

Virtual art exhibition opens on Thursday

From Thursday you will be able to have a look at the latest exhibition at The Fine Art Society with the help of some 3D technology.

It will be just like walking round the Dundas Street gallery without the bother of going there.

The [exhibition](#) features artist Ron Sandford who lives in Shetland.

RON SANDFORD: 114° E / 1° W

Hong Kong to Shetland

14 May – 13 June 2020

Hong Kong and Yell: two halves of The Fine Art Society's first exhibition of drawings by Ron Sandford (b.1937). Island life from two geographically and culturally distinct and distant places are united in Ron's appreciation of the commonplace – or common place – both richly detailed microcosms.

Encouraged by Norman Foster to draw the newly built HSBC building in Hong Kong (completed 1985), Ron found himself in a city that presented the change of pace and scene he needed: a break from commissioned work in the UK, cheap living, low taxes and bountiful material. Upon meeting an ex-pupil, Meilo So – who later became his wife – he settled in Lamma, a small island off Hong Kong.

A sort of paradise is how he described it. Living on the edge

of pre-handover China and close to Macau, Ron was drawn to Chinese vernacular architecture. A recurrent motif of mid-stream operations, the at-sea loading and unloading of containers, in the shipping lanes just off Lamma forms the backdrop to many of his pictures from this time. Brooding hulks contrast with decorative domestic environments.

Encouraged by his father-in-law, Ron and Meilo returned to the UK at the handover to China.

He said: "I loved it, could have stayed and would still be there now." But on returning to London he fulfilled his valedictory commission to draw the Millennium Bridge and then moved to another island, almost as far north as he could get in the UK, to Yell, a place he had first visited in the 1980s. By then he and Meilo had a two year old daughter, Ming. That it was also a trout fishing paradise, he concedes, 'weighed heavily'. Freed from deadlines and exacting commissions, he followed his own inclinations.

From his studio in The Galley Shed, he draws the everyday, every day: still life, landscape and portrait in pencil, pen, ink and watercolour. Not ordinary, but charged with attitude: flax plants look like an embodiment of defiance, aloe vera appear predatory, a defeated polytunnel struggles vainly in a gale.

The Last of the Rose is a tribute to a fine, obsolete flitting boat. *Mousa Broch* is weighted in history and mystery. Old rope, wild flowers, geos, trout, geese and sheep fill pages and pages of sketch books. From the windows of his studio and home, Ron looks across the Bluemull sound to Unst. A distinctive cleft in the cliff face defiantly sits in the backdrop of many pictures, a recurring motif like the container ships

[Click here to access the exhibition in 3D](#)

Ron grew up in Greenock, the son of a marine engineer. He was

surrounded by plans and elevations. Through war-time rationing, his father brought home disused blueprints for tablecloths. The pale blue background and white skeletal drawings of cross-sections and elevations were, he recalls, 'soaked up with my porridge'. Upon leaving Greenock High School he trialled at a local architect's office.

The routine of it was deadening and he chucked it within weeks. From 1956-60 he attended Glasgow School of Art in the etching and engraving department, soon to be taken over by Philip Reeves.

He was still liable for National Service but, encouraged by Reeves, he applied for and was accepted into the Royal College of Art. For three years he studied in the Graphics department and it was there he became friends with Edward Bawden.

Conversations about drawing and plants provided rich common ground. Bawden, who was in his 70s, invited Ron to join him on a drawing trip to Istanbul. Bawden held Ron in high esteem, dubbing him 'the wizard of the ink bottle' and helped him secure a part-time teaching job at the College.

Through the 60s and 70s he taught part time at the Central School of Art and Design, the Royal College of Art, St. Martin's School of Art and Brighton School of Art. From the 1960s he was a corresponding editor of *Ambit*, a quarterly art and literary publication. Each issue over 40 years included his drawings and around 80 poets have sat for their Sandford portraits.

For 30 years, Ron illustrated books and newspapers and undertook large scale architectural commissions such as Bishopsgate, London. He was commissioned by the likes of the V&A, Longman publishers and architects such as Norman Foster and Richard Rogers.

His oil-rig series, commissioned by Mobil Oil saw him stay on a rig for a month where he could observe the technical details

of an offshore installation alongside profiles of the roustabouts. Although he put his own stamp on the work, he had to respond to the needs and demands of the commissioning agents.

Imprinted upon all the pictures from his time in Hong Kong onwards is a small red character. In Cantonese it is 'san', meaning mountain, but appropriates the sound of his name, Sandford. Meilo bought the character chop, or seal, on the street almost as a joke but it has become his mark. Much like the man himself, it sits quietly but assuredly in the work, a bold graphic type, no nonsense.

The Fine Art Society | 6 Dundas Street | EH3 6HZ |
www.fasedinburgh.com | +44 (0) 131 557 4050

