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nimtim
a r c h i t e c t s

contact@nimtim.co.uk
0208 693 0878
@nimtim_arch
@nimtimarchitects
nimtim.co.uk

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Peckham painter's work to be made into a book

A local resident is launching a book of her late husband's art.

Jaqui Benjamins met her husband Paul while they were both studying at Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts (now Camberwell College of Arts) in the early 1970s. He then attended the Royal College of Art to do an MA.

The couple were able to buy a large Victorian house in the days when property in Peckham was relatively affordable. Paul, a renowned fine artist, used the entire ground floor as his workspace, while Jaqui, a textile designer, had a studio in the basement.

They married in 1976 at Camberwell registry office and had two children: Dan, who owns The Habit restaurants in Nunhead and at the South London Gallery, and Rebecca, a deputy head teacher at Bessemer Grange Primary School in Dulwich.

Speaking of Paul's work, Jaqui, who also has three young grandchildren, said: "Paul painted abstract landscapes. I think he'd call them 'lyrical landscapes'. Towards the end of his life he said he was trying to paint like Turner."

Tragically Paul was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer in 2014 and passed away the following year aged 65. During the last 14 months of his life he kept a visual diary, filling a series of large, almost A2-sized sketchbooks with about 220 drawings.

"It was almost daily to begin with," Jaqui said, "and I kept buying him sketchbooks. It was very much about noting what he did each day, how he felt, what was happening. I think it was very helpful to him."



"Paul was always incredibly forward looking and really optimistic; he loved people. The drawings are about meeting friends, going for a drink and going to the match – he was a fanatical Chelsea fan."

Jaqui is having the book printed with fine art publisher the Hurtwood Press. She will then sell copies of the book to recoup her costs and will donate all profits to St Christopher's Hospice, which looked after Paul during his illness.

"I think they [the sketches] are fascinating and not that many people have seen them," she said. "Paul was quite keen to publish things and



we talked about publishing them. Friends who have seen them thought they were just beautiful drawings."

All Peckham Peculiar readers are welcome to attend the book launch on March 18, 2-4pm at M2

gallery, 2c King's Grove. About six drawings will then go on show at the gallery (by appointment only) until April 22. Paul's work will also be on display during Dulwich Open House on the weekend of May 12-13 – pick up a programme in local shops for details.



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Spotlight on LGBT history

A free exhibition on the history of LGBTQ+ people and communities is coming to Peckham during LGBT History Month.

QueerStory will delve into the Southwark Archives to uncover a world of queer culture and forgotten histories, such as female husband James Allen, who was born a woman but spent his life living as a man with his wife in Bermondsey.

Also on display will be 1930s photographs by Southwark man Ralph Hall, which depict a life of domestic happiness with his lover Monty, along with the love letters they wrote when Ralph was posted off to war.

Other photos will show the glorious pub drag culture of the 1960s, the emergence of the gay disco scene pioneered by DJ Tricky Dicky in 70s Camberwell and the saucy drag shows and boozing dancing at the Ship & Whale.

Moving into the 1980s, the exhibition will look at the work of forgotten local groups like the Southwark Sappho Sisters, Peckham Black Women's Centre Lesbians, Gay Men In

Southwark and the Black Gay & Lesbian Centre.

It will show how Southwark's LGBTQ+ community confronted key issues of the time, campaigning against Section 28 and fighting for rights that were finally realised in the 1990s and 2000s.

Councillor Johnson Situ, cabinet member for business, culture and social regeneration, said: "This is a wonderful opportunity for people to learn about, and celebrate, the long and important history of the LGBTQ+ communities in Southwark and the impact they had on the national stage, paving the way for LGBT equality."

The exhibition is curated by Southwark Council heritage officer Chris Scales, with production assistance from local musician Rina Mushonga. It is supported by the Southwark LGBT Network.

QueerStory is on display at Peckham Levels from February 15-28, 10am-11pm. Pictured: Pride 1984, © Pam Isherwood.



Let us play

Plans to build "one of the best play areas in Southwark" in Peckham Rye Park have been delayed after asbestos was discovered in the ground, writes Kate Graham-Shaw.

The scheme is part of a Southwark Council initiative to revitalise the park and was granted planning permission in January last year. It will feature a playground, changing rooms and activity centre built by Neillcott Construction Group.

The play area design was inspired by the Tumbling Bay Playground in the Olympic Park and will include a "water play zone" full of "pumps, streams and dams" throughout the summer months, as well as a climbing frame with tunnel slides and swings.

The council said the main development visions for the project are "to design and build one of the best play areas in Southwark" and "to create a flexible and sustainable children's playground", among others.

However, the scheme has now been delayed

due to asbestos found in the ground of the former car park site. It allegedly came from the old prisoner of war buildings that used to stand on the spot where the café is now located.

The asbestos is said to be low grade, not airborne and concentrated to one area. The council said it is unlikely to discover traces of the potentially dangerous material in other areas of the park and that the new play area is now set to open in June this year.

Councillor Barrie Hargrove, cabinet member for communities, leisure and safety, said: "Aside from an unavoidable delay, due to the discovery and professional removal of asbestos in the new play area, works have progressed like clockwork."

Work is also set to begin on Leyton Square playground in north Peckham this spring, which has been closed for several years due to "safety fears". A council spokesman said Southwark is "committed to providing a top-quality play area in every local area".