



ILLUSTRATING HAMPSTEAD

presenting ROBERTA PALADINO IN EXHIBITION

Curated by Diego Fernandez Alvarez del Castillo

EXTENDED CURATORIAL TEXT

Drifting and Framing a Flâneuse

In 1863, Charles Baudelaire popularised the term *flâneur*, describing the ideal artist, one who wanders and fully breathes the streets in, keen in observation and a master of capturing the fleeting mundanity of everyday life, epitomised by the illustrator Constantin Guys. The term, and most importantly, what it represents, has resonated with the practices of artists and illustrators for centuries, the likes of Manet, Monet, Degas, and Renoir illustrated and captured mundane life, such as an afternoon at the café, a promenade down the main road on a Sunday, and a lively "fête à Paris." The act of observing people going about their daily, mundane lives has been a presence in the pictorial arts for a long time. The *flâneur* has been linked to art in a way that feels almost intrinsic. Although the term has remained unchanged, its embodiment has evolved and adapted to keep pace with the times, changing throughout history to fit within different art movements and adjusting to any medium of creation, including painting, film, photography, and illustration, which is the core subject of this exhibition.

For the last seven years, independent illustrator Roberta Paladino (Robi) has chosen the area of Hampstead as a sort of haven in London. A place where she doesn't live, but where she spends a lot of time, and feels bounded to, born out of sheer appreciation and admiration for the place. As she describes it herself, "Hampstead felt like a second home, a place I wanted to be in." Through her illustration, Roberta has captured fractions of the life, the scenes, the style, and most of all the people and the rhythm of the mundane of Hampstead. Often inserting herself into the everyday narratives that she witnesses: walking on the famous Heath, sitting in the plethora of cafés in the area, swimming in the Lido, immersing herself fully into her surroundings with her illustration. Much like how historian Bruce Mazlish explored and conceived further the role of the artist and the *flâneur*, positioning it as much more than a passive observer but rather a dissector of society, a true reader of the urban scene, and a meaningful representor of the world they live in; "a member in the crowd but not of the crowd" (Mazlish, 1994).

However, in stark contrast with the classic *flâneur*, Roberta's practice resonates within the notion of "La dérive" or "the drifter" proposed by philosopher Guy Debord in 1956 as an act of experimentation of a space or a city, in which the act of aimlessly wandering allows to observe, explore, and map any given area with a notion of processing the distinct environments the drifter encounters and how they affect them physiologically and emotionally, and thus gaining deeper knowledge of their surroundings (Debord, 1956). This can be appreciated in the way Roberta's illustrations often include reflections and pieces of her mind, as well as the way she frequently depicts herself reacting to the surroundings she has encountered. Oftentimes posing questions, and through her work, she reflects and ponders about what it means to be an outsider looking in.

Contemporary writer Lauren Elkin conceived the idea of the "flâneuse" as the female counterpart of Baudelaire's male-centred "flâneur." Elkin's reclaiming of the idea of the thoughtful female urban wanderer is centred on the concept of "in betweenness," existing in ambiguity and between places without roots. Similarly, Robi's work is the outcome of how she experiences the world and how she copes with her daily experiences, part autobiographical, part storytelling device. She inhabits Hampstead without belonging to it; she depicts her experiences and people around her as someone who comes from somewhere else. She lingers between Hampstead and the rest of the city. Her illustrations are the product of her personal journey in London, selecting Hampstead as a third space where she introspects, documents, critiques, and reproduces the world around her with her illustration. Her work is the physical manifestation of her emotions, identity, and coping with her reality at any given point.

Robi's Theatre

Philosopher Paul Woodruff reflected on theatre as something beyond the stage, arguing that theatre revealed the human social necessity of watching and being watched to function. He claimed that the most vital aspects of human life happened as theatre, even the everyday life interactions. He claims that "the art of the theatre makes any part of the world a stage for a time" (Woodruff, 2008), one in which we all must learn how to watch and be watched to function and mediate a construction of social life, one worth observing.

And, in a city where everyone is constantly being captured by cameras everywhere and surveilled all the time, Robi's approach is gentler, almost passive. As a silent figure tucked away in a corner, she quietly observes, takes in, and translates the people who surround her, immortalising them on paper. With her eyes as her lens, her hand stroke as her composition, and her colour pencils as a memory stick, she incessantly illustrates those who pass her by, extrapolating their essence and capturing the vital traits that make them recognisable, often achieving a striking resemblance. But often elevating the people she sees into characters of her own creation, and thus elevating them from the plain of mere reality into her constructed one. Robi doesn't reproduce or copy with forensic accuracy, but rather she traps people's essence and pours it onto textured paper, creating a dialogue between what she saw and her imagination and input, adapting her techniques and styles according to her emotions: abstracting figures and landscape to the minimum or amping them up, zapping narratives and constructing stories of her own device, sitting at the intersection of representation and interpretation.

As Professor Molly Andrews explains, narrative imagination constitutes a vital aspect of human life, and it is the "minutiae of daily life. We use it to negotiate competing desires, carry out responsibilities, and simply be ourselves in the world" (Andrews, 2014). This seems seminal to the way that Roberta frames and conducts her practice as an illustrator, both as a reproducer of the world she sees and experiences, but also as a storyteller and a biographer of her life through illustration. There has been extensive research that explores the value and the importance of illustration for the arts, the artist who chooses illustration as their medium, and society at large. Such is the case of researcher and illustrator Mireille Fauchon, who argues that illustration has the potential to transform social dialogue in a meaningful way and that the role of the illustrator goes beyond commercial value, but rather has the power to better convey the complex, hidden, and often painful realities of everyday life (Fauchon, 2020). Illustration work like Roberta's could be understood as a subjective yet real and valid testimony of an area, a time and a place, resulting in an ongoing social dialogue between the artist and the places the artist chooses to portray.

NW3: Choosing a Third Space

Hampstead Village in North London has been a famous creative hub for centuries, the home of historic literature figures, the preferred area for lovers of the arts, nature, and a bucolic green escape nestled not far from the hecticness of central London. Urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989) conceived and popularised the concept of the "third space," an urban space where human social life develops, separated from the "first space": the home, and the "second space": work or school. The third space is defined by its neutrality, its openness, accessibility, its vitality for human interaction and its centrality to community life. He proposed cafés, barbershops, parks, and other public spaces as the general representations of spaces that are ingrained in how we live our lives and how we interact with the cities and spaces we live in.

Recently, the concept has evolved, taking Oldenburg's core principles and making them subjective to the individual, meaning that today it is believed that anyone can choose a space to be their personal "third space," a "home" away from home, a place that feels intrinsic to individual personality, values, and approach to living that also brings them joy, comfort, and a sense of authentic being. Such is the case of Hampstead for many, including Robi, for whom the area has become a third space and her selected home away from home, even when she doesn't reside in Hampstead.

Shortly after moving from Sicily to London, Roberta stumbled upon Hampstead Village and formed an immediate connection with the place. As she describes it herself, Hampstead felt like a place to escape from the chaos of London, a place that mentally and physically recharged her and energised her days in the city. Over time, she has fully immersed herself in the life and the fabric of NW3, and in return, Hampstead has offered Roberta a plethora of inspiration, curiosity, social observation, and wonder. Spending a considerable amount of time over the last seven years, Roberta has had the opportunity to observe and engage with Hampstead from various unique positions, as an incognito walker, a café regular, a hospitality industry worker, a swimmer, and an artist, forging interactions and connections with the people around her in multiple capacities, all of which she portrays and reflects on through her practice as an illustrator, consuming, digesting, and capturing the essence of Hampstead from her subjective point of view.

This exhibition is a display of the body of work she has accumulated in that period of time, exploring different pictorial techniques and evolving her practice as she has grown and developed as an independent illustrator and artist. The exhibition is meant to showcase a dialogue between the artist, her medium, process, and her subjects, making matters like subjectivity, representation, and interpretation of the world into her own unique vision, showing once again how art and, in this case, illustration continues to be a vital practice to life and a means to understand, digest, and mediate the realities we live in.

Other Work by Roberta Paladino.

Roberta Paladino (b.1983, Catania, Sicily) is a self-taught independent artist and illustrator based in London.

Her work is multifaceted and directly inspired by her emotions and her life's journey, adjusting, evolving and adapting her style and techniques as she evolves as a person. She particularly focuses on personal illustration, often mixing autobiographical work with fiction and storytelling.

She enjoys experimenting with colour, materials, texture and composition, playing with the way she depicts and illustrates her subjects.

She particularly enjoys and draws inspiration from people around her, aiming to capture interesting colours, lines, styles and personalities. Her subjects vary from herself to friends and acquaintances to total strangers she relentlessly observes during her time.

For Roberta, Illustration is a way of understanding and making sense of her life experience, being a vital practice in her being and daily life.

@robinbluebird

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This exhibition wouldn't be possible without the generous and extraordinary support of Hampstead Community Centre.

HAMPSTEAD COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Hampstead Community Centre and its vibrant outdoor Community Market lie at the heart of Hampstead Village life. The centre hosts an eclectic mix of activities, talks and indoor weekend markets and its doors are open seven days a week to the local community and visitors to Hampstead.

Founded in 1976 by a group of residents who restored a disused mechanics' workshop, the centre is overseen by a board of local trustees.

A BIG THANKS TO,

GUY WINGATE

Chair of Trustees

CARMEN MOORE

Chief Operations Officer

And all the members of the HCC community.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

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Exhibition assistance

People Watching

(PEOPLE WATCHING)

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ARTWORK INDEX



1
Roberta Paladino
Inside the Tree, 2019
Watercolour and Ink on paper.
21x33 cm Original
50x70 cm Printed Reproduction.



2
Roberta Paladino
Ponds, 2019
Watercolour and Ink on paper.
21x33 cm Original
50x70 cm Printed Reproduction.



3
Roberta Paladino
Into the Woods, 2019
Watercolour and Ink on paper.
21x33 cm Original
50x70 cm Printed Reproduction.



4
Roberta Paladino
Alone 1.1, 2019
Watercolour and Ink on paper.
21x33 cm Original
50x70 cm Printed Reproduction.



5
Roberta Paladino
Alone 1.2, 2019
Watercolour and Ink on paper.
21x33 cm Original
50x70 cm Printed Reproduction.



6
Roberta Paladino
Squares, 2019
Mixed media/Collage.
21x32 cm



7
Roberta Paladino
Leaves, 2019
Mixed media/Collage.
21x32 cm



8
Roberta Paladino
Behind the Counter 1, 2019
Watercolour & Ink on paper.
21x15.5 cm



9
Roberta Paladino
Behind the Counter 2, 2019
Watercolour & Ink on paper.
21x15.5 cm



10
Roberta Paladino
Behind the Counter 3, 2019
Watercolour & Ink on paper.
21x15.5 cm



11
Roberta Paladino
 Behind the Counter 4, 2019
 Watercolour & Ink on paper.
 21x15.5 cm



12
Roberta Paladino
 Behind the Counter 5, 2019
 Watercolour & Ink on paper.
 21x15.5 cm



13
Roberta Paladino
 Behind the Counter 6, 2019
 Watercolour & Ink on paper.
 21x15.5 cm



14
Roberta Paladino
 Girl, 2019
 Ink & Colour Pencil on paper.
 13x18 cm



15
Roberta Paladino
 Adrian, 2019
 Ink & Colour Pencil on paper.
 15x21 cm



16
Roberta Paladino
 Lido 3 Alí, 2019
 Colour Pencil on paper.
 21x30 cm Original



17
Roberta Paladino
 White Dress, 2022
 Watercolour & Ink on paper
 15x21 cm



18
Roberta Paladino
 Big Coat, 2022
 Watercolour & Ink on paper
 15x21 cm

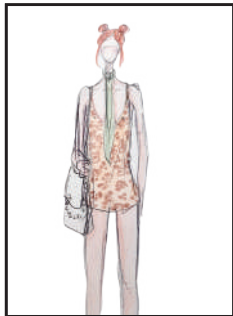


19
Roberta Paladino
 Couple, 2022
 Watercolour & Ink on paper
 15x21 cm



20
Roberta Paladino
 Kiss, 2022
 Watercolour & Ink on paper
 15x21 cm

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21 - 27

Roberta Paladino

Flask Walk 1-7, 2023

Colour Pencil on paper.

10x15 cm Original

10x17 cm Printed Reproduction.

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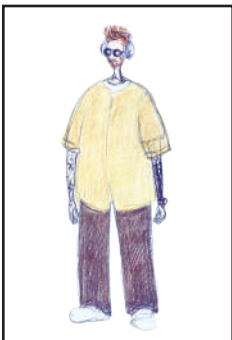
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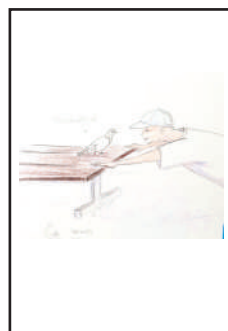
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Roberta Paladino

Hampstead 1-27, 2019-2025

Colour Pencil on paper.

14x20 cm Original

14x20 cm Printed Reproduction.



55

Roberta Paladino

Scarve, 2021

Watercolour on Cotton Paper.

15x20.30 cm



57

Roberta Paladino

Sweeping Man, 2021

Watercolour
on Cotton Paper.

15x20.30 cm



56

Roberta Paladino

Old Lady, 2021

Watercolour on Cotton Paper.

21x32 cm



58

Roberta Paladino

Fatherhood, 2021

Watercolour
on Cotton Paper.

15x20.30 cm



59
Roberta Paladino
 2ppl, 2021
 Watercolour on Cotton Paper
 15x20.30 cm



60
Roberta Paladino
 Danese, 2021
 Watercolour on Cotton Paper
 15x20.30 cm



61
Roberta Paladino
 Emma, 2021
 Watercolour on Cotton Paper
 15x20.30 cm



62
Roberta Paladino
 Snow, 2021
 Watercolour on Cotton Paper
 15x20.30 cm



63
Roberta Paladino
 Nosy Man, 2021
 Watercolour on Cotton Paper
 15x20.30 cm



64
Roberta Paladino
 Café, 2023
 Colour Pencil on paper.
 21x33 cm Original
 30x40 cm Printed Reproduction.



65
Roberta Paladino
 Robin, 2023
 Colour Pencil on paper.
 21x33 cm Original
 30x40 cm Printed Reproduction.



66
Roberta Paladino
 Café, 2023
 Colour Pencil on paper.
 21x33 cm Original
 30x40 cm Printed Reproduction.