Romeo and Juliet* and two monochromatic renditions of *Hamlet*; on the other, *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*, also coincidentally a favourite of Proust.

Prominent Italian and in particular Venetian themes complicated this cosy entente cordiale, and in the first room three large-scale paintings invited comparison between these three national cultural traditions. 'La Comédie anglaise' and 'La Comédie française' echoed one another

structurally, composed as they are of a neat series of boxed-in tableaux of individual figures, though the French rendition is more muted in colour. In contrast, 'La Comédie italienne' is a deliberately chaotic, vibrant, carnivalesque piece, with no such schematic structure and with interaction between characters revealing an almost uncontrollably sociable nature. Whether these national stereotypes are accurate or parodic is a matter of taste, but a suggestion of the infinite possibilities is ultimately suggested by the last figure at the bottom right of the 'Comédie française', who is cheekily turned away from his companions to saunter out of the painting altogether. All three paintings represent a sort of crib, gloss or catalogue of characters scattered throughout the exhibition.

Proust is a constant point of reference for Halliday, particularly since his time studying the National Theatre's rehearsals for and production of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, adapted for the stage by Harold Pinter and Di Trevis in 2000-2001. Halliday finds in Proust a kindred spirit through their shared passion for music, Venice and Russian ballet. One painting in this exhibition explicitly presented 'Proust: the Vinteuil Sonata', with a glittering Odette turning away from the music and peering out at the audience, as if more interested - in a typical act of Proustian snobbishness - in being seen to be at the concert than in the music itself. A further painting from this production hangs permanently close by in the Kendrew Café, mirrored by a depiction of a scene from *Peter Grimes*, a subject also reprised in the exhibition.

As a keen and by all accounts talented actor early on with the National Youth Theatre and later during his time at Oxford (in 1977, he was offered a contract to join the RSC, but turned down the offer in order to complete his DPhil), Halliday surely remembers well that calm-before-the-storm moment of excitement and agitation that precedes stepping out onto the blinding brightness of the stage. The only backstage painting of this exhibition ('*Tosca* backstage' from a production by Francesca Zambello at Earls Court) encapsulated this moment beautifully in the tense isolation of three dark figures seen from the back shifting from foot to foot.

Halliday is a sort of modern-day, English Degas, revelling in the fluidity and poise of the theatre. His bold, colourful brush strokes and free and flexible style capture brilliantly the essence of the stage: light and movement, grace and muscle".

2017

Article by Eilis McCarthy (Archivist, Royal Opera House Covent Garden) June 2017

“Drawing on our history: how drawings bring The Royal Opera’s past to life”

Artist Alan Halliday drew and painted general rehearsals for more than 25 years, now preserved by ROH Collections.



Detail from Triumphant dance. Elektra. Page 27 of Alan Halliday’s sketchbook of the general rehearsal of Elektra, The Royal Opera, 1990, copyright ROH Collections

ROH Collections works to preserve the history of the Royal Opera House by collecting and storing items that document the life of the building. Many of our precious items come from generous donations, and in December 2016 we received a remarkable offer from an artist with a long and unusual history with the Royal Opera. Painter Alan Halliday worked front of house in the 1970s, while a student at the Courtauld Institute of Art. In Halliday’s own words, the experience ‘enabled me to see night after night some of the greatest singers, dancers and productions the Royal Opera House has ever presented - Nureyev, Fonteyn, Boris Christoff, Geraint Evans, Domingo, Pavarotti, Sibley and Dowel...’. He also gained a detailed, first-hand knowledge of the Royal Opera House and how it worked.

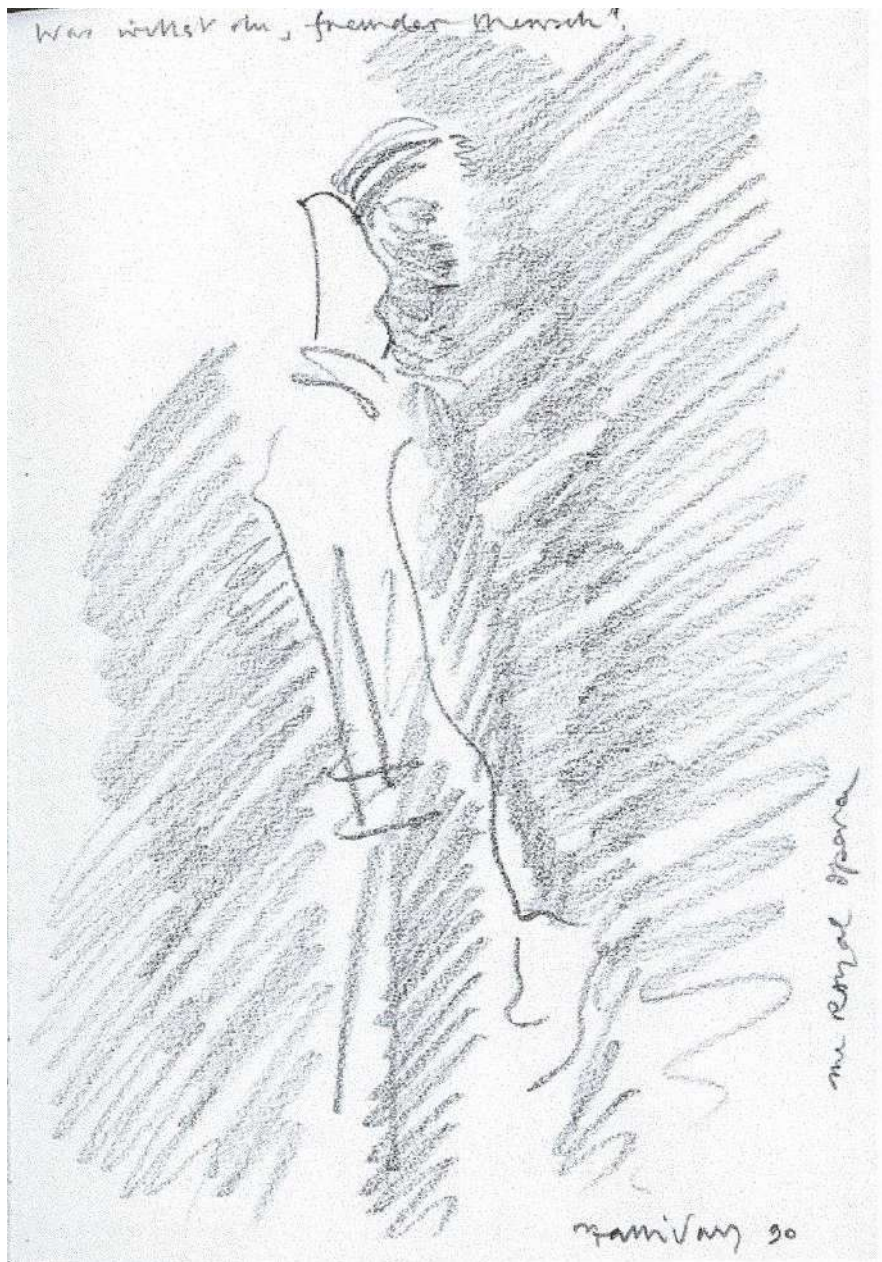
In 1979, now working as a professional artist, Halliday returned to Covent Garden and made drawings of members of The Royal Ballet from the standing area at the back of the Stalls Circle. On seeing his portfolio, the ROH’s General Director John Tooley and The Royal Ballet’s Founder Choreographer Frederick Ashton invited Halliday to draw at general rehearsals (the last rehearsal before opening night). Halliday went on to draw both The Royal Opera and The Royal Ballet for the next 25 years.



The sketchbook donated to ROH Collections contains drawings made in 1990 at the general rehearsal of Gotz Friedrich's new production of Richard Strauss's opera Elektra. The drawings were made during the rehearsal and run chronologically through the rehearsal. It was offered to ROH Collections on behalf of Alan Halliday by Stephen Camburn of the Camburn Fine Art Gallery in France, which specializes in Halliday's paintings.

The sketchbook begins with a portrait of conductor Georg Solti, arms outstretched. We then move to the performers on stage: Eva Marton as the suffering, furious Elektra; Nadine Secunde as her beautiful sister Chrysothemis; Robert Hale as their brother Orest, thought to be long lost; Marjana Lipovsek as their sickly mother Klytemnestra and Robert Tear as her lover Aegisth.

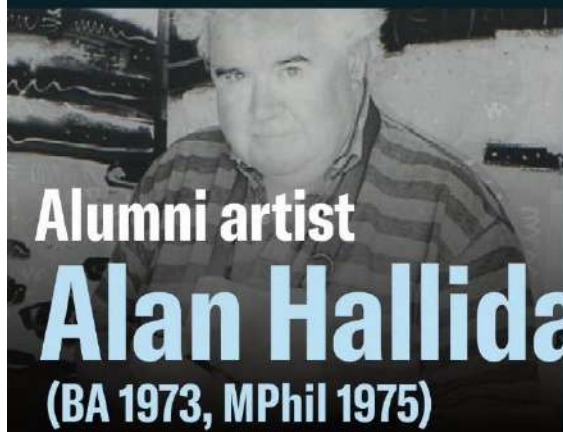
Above some of the images Halliday supplies text that ties the drawing to a specific line from the opera. In 'Orest is tot!' (Orestes is dead!) the despairing Elektra clasps her hand to her mouth; and in 'Was willst du, fremder Mensch?' (What do you want, stranger?) the returned Orest, unrecognized by his sisters, is half-submerged in darkness. The sketchbook closes with powerful images of Elektra's final dance to her death.



'Was willst du, fremder Mensch?' Page 17 of Alan Halliday's sketchbook of the general rehearsal of Elektra, The Royal Opera, 1990 copyright ROH Collections

The sketchbook is a beautiful item in its own right. But it also makes a valuable addition to the ROH archive, adding detail and a unique perspective to our records of this production of Elektra.

ALUMNI ARTIST



Alumni artist Alan Halliday (BA 1973, MPhil 1975)

I am Dr Allan Halliday and I hold degrees in art history from both The Courtauld and the University of Oxford. At The Courtauld, my special period was 1750-1830, taught by Anita Brookner and Michael Kitson, and my special subject was 1900-1915 where my tutors were John Golding and Christopher Green. The Courtauld was at that time under the directorship of Anthony Blunt.

In 1979, I became a full-time professional artist and that has been my 'métier' ever since. For the last four decades I have exhibited regularly in London, Europe, the Middle East, the Far East and across America. I have specialised in paintings of performers and performances, including theatre, opera, ballet, and film; and from 1980-2008, I painted every dress rehearsal of the Royal Opera and the Royal Ballet. In 2008, I moved to the Loire Valley in France where I have much more space, including two large studios devoted to works on paper and oils on canvas. As a result, my canvases have become bigger and more abstract as I continue to work more and more from memory, eliminating the unnecessary and bringing out the essential. During the pandemic when all my gallery exhibitions and art fairs were closed down, I have continued to paint but I have also taken up writing fiction again, and produced a number of novels, plays and screenplays which are under consideration at the moment.

My favourite painting in The Courtauld Collection was, and remains, Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882). It is a masterpiece on many levels. The handling of paint, especially in the foreground still life is second to none and was painted freehand without the aid of a camera obscura because there are a number of visible 'mistakes' which herald modernism. The background is a reflection in a



Alan Halliday, *Mozart and the Wolf-Gang* (2018). Image courtesy of the artist

large wall-mirror of what is happening behind our backs as we look at the painting. We are supposedly the man in the top hat talking to the girl behind the bar. His reflection is mysteriously transposed over to the right hand side of the composition and people have often wondered about this. But bar mirrors in France are often set at right angles to each other, which would explain the displacement of the reflection. Also, I have always liked the trapeze artist's legs in the top left hand corner and the convincing sense of space in the reflection of the audience, including the young woman with the opera glasses who looks to me like Berthe Morisot with whom Edouard Manet was in love (but she married his brother). In my view, this painting is deeply personal on the part of the artist, and it inspires me because my own art has always been emphatically autobiographical.



Edouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) Image © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

