

PRESS RELEASE 2018

## Sheila Bownas: A Life in Pattern

21 February – 20 May 2018

De'Longhi Print Room, Free admission

A new exhibition in Pallant House Gallery's De'Longhi Print Room showcases the work of Sheila Bownas (1925-2007), a mid-century textile designer who supplied Liberty London and Marks & Spencer amongst others. Her work has been relatively unknown until recently when an archive of her work surfaced at auction. The colourful patterns created by Bownas include floral and geometric motifs alongside playful designs of children dancing and animals, capturing the optimism of the post-war era. This exhibition offers an opportunity to discover the work of a talented British textile designer who, alongside many other female designers in the mid-century textile industry, remained invisible during her career. The exhibition has been curated in association with Chelsea Cefai, who first discovered Bownas' work at auction in 2008.

The quality and scale of Bownas's output indicates that she was a talented and prolific designer, yet she received little credit for her designs during her lifetime. Her designs were issued by various textile and wallpaper manufacturers under their name – a practice that was (and still is) the norm in the commercial world of textiles. Although some designers, most notably Lucienne Day (1917-2010), were promoted by their clients as star designers, Sheila Bownas's career was more typical of what was on the whole a low-profile, low-paid and largely female profession, which remains invisible to the public eye to this day.

Like many art school graduates, Bownas operated as a freelancer, selling patterns to various clients rather than being on staff at one particular firm. Bownas's clients included Liberty London and Crown Wallpapers, who also worked with Lucienne Day, as well as Lancashire textile firms of Simpson & Godlee and Turnbull & Stockdale (Rosebank Fabrics), Marks & Spencer and the stationers Gordon Fraser.



Sheila Bownas, SB159, circa 1950-59

Sheila Catherine Bownas was born in 1925, growing up in the small Yorkshire Dales village of Linton. She displayed a natural talent for painting at a young age, attending Skipton Art College in the 1940s before securing a scholarship at the Slade School of Art in London. During her time at the Slade, she won a number of prizes for her work and had nine paintings accepted for the Royal Academy summer exhibitions. She graduated in 1950 and moved between London and Linton for twelve years, before finally settling in the Yorkshire Dales for the rest of her life, selling her designs by post.

Bownas's bright and bold designs reflect the changing mood of consumers during the early 1950s. After years of post-war austerity, British households eagerly welcomed the new designs that began to appear on wallpaper and home furnishings as manufacturers capitalised on a new feeling of optimism that swept the country, exemplified by the Festival of Britain in 1951. It was in this climate that Bownas forged a career as a freelance designer, supplying patterns to the likes of Liberty and Marks and Spencer.



# PALLANT HOUSE GALLERY

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It was only on her death in 2007 that her family discovered the sheer scale of her output, which included still life, landscape and portrait paintings as well as textile designs. The archive first became known at auction in 2008, when Chelsea Cefai bought 200 of Sheila's hand-painted patterns. She founded the Sheila Bownas Archive in 2010 in order to bring her work to a wider audience.

The Sheila Bownas Archive is particularly striking thanks to the stylistic variety of her designs. She was able to turn her hand to a diverse range of subjects, which no doubt helped to contribute to her success as a designer. Whether her clients were looking for bold abstract designs such as SB 1471, or figurative patterns such as SB 159, which depicts children playing together, the standard of Bownas's work remained consistently high.

**Sheila Bownas: A Life in Pattern** will be on display in the De'Longhi Print Room at Pallant House Gallery from 21 February until 20 May 2018. Entry to the De'Longhi Print Room is free.

'Sheila Bownas – The Art of Pattern', a comprehensive record of Bownas's textile designs, is also available to buy from the Pallant Bookshop.

Art historian Jill Seddon will give a talk on Women Designers and the Design Profession in Interwar Britain at Pallant House Gallery on Thursday 15 March, 6pm (£10, Students £9, Friends £8.50). Followed by a book signing and a complimentary glass of wine.

--Ends--

## About Pallant House Gallery:

Pallant House Gallery is a unique combination of an historic Queen Anne townhouse and contemporary extension, housing one of the best collections of Modern British art in the country. Widely acclaimed for its innovative temporary exhibitions and exemplary Learning and Community Programme which has inclusion at its heart, the Gallery has won numerous

awards since re-opening in 2006, including the Gulbenkian Prize, the largest for arts and cultural organisations in the country.

[www.pallant.org.uk](http://www.pallant.org.uk)

## About De'Longhi:

De'Longhi is Pallant House Gallery's headline sponsor as part of the brand's continued support of the arts and local community. De'Longhi, makers of premium Italian coffee machines and other aspirational household appliances, established links with the Gallery for the first time in 2009 through a partnership that included a variety of creative projects throughout the year. De'Longhi continues to contribute to the work of the Gallery through its sponsorship of the De'Longhi Print Room, which features a variety of dynamic exhibitions. For more information about De'Longhi visit [www.seriousaboutcoffee.com](http://www.seriousaboutcoffee.com)



Sheila Bownas,  
SB 1471, circa  
1970-79



Sheila Bownas,  
Untitled 3, circa  
1950-59