

**ROGER HILTON**



29 R H



31 R H



32 R H

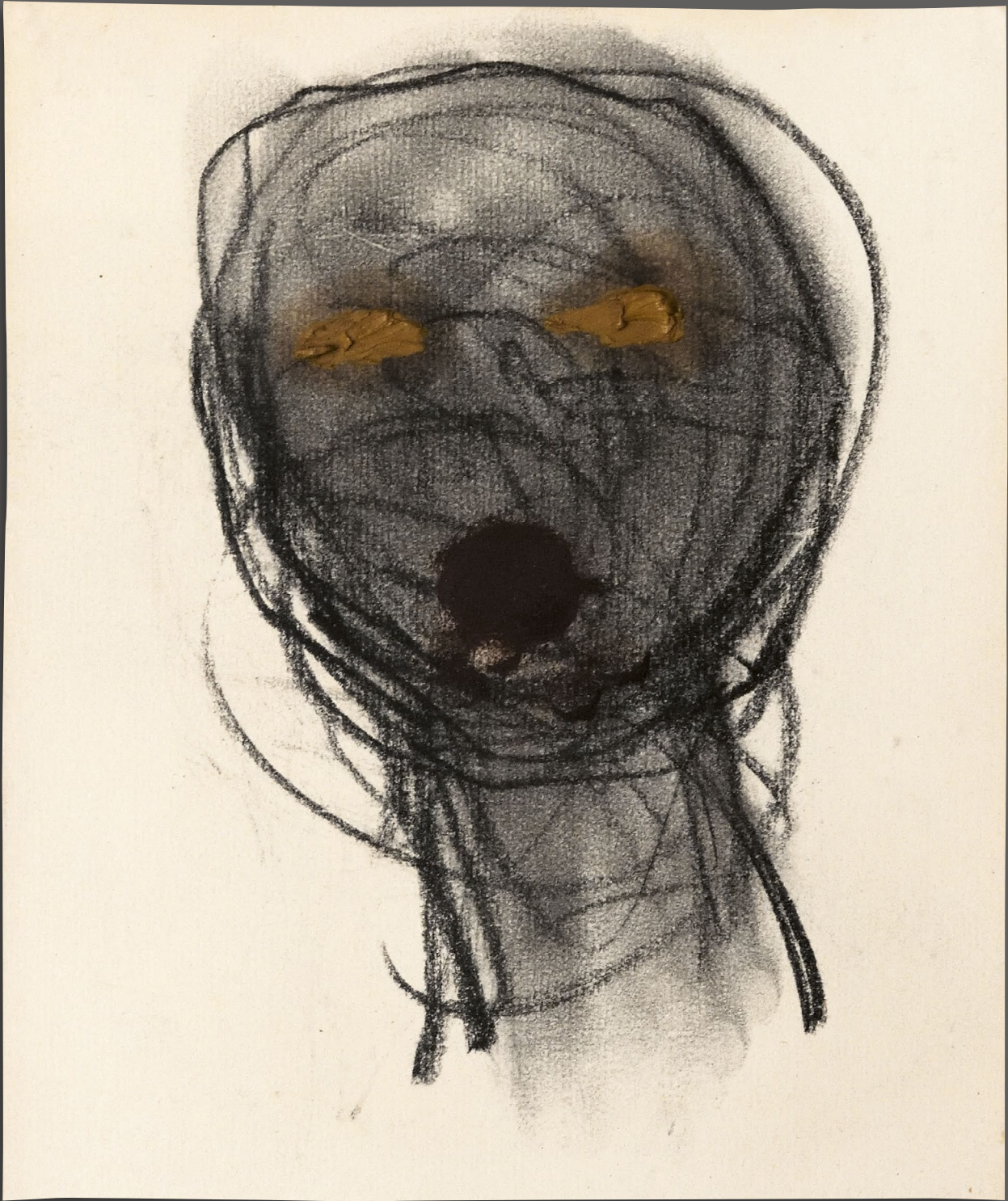
28 R H



# **ROGER HILTON**

1911-1975

In memory of Rose



# ROGER HILTON

Oil Paintings

JONATHAN CLARK FINE ART

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Hulton

JAN '69

20 x 20  
x30

## ROGER HILTON – Violent Figuration

by Chris Stephens

Roger Hilton was the most exciting painter working in Britain after the Second World War. He was turning fifty when his true originality became clear with a body of work produced at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 60s in which scraggly line and sensuous paint could make up an abstract composition, the image of a figure or, most commonly, something that combined the two through suggestion and allusion. It was only with the eruption on to the scene of David Hockney that Hilton's title as Britain's most original painter was threatened. Hilton is most often lumped with the St Ives artists of the 1950s – Peter Lanyon, Patrick Heron, Terry Frost and others – artists seen as the British equivalent to French *tachisme* and American Abstract Expressionism. In fact, he knowingly remained separate from their aesthetic values though he was certainly part of that social group. Instead, he explored and experimented with new ways of painting the figure and, for that reason, had more of a legacy in younger artists' work than any of his peers. In fact, now, in the 21st century, we might see him and his significance lying in his position somewhere between the pure modernism of Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the postmodern figuration of Hockney and the neo-expressionist work from the 1980s of artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat.

As a modernist innovator, Hilton was a late starter. He was born in 1911. Spurning a place at the Slade,

he spent the 1930s shuttling between Paris and London and would later make much of his grounding in traditional Parisian painting skills. This was typical: Hilton sought to break the mould of painting but wanted radical innovation to be based upon solid traditional values. He was passionately and eloquently attached to formal and technical qualities of painting – colour, space, facture – yet was insistent upon the need for a subject, particularly the human figure. His importance lies in his insistence on the centrality of the human figure at a time when formalism seemed to reign supreme. The conundrum he faced was made clear in a letter to Terry Frost in the summer of 1955:

**It is disconcerting not knowing whether my next show will be of chaste abstracts or violent figuration but in any case it will be one or the other. If abstract they will be fulgurant, demonic, tragic, expressionistic, violent, wanton and destructive. It seems to me this is the nature of the time we live in with untold possibilities of destruction, untold possibilities of building a new world.**

He was familiar with human cruelty; as prisoner of war, Hilton had seen horrific events and later noted that following his return he saw 'life as gratuitous gift'.

After the war Hilton had naturally looked to Paris and developed a non-figurative painting style in line

with recent French painting. In 1953, however, he had a breakthrough following a visit to Amsterdam where, at the Stedelijk Museum, he saw in depth the work of Piet Mondrian and other de Stijl artists and, most significantly, that of Kasimir Malevich. Hilton would never have seen such an uncompromising commitment to non-representational painting before and he quickly adopted the reduced palette of Mondrian and the dynamic forms of Malevich. For the next year, he made a series of works made up of blocks of colour which sit alongside or within and around each other but are always visibly on the same, flat level, never overlapping. In contrast to those modernist masters, however, he injected a palpable human element through his rich, sensuous application of paint. Each, single-coloured form has a powerful physicality deriving from the lively way it has been applied. The expressive power of Hilton's brushwork was always one of his greatest assets; as early as June 1952, Heron had observed: 'he cannot put brush to canvas without creating a splotch, smear, streak, stain or smudge (in other words "a brushstroke") that is charged with expressive quality'.

Through these neo-plastic works of 1953-4, Hilton participated in a short-lived revival of the values of early abstract art though the energy of his surfaces indicated a need to include the messiness of human life. These works were shown at the Symon Quinn Gallery, run by architect Peter Stead in Huddersfield, where they were hung between vertical poles in the middle of the room not against the wall. Hilton might have moved into the kind of Mondrianesque architecture to which his friends from the CoBrA

group, Stephen Gilbert and Constant A. Nieuwenhuys, moved around that time. But his instinct was towards the more evidently human. 'Abstraction in itself is nothing', he wrote in 1961, 'It is only a step towards a new figuration, that is, one which is more true. ... For an abstract painter there are two ways out or on: he must give up painting and take to architecture, or he must reinvent figuration'.

Reinventing figuration was what Hilton set about in the later 1950s. A few works of these glory years were clearly of a human figure, albeit distorted and squeezed into the picture frame. Most, however, appear non-representational and yet allude to or conjure an idea of the human body either through certain features or through the suggestion of the body's processes. He developed a unique style of painting that subverted all the existing protocols: areas of emphatically applied paint might seem to float free on the picture surface; others may lie one over the other like transparent veils; charcoal lines were often as important as the paint, and just as energetically expressive, though they were not just preparatory but were visible beneath the paint and, frequently, were drawn over and dragged through the paint. The effect is one of immediacy, of the sensual qualities of the materials, and the physicality of the picture's making. The paintings are evidently quickly made yet, despite that, and their wandering, scraggly lines and asymmetrical arrangement of forms and colours, Hilton's innate skill ensures they possess a formal harmony. Frequently, the abstract qualities of the work is overlain or subverted by suggestions of the human figure. Certain forms recur like ciphers: a few lines might suggest pubic or armpit hair; others

suggest nipples, navels, an anus, vulva or a penis. That they are of such unquestionable good taste is extraordinary given the imagery and the fact that the nature of their making recalls graffiti more than anything.

It is here, I think, that Hilton's legacy lies. Hockney acknowledged Hilton as one of the British artists on his mind when he started out. He linked his influence to the abstractions that he made shortly after arriving at the Royal College of Art in 1959. With suggestive forms and titles like 'Queer', 'Shame' and 'Erection', Hockney looked back at those early works of his as 'a kind of mixture of Alan Davie cum Jackson Pollock cum Roger Hilton'. More than that, though, we might see Hilton as presaging the graffiti-like figures that Hockney went on to depict in his later RCA works, most famously *We Two Boys Together Clinging*, 1961. Certainly, he had a similar, acknowledged impact on the distorted nudes of the young Australian Brett Whitely who he met in London in late 1960.

As the 1960s came to an end, the passionate and expressive painting of such artists seemed to be going out of fashion. Hockney famously railed against the growth of conceptual art as opposed to work that addressed the human experience. Meanwhile, suffering a slow decline as a result of alcoholism, Hilton was ensconced in Cornwall making small pictures in children's poster paint as full of sex and scabrous humour as ever. Unexpectedly, these can now be seen as one of the great bodies of an artist's late work not unlike in some ways the last paintings of Picasso. It was

only in the 1980s that an expressive form of figurative painting came once more to the fore, marked by the exhibition *New Spirit in Painting* (1981) that included Hockney's recent work and late Picasso. Many of the younger artists in that show – Anselm Kieffer, George Bazelitz for example – could be readily located in relation to grand traditions of painting. In contrast, a painter not included who emerged in New York around the same time, Jean-Michel Basquiat, came out of the world of street art. Though drawing on an eclectic range of world cultures, the scratchy lines, asymmetrical compositions, and informal relationship of painting to drawing resonate with the work that Hilton had pioneered at the beginning of the 1960s. Though modest in scale, those works had pushed the boundaries of what was then acceptable in painting and, in that radical rethinking of how the human experience might be embodied in paint, anticipated several subsequent generations of artist. That, as much as Hilton's brilliance as a painter, should secure his reputation for generations to come.

June 2022

1

**July '53** 1953

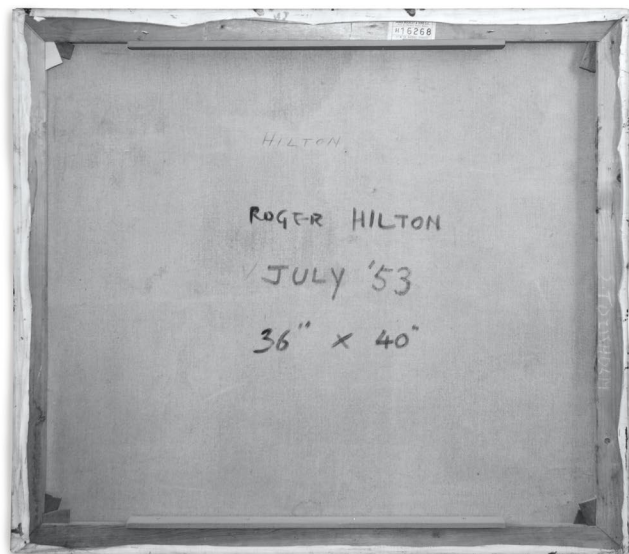
signed & dated verso

oil on canvas

36 × 40 in / 91.4 × 101.6 cm

**Provenance**

Private Collection Sweden





2

**September '53** 1953

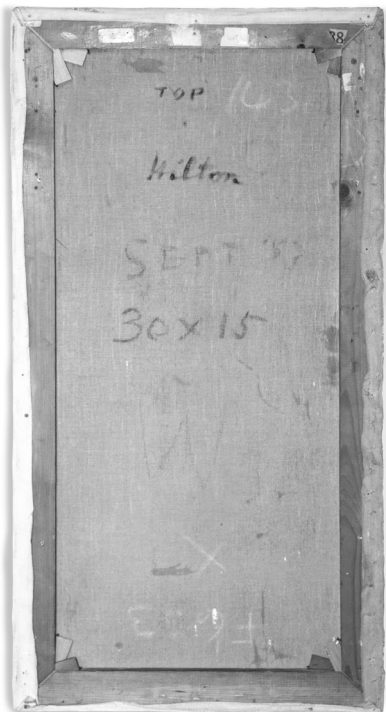
signed & dated verso  
oil on canvas  
30 × 15 in / 76 × 38 cm

**Provenance**

Waddington Galleries  
Private Collections UK

**Exhibited**

Symon Quinn Gallery, Huddersfield, *Roger Hilton*, September 1955, cat. 20  
Scottish Arts Council Gallery, Edinburgh, *Roger Hilton*, 15 June-15 July 1974, cat. 10  
Hayward Gallery, London, *Roger Hilton*, 4 November-6 February 1994, cat. 13, illus.





### 3

#### **December '53** 1953

signed, titled & dated verso

oil on canvas

17 × 36 in / 45 × 91 cm

#### **Provenance**

Rose Hilton

Jonathan Clark Fine Art

Private Collection UK

#### **Exhibited**

Gimpel Fils, London, *Roger Hilton*, April 1954, cat. 34

Symon Quinn Gallery, Huddersfield, *Roger Hilton*, September 1955, cat. 4

Scottish Arts Council Gallery, Edinburgh, *Roger Hilton: Drawings and Paintings*, 15 June-15 July 1974, cat. 12

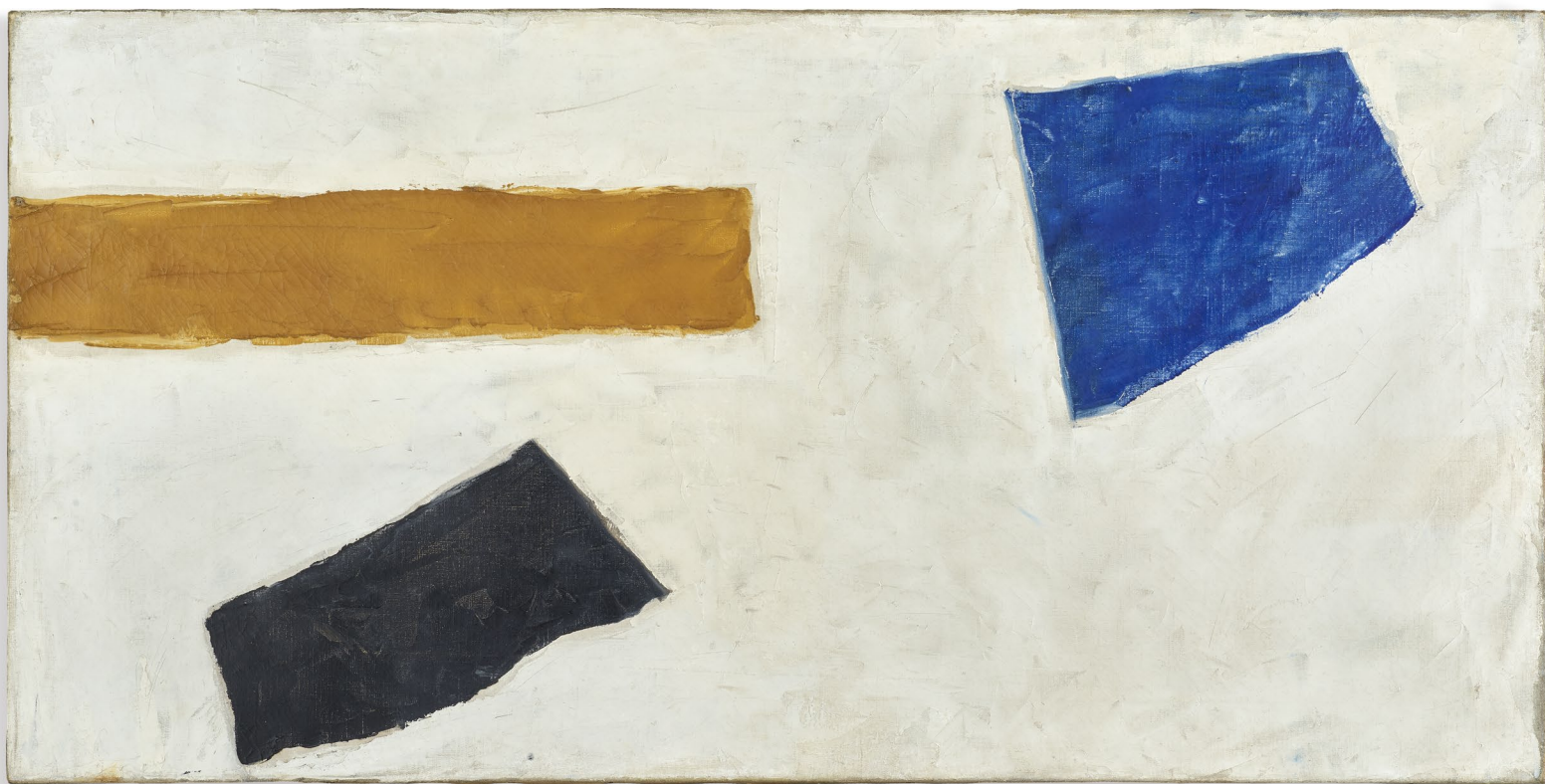
Polytechnic Gallery, Leicester, *Roger Hilton: the Early Years*, November 1984, cat. 84

Hayward Gallery, London, *Roger Hilton*, 4 November-6 February 1994, cat. 15, illus. colour

#### **Literature**

Lawrence Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists*, 1954, illus. no 28

Chris Stephens, *Roger Hilton: St Ives Artists*, 2006, p27 illus. no 15



4

**Brown Painting** November 1959

oil on board

69 × 48 in / 174 × 122 cm

**Provenance**

Waddington Galleries

Alex Bernstein

Sam Fogg

**Exhibited**

Waddington Galleries, London, *Roger Hilton*, May 1960, cat. 7

Serpentine Gallery, London, *Roger Hilton*, March 1974, cat. 37

Scottish Arts Council Gallery, Edinburgh, *Roger Hilton*, June 1974, cat. 25





5

**Untitled** 1959-61

signed & dated verso

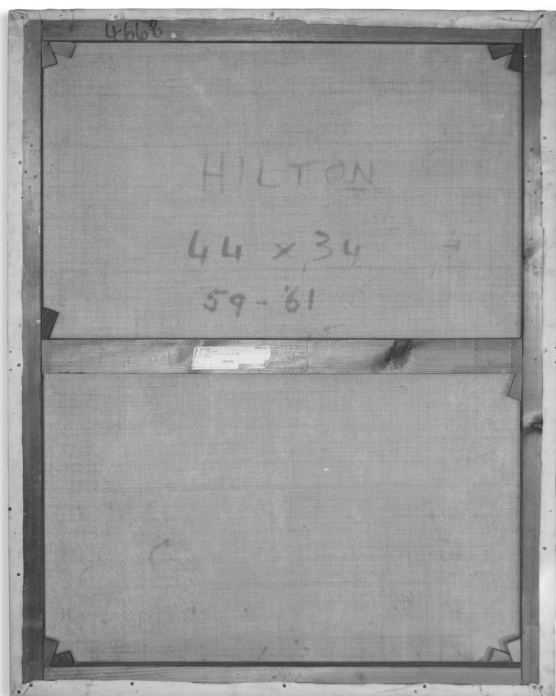
oil on canvas

44 × 34 in / 111.8 × 86.4 cm

**Provenance**

Waddington Galleries

Private Collection UK





6

***June '60 (Red)*** 1960

signed, titled & dated verso  
oil on canvas  
25 × 30 in / 63 × 76 cm

**Provenance**

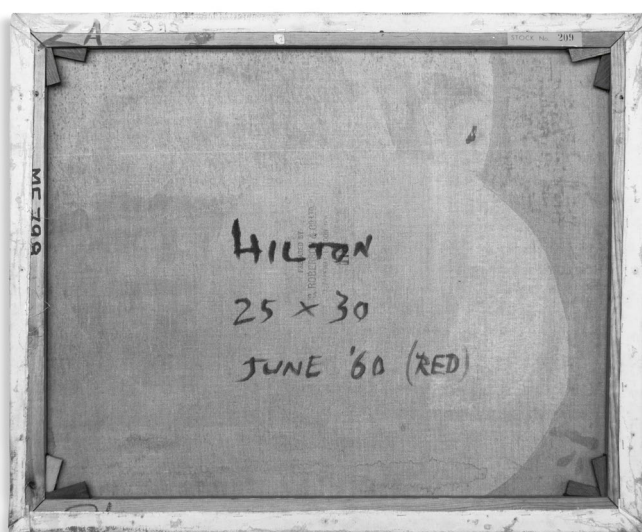
Lord Gowrie  
Thomas Gibson Fine Art  
Daniel Katz Ltd  
Private Collection UK

**Exhibited**

Galerie Charles Leinhard, Zurich, June 1961, cat. 20  
Hayward Gallery, London, *Roger Hilton*, 4 November-6 February 1994, cat. 36

**Literature**

Chris Stephens, *Roger Hilton: St Ives Artists*, 2006, p27 illus. no 32





7

**May '61 1961**

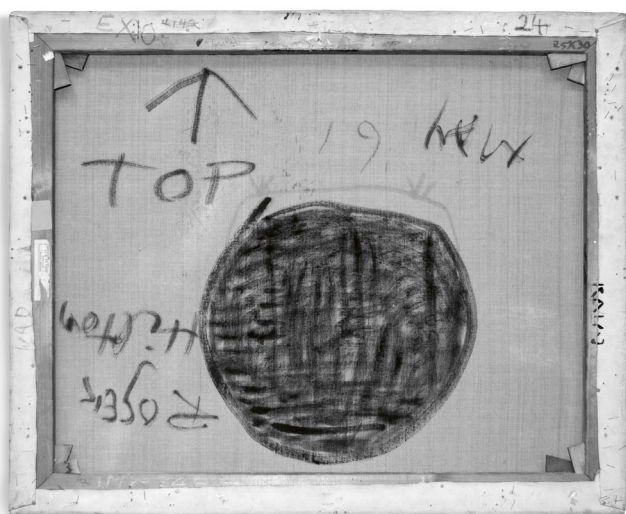
signed & dated verso  
oil on canvas  
25 × 30 in / 63 × 76 cm

**Provenance**

Waddington Galleries  
Rowntree Clark Gallery  
Sam Fogg

**Exhibited**

Waddington Galleries, London, *Roger Hilton*, April 1962, cat. 10  
Scottish Arts Council Gallery, Edinburgh, *Roger Hilton*, June 1974, cat. 35





**8**

***Nude* c.1962**

oil on canvas

36 × 30 in / 91 × 76 cm

**Provenance**

Waddington Galleries

Jonathan Clark Fine Art

Lord Thomson of Fleet

Private Collection UK



9

**December '63** 1963

signed & dated verso

oil on canvas

60 × 50 in / 152.4 × 127 cm

**Provenance**

Waddington Galleries

Paisnel Gallery

Sam Fogg

**Exhibited**

Waddington Galleries, London, June 1964, cat. 6





10

**January '69** 1969

signed & dated verso

oil on canvas

30 × 30 in / 76.2 × 76.2 cm

**Provenance**

Anne Berthoud Gallery

Waddington Galleries

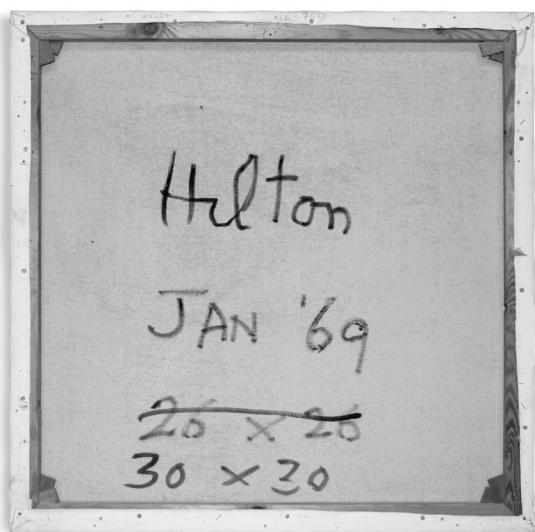
Sir Nicholas Goodison

**Exhibited**

Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, *Roger Hilton: Swinging out into the Void*, August-September 2008, no. 46

**Literature**

A. Lambirth, *Roger Hilton: the Figured Language of Thought*, London, 2007, p.215, illus.





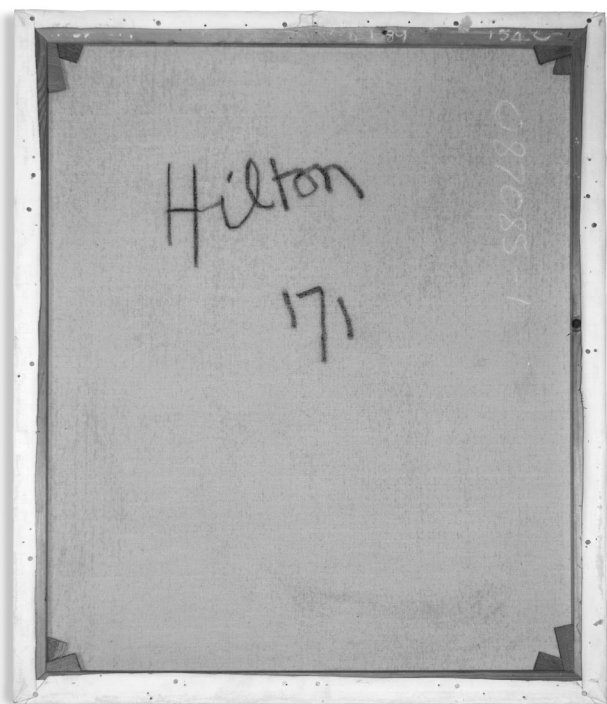
11

**Two Figures** 1971

signed & dated verso  
oil on canvas  
36 × 30 in / 91 × 76 cm

**Provenance**

Waddington Galleries  
Beaux Arts Gallery  
Victor & Bernice Sandleson





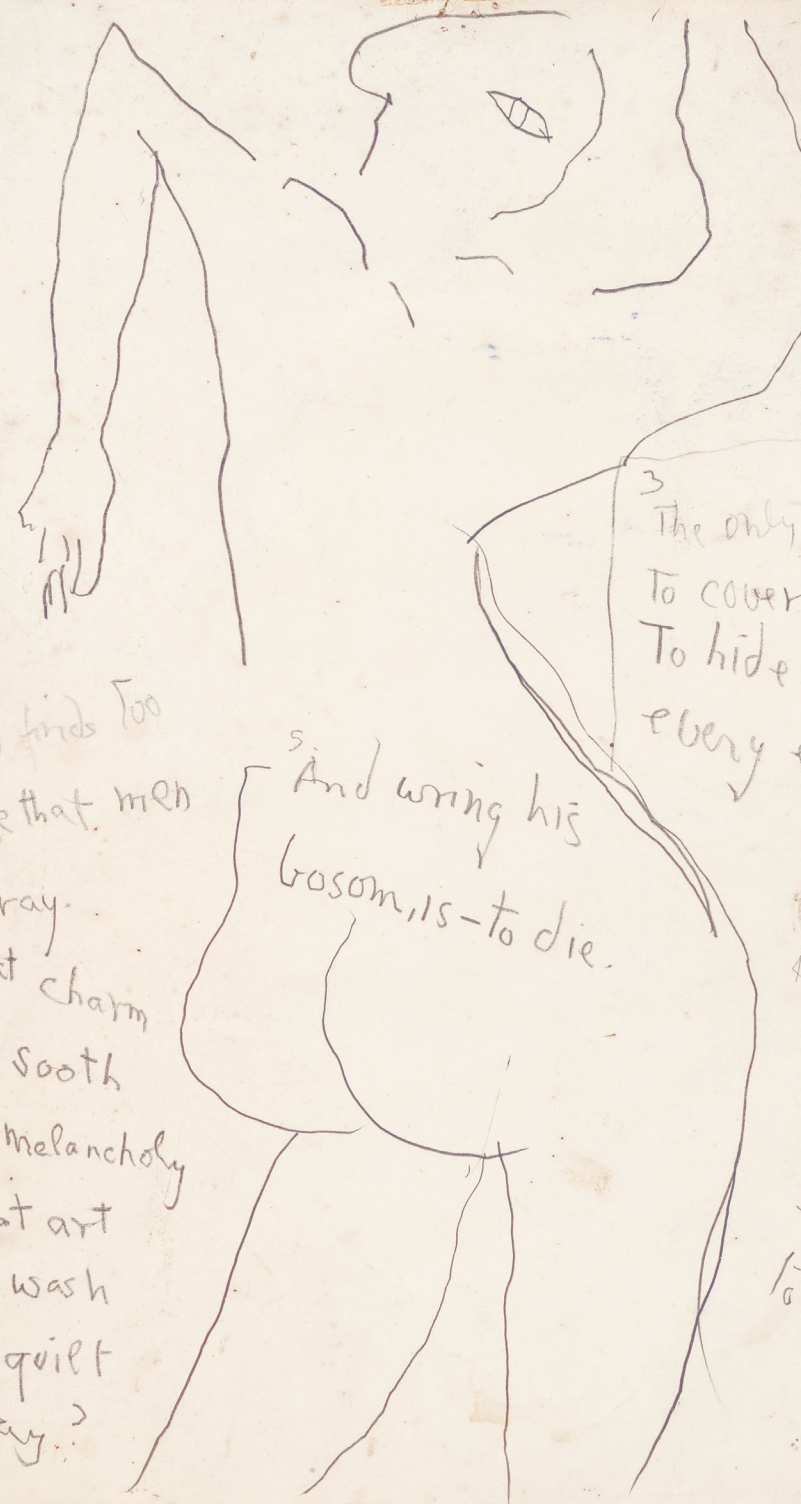
2  
and finds too  
late that men  
betray.  
What charm  
can sooth  
her melancholy  
What art  
can wash  
her guilt  
away?

5  
And wring his  
bosom, is - to die.

3  
The only art her guile  
to cover,  
To hide her shame from  
every eye

When  
lovely  
woman  
stoops  
to folly.

4  
To give  
repentance  
to her lover,



## Passages from Hilton's writings on art

Selected by Adrian Lewis

At the height of his career, writing the 1961 statement for his Galerie Charles Lienhard catalogue, Roger Hilton talks about how dangerous writing on visual art might be. He suggests that 'words and painting don't go together' and that 'half the difficulty that people find in 'understanding' painting is that they think they have to put it into words'. As well as the blockage created by the literate spectator's impulse to convert a painting into paraphrased written content, he also felt that the texts themselves would become a screen between the artwork and the spectator, the solution being that 'the only way to understand painting is to look at a lot of it.' The paradox of course, apart from the fact that a lot of looking involves absorbing a whole culture of conventions and anticipations, is that Hilton was making this point in a text intended to mediate his work to the spectator: such statements are both expected rites of gallery-going and more-or-less helpful orientations towards the artist's mindset.

Hilton could actually write quite elegantly and pithily when required, though he did so less and less as time went on, and the major period of his writing come from the time when he himself was stimulated to work out what he was up to. Though he began writing down his thoughts on art in his post-war drawing books, it seems to have been around 1953-54 when he focused the most intensely on sorting

out his artistic principles. It was the moment when he was shifting from a variant of 'tachisme' (a lyrical abstraction which in its originating French moment had shown itself reluctant to theorise) to what Hilton dubbed his 'neo-plastic' phase.

This crucial moment resulted from his encounter with the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys (who was proselytizing for painting to take the lead in redesigning the built environment along the lines of 'spatial colourism') and Hilton's direct study of Mondrian's work in the Hagues' Gemeentemuseum as well as Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum. This taxing rethinking of all his preconceptions about the form and operation of his painting ended up changing his art and finally (in a partial reaction to these polemics) moving it to an abstraction in which (as he says in a c.1953-4 text entitled *The way of the rejection of images*) the 'grand chords' of Romantic passion can alone be achieved. As he wrote to Constant in November 1953, painting founded on 'spatial colourism' could still be expressive: 'the picture may still emanate a presence, a savour, a personality'.

We see emerging even within Hilton's 1953-4 phase of painting the thematics of existential authenticity (tagged today with the art historical label 'abstract expressionism'). Image association and extreme abstraction, painterly openness and formal reduction,

now operate as polarities for a surprisingly changeable expressive range. In a sense, his art's development outstripped his ability theoretically to account for it (especially using the current notions of 'abstraction' and 'figuration'), and efforts to make the usual modern artist statement dry up in the next decade.

Many themes reappear over the years in Hilton's writings. In compiling this sample, I have selected the first appearance of ideas over later, more publicly well-known versions.

Some texts were found as loose sheets, as with the extraordinary attack on his first commercial gallery Gimpel Fils, with whom he broke in 1956. This piece is not exactly an artist's statement but is nonetheless revealing about his self-image and mind-set.

Hilton's published writings on art are not copious when compared, for example, the likes of Kandinsky, Mondrian, Motherwell or Tapiès. However, when we factor in the unpublished writing in his early drawing books, the variety of sheets and drafts of writing that have survived, the focused discussion of artistic matters in his correspondence, and some remarks in interview, we find that he left enough of a contribution to warrant the publication of a modest book, which is currently in preparation, enough writing (and certainly interesting enough in content) to compare with other British and American artists of his generation.

Words and images may well be very different affairs, but modern artistic endeavour often seems (for various reasons) to leave fascinating verbal accountings in its wake.

Art: what one doesn't want to do one hasn't the strength to do.

The world: don't like most of the people in it.

Picasso? Turning away from the world?

His pictures however won't come to life.

Once I thought of art as a fine thing – now I don't.

What is fine?

Flowers, rain, sun, sleep, food...

Album W, 1945

In order to prove your painterly ability, you must first give your picture a surface. In a good finished picture by Cézanne, there is a surface which is completely covered with paint. Some of his pictures he was unable to finish. The problem had no solution, or he was unable to find one... We see in Braque a constant adjustment of shapes and dimensions and tones until his picture is finished. Why do these men of talent take these pains? It is because for them painting is, amongst other things, a question of just this one of solving the... problem of plastic colour in space carried all over the canvas. In a good painting there is a surface created by the colour. Painters talk about colours making a hole in the picture. This hole, what is it?

One can only say that it is a colour on the picture which is not held up by the colours surrounding it. The result is that the eye, so to speak, falls through it... In fact colours must be pinned down and kept in their places by other colours. A good picture takes place at the surface of the canvas, a bad one slightly behind it or in front of it. And the worst are those of which some parts are behind the picture-plane and some in front and some on it.

**Album Q, c. 1953-4**

*The way of the rejection of images*

The tyranny of the image must be overcome. If a picture is no longer looked at for images it has a chance to fulfil the role which it is finding for itself and which must be granted to it. The first step is the utter rejection of the stultifying image. If the picture is to fulfil its role of health-giving 'lung' enabling the

spirit to breathe, there can be no question of our being arrested as it were in the middle of a deep breath by some figuration distorting and twisting the total impact of the work out of its course... With the rejection of images painting is able to link itself at once with two things which are of the greatest moment to us - space and time.

One might almost go so far as to say that the abstract has come into being in order to investigate by a visual means these two non-visual and theoretical entities. Therefore, do not look at abstract pictures for images but look at them for truth. If they move you do not believe that it is an image which moves you, but rather that they are linking you in some mysterious way with the obscure forces which govern our lives. The human mind conceiving these forces has brought them into being.

In a sense these pictures are unethical. They point no moral. You must trust to them like you would an open boat upon a dark and stormy sea, and in this way with the rise and fall of the waves there may be some comfort in them. Do not look for any lights upon a further shore.

We are in transit. Colours are no longer used for describing the visual appearance of the world. They are to body forth a feeling conveyed by visual means.

I would say that today it is only through the abstract that Romantic passion can re-enter into painting. Only here that any grand chords can be struck. Today the image automatically precludes passion.

**Undated loose sheet, c. 1953-4**

'If I describe...what interests me in a picture in short as opposed to what interested me as little as two years ago...,briefly it is very simple. Whereas before although painting in a non-figurative way I was still interested chiefly in illusory space, in constructing the picture in depth behind the picture plane; whereas before it was a question of the spectator looking into a picture now it is much more of a question of the picture looking out at the spectator. From being concerned with what took place behind the picture-plane one is now more concerned with what is taking place in front of it. That is to say the picture must radiate outwards. It does not depict anymore. Therefore it can no longer truly be called a picture. It consists of radiations arranged in a certain order. Or vibrations if you like. Thus it has become an active thing rather than a passive thing.

Besides this I have tried to reduce the picture to its simplest terms. I have relied entirely on the relationship of a few shapes. On the whole I have used unmixed primary colours and I have deliberately discarded any particular subtlety of handling or tone. I have tried, while using disparate entities, to present a unified surface.'

I don't want to turn my shapes into people or things because I don't want them to have any reference to anything other than themselves; I don't regard them so much as shapes as a particular quantity of a given colour with a given vibration... I regard pictures as the meeting place of opposing forces. These forces should be balanced not so much through design in the accepted sense, but according to laws of strength. Thus the picture partakes in some way of a

physical reality. The drama is a purely pictorial drama where the personalities are colours.

The only virtue is in their immediacy, their presence and their vitality.

#### **Short text c. 1954 (family papers)**

I have moved away from the sort of so-called non-figurative painting where lines and colours are flying about in an illusory space; from painting which still had depth or from pictures which had space in them; from spatial pictures, in short, to space-creating pictures. The effect is to be felt outside rather than inside the picture; the picture is to be not primarily an image, but a space-creating mechanism... Images are discarded; the pictures are denuded - they have become secular... They are one of the many feelers that man is putting out, continually probing his environment; seeking to paint a picture of himself. It is the nearest he can get to an independent action... This role for pictures is very far removed from their role as images or as expression, or in any way as windows one looks into to see the visionary world as the artist. The new pictures have become, or aim at becoming, machines for the activation of the surrounding space... Rather plain affairs on the whole; our lone singing birds..., humming and singing along like veritable little space-ships; our only airy fairies.

I am only interested in pictures which turn their faces outwards, whose action is outwards, and which are received outwards by the spectator... They are real. They clang like a bell. They do something. They

act. They are immediate... Above all, the picture should project itself into space. Its impact should reach me easily from far away. The picture will be based upon a mixture of primary colours, strictly delimited; each one with its exact punch towards the spectator yet all beginning from the starting point on the picture-surface... [Painting] has become an instrument, a kind of catalyst for the activation of the surrounding space...

The abstract painter submits himself entirely to the unknown... Thus he is like a man swinging out into the void; his only props his colours, his shapes and their shape-creating powers. Can he construct with these means a barque capable of carrying not only himself to some further shore, but with the aid of others a whole flotilla which may be seen eventually as having been carrying humanity forward to their unknown destination?...

**From a lengthy draft written for Lawrence Alloway's *Nine Abstract Artists* (London, 1954), drastically edited by Alloway**

You will see why the average 'life' of an artist is so short. I mean his selling life. It is almost impossible for an artist, once he begins to sell, to avoid sinking into oblivion. Once he is no longer a 'discovery', the people who make the pace cease to buy... The buying public are continually on the look out for... something with a little gold in it... This prevents them thinking what would look well on their walls. Also the price prevents them thinking in this way. And yet, if we could finally decide that the time of great art is over, as it undoubtedly is, we might just get something

which just approaches to pleasant art. The prices of paintings should be, I think, kept much lower than they are now. Very few even of our best known painters can live on their earnings anyway. The prices should be raised only in the case of demand exceeding supply. Whatever dealers may pretend, this is definitely not how things are at present...'

**Album W, 1945**

### *Gimpel's Shitting and Pissing Stable*

Don't worry, Papa Gimpel will show you how to do it. Consultations free of charge. Mind you, it's easy really. Just a question of shitting and pissing a bit more and of course bigger. You don't need to bring any of your personal problems and little preoccupations with you. Leave eternity outside the door. And if you're good we'll make you into one more little Gimpel sausage machine. Another thing. Get it right out of your head that you personally have anything to contribute which would be of the slightest value. It all boils down to a very simple thing really. You can forget any preoccupation you may have with painting well, with the philosophical implications of painting, with the relation of painting to space and humanity and its relation with your own personal life, the pros and cons of colour and form; you can forget about necessity and integrity; from now on the matter is easy. Just forget about good taste, inverse the normal order, make something really bad taste, really crude and really vulgar and you're there. And remember, the last thing that's required is something of any lasting value, something serene, calm and sublime. What we want is something just a little more strident than the next

man's, something with vertigo, with *frémissement*, something titillating, exacerbating, something which slings an iron rope round your neck and whips you in under, and then some, or alternatively an enormous, amorphous piece of blotting paper which will soak little you right up into its broad bosom and hug you there.

#### **c. 1953-6 (family papers)**

A creative artist is a man who is struggling with an idea. His works record his thought processes, his outlook. The greatest artist will be the one who most completely lets the medium shoulder the idea...I speak here for convenience as if the medium were a sort of person. To the artist perhaps it seems like that. Hence the idea of the Muses. What in fact the artist has in his mind is his idea or thought on the one side and his medium on the other. These are very different people. One of them is an awkward character who, however, possesses the great advantage of being able to leave the artist's brain and appear on a piece of canvas. The artist's job is to see that thought continually confronts medium, that it insists that medium arrange itself to express that thought and that it rejects medium's cajoleries about thoughts of its own (though the artist may privately take note of its ideas for use on future occasions).

**From Statements: A Review of British Abstract Art in 1956, I.C.A., London, 16 Jan.-16 Feb. 1957**

The technique has been built up not so much for the purposes of representing the visible world as

for being an instrument capable of embodying men's inner truths... This whole vast vocabulary is still available to us painters. Furthermore it is a vocabulary that has been so intimately connected with the inner selves of the greatest painters of the past that, if we associate with it and learn to know it, we shall come to know what in truth it reflects. It is only at this stage that we can use it to reflect a truth of our own. This is a plea for using the full technique of the past; for pulling out all the stops; for not cutting off our noses to spite our faces. In much painting today we are given paint which is delightful but which has not been put to the sterner but ultimately more rewarding task of presenting something other than itself so that itself becomes transfigured in the process...

**'Statement' from Roger Hilton Paintings 1953-57, I.C.A., London, 12 Feb.-8 March 1958**

The central problem at the moment is to re-introduce figuration without making it descriptive. Figuration not because we want to particularly figurate but because the picture must be geared to something outside itself...

#### **Short note (family papers)**

In 1952 I finished with non-figurative impressionism and abstract expressionism, with an impressionist technique and all vestigial surrealist elements. I embraced neo-plasticism and continued in this way until 1954 when the fear of being driven out of painting altogether by its too cold and limiting

ideas drove me back again gradually towards painting of unabashed sentiment. From this it is but an easy step to unabashed figuration; though this is not easy to integrate with the ways of painting acquired during the preceding, more abstract phase and which one carried willy-nilly in my satchel. If one were to ask me how I see the future of painting, I should say we must have a synthesis of Mondrian and Picasso.

**Notes written possibly c. 1961**

Abstraction itself is nothing. It is only a step towards a new figuration, that is, one which is more true. However beautiful they may be, one can no longer depict women as Titian did. Renoir in his last pictures had already greatly modified her shape. Today one sees people who are changing abstraction into landscape (the easiest to do). For an abstract painter there are two ways out or on: he must give up painting and take to architecture, or he must reinvent figuration. Now that we have conquered new plastic ground during the last fifty years, there is no reason why images should not return to painting without fear of repeating what has already been done.

**'Remarks about Painting' from Roger Hilton, Galerie Charles Lienhard, Zurich, June 1961**

## BIOGRAPHY

- 1911 Born on 23rd March in Northwood, Middlesex
- 1929-31 Slade School of Art, London, studying under Henry Tonks
- 1931 Academie Ranson, Paris, under Roger Bissière: also attended Atelier Colarossi, Paris
- 1933 Academy Schools, London
- 1935-6 Shows with London Group  
(and again in 1938, 1948, 1949 & 1951)
- 1936 Teaches at Dunmow School, Yorkshire
- 1937 Living and working in Paris
- 1939 Son Timothy Born
- 1940-5 Fights in the War with Commandos: P.O.W. from 1942-45
- 1945 Central School of Art, London
- 1946-7 Teaches at Port Regis and Bryanston Schools
- 1947 Marries Ruth David
- 1948 Son Matthew born
- 1950 Daughter Rose born  
Visits Cornwall for the first time and spends seven months working in Polzeath
- 1952 Meets William Scott and Patrick Heron, who introduces him to Peter Lanyon and Bryan Wynter  
Joins Gimpel Fils Gallery and has first solo exhibition in London
- 1953 Introduced by ex-Slade colleague Stephen Gilbert to Dutch Neo-Plasticist painter Constant  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam is first public institution to purchase work
- 1954 Included in Lawrence Alloway's ground-breaking book 'Nine Abstract Artists'
- 1954-6 Teaches at Central School of Art, London
- 1955 Heron publishes 'The Changing Forms of Art' devoting a section to Hilton
- 1957 Member of Penwith Society (remains so until 1960)  
Takes a studio in Newlyn, Cornwall
- 1958 Tate Gallery buys its first Hilton painting, 'January 1957'  
Meets Rose Phipps, his future wife (they were married in 1965)
- 1959 Moves to Waddington Galleries
- 1961 Son Bo born
- 1965 Moves to a farmhouse at Botallack Moor, near St Just in Cornwall  
Son Fergus born
- 1975 Dies on 23rd February; is buried at St Just, Cornwall

## AWARDS

- 1931 Scholarship, Slade School of Art, London
- 1959 Prizewinner at 2nd John Moores Exhibition, Liverpool
- 1961 First prize at 4th John Moores Exhibition, Liverpool
- 1964 UNESCO prize at XXXII Biennale, Venice
- 1968 CBE

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1936 Bloomsbury Gallery, London
- 1952 Gimpel Fils, London
- 1954 Gimpel Fils, London
- 1955 Symon Quinn Gallery, Huddersfield  
Gimpel Fils, London
- 1958 Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (Retrospective)
- 1960 Waddington Galleries, London
- 1961 Galerie Charles Lienhard, Zurich
- 1962 Waddington Galleries, London
- 1963 Waddington Galleries, London (Works on Paper)
- 1964 British Pavilion, XXXII Biennale, Venice  
Waddington Galleries, London
- 1966 Waddington Galleries, London
- 1967 New Art Centre, London
- 1968 Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol  
Travers Gallery, London  
Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford
- 1971 Waddington Galleries, London
- 1972 Park Square Gallery, Leeds
- 1973 Compass Gallery, Glasgow  
Orion Gallery, Penzance (Gouaches)
- 1974 Scottish Arts Council Gallery, Edinburgh (Retrospective)  
Hester van Royen Gallery, London  
Serpentine Gallery, London (Arts Council Retrospective)  
Waddington Galleries, London (Works on Paper)
- 1975 Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane  
Alberta College of Art, Calgary
- 1976 Gruenebaum Gallery, New York (Retrospective)  
Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth  
Wills Lane Gallery, St Ives
- 1977 Waddington Galleries, London
- 1980 New Art Centre, London  
Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield (Gouaches)

1981	Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan	Cambridge	Fitzwilliam Museum
1983	Waddington Galleries, London		Kettle's Yard
1984	Leicester Polytechnic Gallery, Leicester	Coventry	Herbert Art Gallery
1985	Redfern Gallery, London		University of Warwick
1986	312 Lennox Street, Melbourne	Eastbourne	Towner Gallery
1987	Rex Irwin Gallery, Sydney	Edinburgh	Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
1988	Chessel Gallery, Moray House College, Edinburgh	Huddersfield	City Art Gallery
1989	Oxford Gallery, Oxford	Hull	Ferens Art Gallery
	Wolf at the Door Gallery, Penzance	Ipswich	Ipswich Museum
1990	Redfern Gallery, London	Kendall	Abbot Hall Art Gallery
1993-4	Hayward Gallery, London (Retrospective) - touring to Ikon Gallery, Birmingham & Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester	Leicester	New Walk Museum & Art Gallery
1995	Beaux Arts Gallery, London	Liverpool	Walker Art Gallery
	David Hibberd Gallery, Lyme Regis	London	Arts Council Collection
1996	Belgrave Gallery, London		British Council Collection
1997	Tate Gallery, St Ives		British Museum
1998	Waddington Galleries, London		Government Art Collection
2000	Jonathan Clark & Co, London		National Portrait Gallery
2001	Belgrave Gallery, St Ives		Tate Gallery
	Jonathan Clark & Co, London (Works on Paper)	Manchester	Victoria & Albert Museum
2006-7	Tate Gallery, St Ives (Retrospective)		City Art Gallery
2007	Jonathan Clark & Co, London (Gouaches)		Whitworth Art Gallery
2008	Kettle's Yard, Cambridge	Oldham	Museum & Art Gallery
2009-10	Kettle's Yard, Cambridge	Plymouth	City Museum & Art Gallery
2011	Newlyn Art Gallery, Penzance	Rye	Rye Museum
	Jonathan Clark & Co, London	Sheffield	Graves Art Gallery
2014	Jonathan Clark & Co, London	Southampton	City Art Gallery
2019	S/2 Gallery, Sotheby's, 'Roger Hilton', June/July 2019	Stromness	Pier Gallery
		Swindon	Museum & Art Gallery
		Truro	Royal Cornwall Museum
		Wakefield	Wakefield Art Gallery

## SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

### Britain

Aberdeen	City Art Gallery
Ayr	Maclaurin Art Gallery
Bath	Victoria Art Gallery
Bedford	Cecil Higgins Art Gallery
Belfast	Ulster Museum
Bradford	Cartwright Hall Art Gallery
Bristol	Museum & Art Gallery

### Abroad

Australia	Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
Austria	Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Vienna
Canada	National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
	Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
Holland	Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
	Peter Stuyvesant Foundation, Amsterdam
Japan	Setagaya Museum, Tokyo
Portugal	Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon
	Collecio Berardo, Lisbon
USA	Fogg Art Museum, Harvard
	Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

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Frontispiece  
Roger Hilton *Self Portrait* c.1960  
charcoal on paper 9 × 7 in / 23 × 18 cm

Page 30  
Roger Hilton *When Lovely Woman...* (Oliver Goldsmith) c.1968  
pencil on paper 15 × 12 in / 38 × 30 cm

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& Mark Trompeteler for their generous help

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