

Show of FRIENDSHIP

WORDS BY LUCY STUDLEY





Three artists celebrate their shared history and the seminal impact of a particular stretch of the South West Coast Path.

In more ways than one, this major exhibition – which takes place at The Old Coastguard in Mousehole this summer – is long-overdue. Three artists who share not only a love of a spectacular stretch of the coast path, but also roughly 40 years of familial connections and friendship, should surely have hung work alongside each other before. The concept of holding a group exhibition was devised pre-pandemic and after a two-year delay it will finally open on 24th July.

Sasha Harding, Sophie Harding and Gemma Pearce are all highly regarded in the Cornish artistic milieu. All three grew up in Dorset before moving independently to Cornwall, where they followed very different creative paths. As well as sharing childhood connections and artistic talent, all are also inspired by a particular stretch of the South West Coast Path, hence the name of the exhibition ‘From Mousehole to Marazion’.



Paul Massey

Sisters Sasha and Sophie Harding, and their friend Gemma Pearce, grew up together in Swanage in Dorset. It was only by a quirk of fate that they all moved to Cornwall. Sasha was the first to feel the lure of the Cornish coast, arriving in Falmouth in 1989 as a Fine Art student. Gemma was a regular visitor, jumping on the train from Bath where she was studying Illustration to spend weekends enjoying student misdemeanours with her closest friend. Sasha stayed on in Cornwall after her degree and began to create a niche for herself as an artist. Years later when, on an impulse, Gemma rented a flat for herself and her young son in Mousehole, Sasha was on-hand to help them move in.

Gemma sees that move to the Cornish coast as an almost visceral reaction to an unhappy situation. She was craving freedom, uplifting surroundings and the steady routine she required to find her feet as an artist. Bit by

INSET
The Old Coastguard



TOP
Mousehole & Anemones – Gemma Pearce

ABOVE
Mousehole & Wild Flowers – Gemma Pearce



bit those elements have fallen into place, and Gemma's work is now some of the most distinctive on Cornwall's contemporary arts scene. Her still life paintings depict interiors which contain simple objects imbued with poignancy (pebbles, jugs, flowers, feathers) and windows framing views of the coast – typically harbours. "I like the contrast between the pretty and the industrial," she explains. "The two coexist happily in Cornwall's working ports."

Gemma's work reflects her enigmatic personality; each canvas conveys a feeling of introspection and reflects the quiet joy of finding a room of one's own. Sasha is more of an extrovert and again, this is echoed in the kind of images she creates. Her portfolio is full of storytelling, humour and connectivity – she clearly revels in human interaction. "In all my work, I aim to strike a balance between the pensive and the silly, the serious

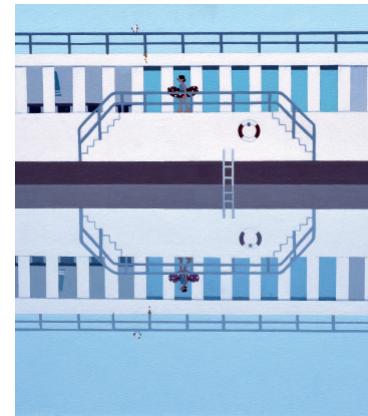
and the absurd, injecting quirkiness and humour in careful measures," explains Sasha. "The resulting juxtapositions very much reflect my personality."

All this distillation of human life is conveyed using a simple method and only four colours. Unusually she takes a notebook rather than a sketchbook with her on walks, writing a title and narrative for each work before returning home to bring the formal elements together using the technique of collage. She cuts out figures and moves them around, getting the composition just right as if she is creating a storyboard for an animation. This idiosyncratic approach led Sasha into the world of book publishing, illustrating her adventures with her dog on the South West Coast Path in *A Brush With The Coast*; a second edition was released in 2020 with enriched text and several new illustrations. Sasha also put pen to paper for *A Brush With Anglesey* and more recently the children's book *Plop*.

Sasha's sister Sophie was the last of the trio to relocate to Cornwall. Sophie originally studied Fashion Design at Central St Martins. She worked in London for 11 years as a freelance painter, illustrator and textile maker for clients including Marks and Spencer, Friends of the Earth, Ladybird Books and WHSmith. Eventually she followed her younger sister Sasha to the Cornish coast.

Sophie's work for this show reflects her increasing mastery of colourist painting. Her vibrant images celebrate the simple joys

ABOVE
Dinner with a view at The Old Coastguard



TOP LEFT
The Lido – Gemma Pearce

TOP RIGHT
Two Luggers – Gemma Pearce


ABOVE
Tight Lines – Gemma Pearce



arranges and curates exhibitions at The Old Coastguard and sister hotel, The Gurnard's Head, approached them to put together a summer exhibition. In preparation the trio have been walking the coast path between Mousehole and Marazion together, cameras in tow. Gemma explains: "We've been finding that we're attracted to the same views, and keep tripping over each other as we stop in the same spots!" However, given the very different styles of the three artists, these shared vistas are likely to be more intriguing than repetitive.

Charles Inkin, Director of The Old Coastguard, says: "Although their work is very different, it will hang well together and look fantastic in the space at The Old Coastguard. All three artists are working on a summer theme, so we're expecting this show to be a really exuberant celebration of our special location on the coast at Mousehole." This unusually interconnected exhibition celebrates shared history and a profound love of an adopted home, with different styles and perspectives bringing depth and nuance to the subject matter. It also presents a unique opportunity to see these paintings in the Cornish location which they take as their inspiration.

'From Mousehole to Marazion' is showing at The Old Coastguard from 24th July – 19th September. A 'Meet the Artists' event will be held on Saturday 17th September at 10.30.

 oldcoastguardhotel.co.uk

in life, yet behind this lies an accomplished exploration of colour theory and fundamental form. Sophie's still life images, and her depiction of Cornwall's tropical gardens and beaches, has seen her gain royal collectors from Tresco to Knightsbridge.

Sophie lives in a colourful cottage in Penzance, while the sisters' friend Gemma still lives in nearby Mousehole. Sasha is a regular visitor to west Cornwall and the picturesque harbour of Mousehole is where her favourite hotel in the world can be found. Sasha stays here at The Old Coastguard with her dogs, and describes how she loves to wake up to the ever-changing view with the possibilities of the coast path stretching out before her in both directions, and her old friend Gemma and sister Sophie so close by. All three artists were thrilled when Gillian Cooper, who

LEFT
Wiggly Tree – Sophie Harding

ABOVE
Terracotta Pots – Sophie Harding