

TONY BARTL

A RETROSPECTIVE: 100 YEARS



By kind permission of The Usher Gallery

SAM SCORER GALLERY

January 9th - February 5th 2012



Antonin Bartl: One Colourful Life

Born in Czechoslovakia 1912, died in Lincoln 1998, Tony came to England invited by The British Council as visiting artist and did not return.

Son of a bespoke tailor and pro-Nazi politician, Tony went to school in the small market town of Cheb. His mother was artistic, a painter, who designed and embroidered her own clothes. However she died young, aged 40, and this had a huge impact on Tony who was only 17 at the time. Tony graduated to the Prague Academy where he was taught by Oskar Kokoschka and was influenced by Otto Dix, Gustav Klimt, Paula Modersohn-Becker and Otto Muller. The expressionist values of these painters can be found in Tony's use of

colour, which, in addition to naturalistic references, are the intentionally heightened colour values, designed to carry his personal reactions, his feeling and emotional response to his subject.

In 1938, Tony's sister married Dr Richard Weck, who was a communist and who moved to England while Tony stayed behind in Prague. Bartl was befriended by Egon Adler who worked for 20th Century Fox, and it was he who secured Tony the job as their publicity manager from 1936 to 1941.

The changing political climate in Czechoslovakia more than disapproved of Tony's communist views, he was imprisoned and moved to a labour camp near Vienna. However he managed to escape and found refuge with a sympathetic uncle who permitted him to live in the shed on his allotment, where he ate swedes and turnips from the vegetable patch. Following the Russian advance on Vienna, Tony joined up as a refugee from the Nazis where he painted the Russian Officers in order to earn his passage and keep. He stayed in Czechoslovakia and managed to return to Prague for the end of the war, but, as first the Germans then the Russians had commandeered his apartment in the city, when he returned he had nothing.

His brother-in-law, Dr Richard Weck, was instrumental in getting Tony to England on a Visa through the Arts Council in 1947. He arrived in the country with a smart overcoat, some clothes and a feather duvet bed, envisaging that he might be staying for a while. Tony couldn't speak English and his Fine Art qualifications were from Prague. On arrival, Tony stayed with his sister Katie and Richard who lived in Weybridge at a refugee camp run by Dame Ethel Locke-king, whose husband established Brookland's Racetrack. From there, his brother-in-law eventually moved to Cambridge, where, as an expert in metal fatigue, he took up work for the British Welding Research Association. He was later awarded CBE and the Bessamer Medal. Still recovering from his traumatic war experiences, Tony went with them.

Tony decided to attend Heatherly School of Art in London where he was introduced to the Principal Ian Macnab. As luck would have it McNab was friend of Marchbank Salmon, the Principal of Lincoln School of Art who was looking for a painter to join his staff. Tony came to Lincoln in 1948, taking a room on Lindum Terrace, later moving to Duke William Pub on Bailgate, and spent his holidays between his work in Lincoln and his family in Cambridge.

As did many tutors at the Art School, Tony taught regular day classes at the School, students, many ex-servicemen who received grants to retrain, and in the evenings at night school, where many students were Polish airmen who were stationed around Lincoln. He taught painting and was himself able to paint. Teaching for three evenings a week freed up daytime to work. Initially, Tony had his easel set up beside his bed in the rented rooms, then later from the upstairs studio at 5 Gibraltar Hill.

It was during this heady time teaching at Lincoln School of Art that he met his future wife, Sheila, who a student in the textile department. At that time, as now, such a relationship was much disapproved of but did survive in spite of this. Tony and Sheila moved into a flat on Lindum Road, then decided to purchase land on Gibraltar Hill for £50 and in 1955 built their house with a mortgage for £2000. It was designed by architect Edward Albarn, a conscientious objector, who was based at Holton-cum-Beckering, near Wragby and lived among other likeminded people including Jim Broadbent's parents, Noel Makin, George Todd – fabric printer and the Cornwallises.

Tony worked at Lincoln School of Art and across Lincolnshire lecturing in Louth, Spalding and Boston. He became widely known and was a member of Lincolnshire Artists' Society.

In 1972, Lincoln Cathedral celebrated its 900 centenary with a festival. Tony was instrumental in the design of several exhibitions working closely with the Dean Oliver Fiennes. With the help of his students at the College of Art, Tony arranged and hung an exhibition of the work of invited artist John Piper.

The following year, he was invited to design a sign for Usher Gallery which was fabricated by Hindles metal workshop in Lincoln.

Tony exhibited locally, in Liverpool at John Moores Gallery and at the Bridlesmith Gate Gallery, Nottingham. Tony exhibited in Leicester, Birmingham, Lincoln, London, with solo shows in Cambridge, Nottingham and Lincoln. Commissions include:

Murals and Designs for Plyglass panels for Richard Thomas and Baldwins, Scunthorpe

Murals for Entrance Hall and Workshop for Engineering Laboratory, University of Cambridge

Mosaics for Main Entrance of Infant School, Scunthorpe, and Private Buildings in Cambridge

Murals, internal and external for British Welding Research Association and The Welding

Institute in London and Cambridge

Paintings in Public and Private Collections.

In Cambridge he lived at Abington Hall, now The Welding Institute, and with introductions from his brother-in-law Richard, he designed murals for The Welding Institute, at Granta Park, and the Fitzwilliam Engineering Department at Cambridge University and sold paintings He exhibited in Cambridge, where his friend Mac Hilton had the Hilton gallery in King Street. Throughout his life, Richard Weck remained Tony's patron supporting his work and purchasing his paintings.

In conversation with Sheila Bartl June 2011

C Eisner







*Portrait of
John Piper*



Edward Seago (1910 – 1974) sold for £29,000

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Cover Image	Courtesy of the Usher Gallery
Catalogue Essay:	Cilla Eisner
Photographs:	David Mc Aleavey Adam O'Meara
Exhibition Printing	APS Printers, Lincoln
Exhibition Support	William Gregory/Golding Young & Thos. Mawer Sam Scorer Gallery
Exhibition Curators	Phil Bowman Cilla Eisner Sheila Bartl Caroline Bartl
Special Thanks to	Cicely Jackson Barry and Judith Jackson Ian Walter Valerie and Michael Hope Renate Birch Paul Scorer Peter Moss Sheila Bartl Caroline Bartl John Roberts
Additional Support	Trustees and Managers Sam Scorer Gallery Georgina Gregory
Logistics	Lindum Group Ltd

Published to accompany the exhibition:

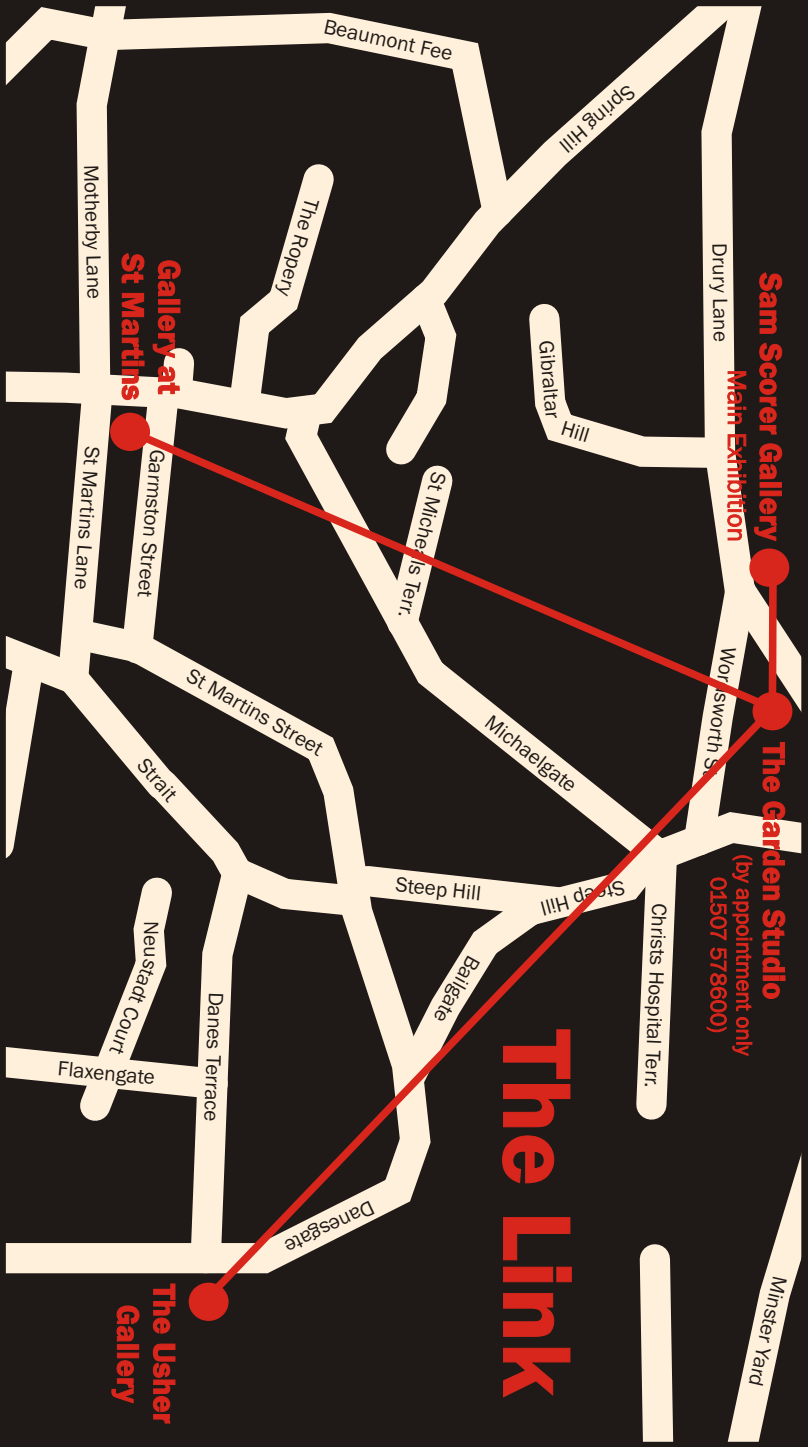
TONY BARTL: A RETROSPECTIVE / 100 YEARS

9th January - 5th February 2012

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The organisers would like to acknowledge the following for their help and sponsorship of this exhibition:

