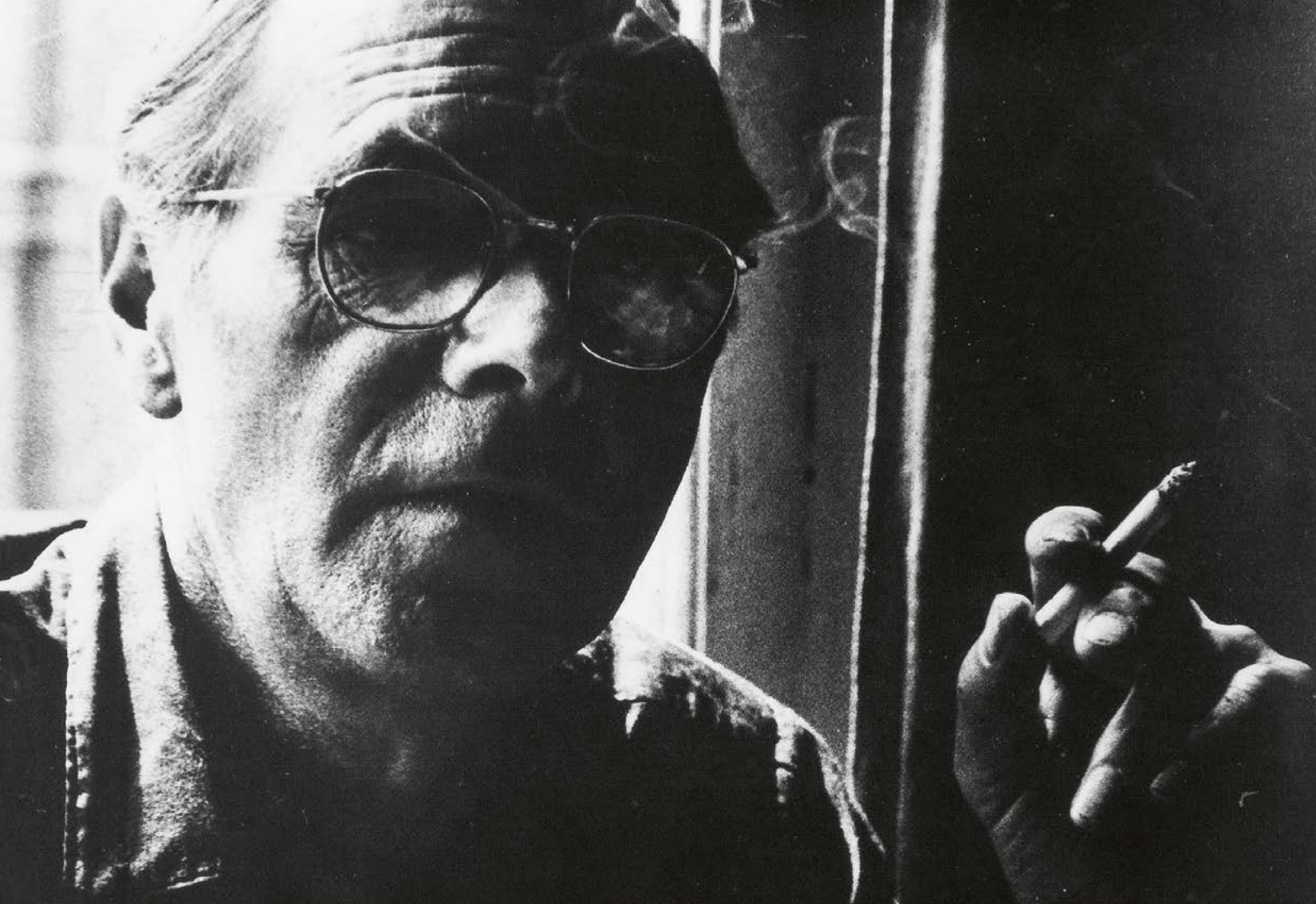


Roger Hilton

Roger Hilton

1911-1975



Roger Hilton
Breaking Out: Works on Paper

Jenna Burlingham Gallery

in association with the Estate of Roger Hilton
and Jonathan Clark Fine Art



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*I have reached a stage now of simplifying. Art is essentially a breaking out,
a shedding of old moulds. Every true artist is a revolutionary*

Roger Hilton, in a letter to Peter Townsend, 1974

Confined to his cottage in the Cornish village of Botallack for the last three years of his life and too weak to paint in oils, Roger Hilton, defiant and unconventional to the last, took possession of a set of poster-paints belonging to one of his sons and began his last body of work.

As he lay in bed, surrounded by an increasing number of emptied whisky bottles, propped up on his left arm, painting fervently with his right arm despite being left-handed, he embarked on a spectacularly fresh series of works on paper. These compositions at first glance appear provocatively simple, yet reveal themselves to be carefully considered and demonstrate Hilton's fearless inventiveness in his final years. Chris Stephens hailed the series as 'one of the most extraordinary bodies of late work by any artist of the twentieth century.'¹

Hilton relished the informality and freedom of his new medium, enthusiastically incorporating cigarette ash, whisky and coffee spills as he worked. Often evoked rather than defined, the subjects are far-ranging. Witty, erotic and light-hearted, these joyful imaginings are also often tinged with Hilton's realisation of his approaching death, his desires, his rages and his frustrations. As Margaret Garlake commentated, 'He painted love, joy, laughter and anger as though they were tangible, he made emotion visible.'² The immediacy of his paint application, and the confidence and vitality of his brushstrokes fill these works with an energy that is barely contained within their modest size.

Despite their apparent naivety and simplicity of expression, these compositions are not the scrawls and ravings of an incoherent drunk. Rather they are the mature work of a master of controlled composition and graphic dexterity who is drawing on the experience of three decades



as a painter. During the 1950s and 1960s, Hilton was notable for placing equal importance on the use of the charcoal line and the application of oil and for combining figurative and abstract elements at a time when artists were traditionally of one camp or the other. His use of charcoal and gouache and his continued negotiation between abstraction and figuration in these later years is the culmination of a career in which he defied convention.

Hilton is often considered a Cornish artist, but he was arguably one of the most European artists of his generation and these late works should be seen in this context. Unlike many of his St Ives contemporaries, he had engaged with, but was not consumed by, the dialogue with American abstraction. Having lived and studied in France before the outbreak of war, he continued to visit regularly and was immersed in the abstract-figurative dialogue of the *École de Paris*. His work should thus be considered alongside that of European artists including de Stael, Constant and Poliakoff. Hilton's gouaches in particular reveal an intimacy with Dubuffet's concept of *art brut*.

Hilton placed huge importance on drawing throughout his life, beginning each working day with sketching figuratively. While the majority of the works in this exhibition date from Hilton's last body of work, also included are some significant works on paper from earlier in his career. All works in the exhibition come directly from the Artist's Estate and have not been seen before in public.

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1. Chris Stephens, "Roger Hilton", 'St Ives Artists', London: Tate Publishing, 2006, p.63.
 2. Margaret Garlake, 'Roger Hilton Thinking Through Print', Exhibition Catalogue, Jonathan Clark, "Roger Hilton Oi Yoi Yoi", London, 2000.



1 Untitled, 1974 initialled and dated gouache 53.3 × 33 cm (21 × 13 in) shaped



2 Untitled, 1973 initialled and dated gouache 8.9 × 35.6 cm (3½ × 14 in) shaped



3 Untitled, 1973 initialled and dated gouache and charcoal 24.8 × 40.6 cm (9¾ × 16 in)



4 Untitled, 1974 initialled and dated gouache, pastel and charcoal on buff paper 31 × 38.3 cm (12¼ × 15½ in)



5 Untitled, 1973 initialled and dated gouache 38.7 × 43.2 cm (15¼ × 17 in)



6 **Untitled, 1973** initialled and dated gouache 10.8 × 55.9 cm (4¼ × 22 in)



7 **Untitled, 1973** signed and dated gouache 17.1 × 33 cm (6¾ × 13 in) shaped



8 Untitled, 1973 initialled and dated gouache and charcoal on buff paper 28.6 × 40 cm (11¼ × 15¾ in)



9 Untitled, 1974 initialled and dated gouache and charcoal 17.8 × 36.2 cm (7 × 14¼ in) shaped



10 Untitled, 1973 signed and dated gouache and charcoal 13.3 × 27.3 cm (5¼ × 10¾ in)



11 Untitled, 1973 initialed and dated gouache 11.8 × 35 cm (4⅞ × 13¾ in)



12 Untitled, 1973 signed and dated gouache 9.5 × 29.8 cm (3¾ × 11¾ in) shaped



13 Untitled (sailing boat), 1974 signed and dated gouache and charcoal 37 × 44 cm (14½ × 17½ in)



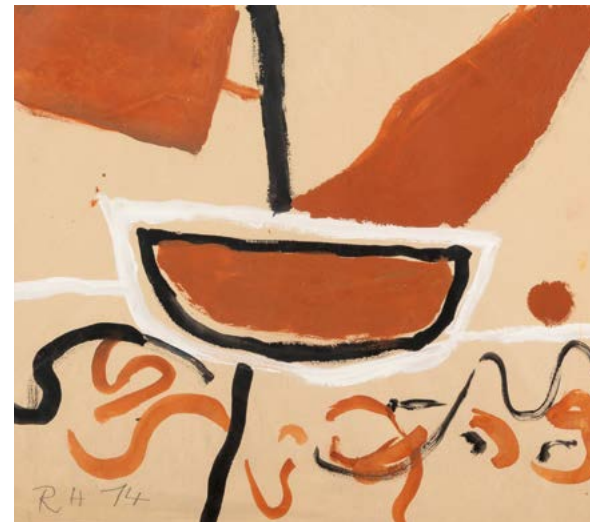
14 **Untitled (boats at sea), 1973** initialled and dated gouache 40.2 x 55 cm (15 7/8 x 21 5/8 in)



15 **Untitled, 1973** initialled and dated gouache 14.5 x 39 cm (5 3/4 x 15 3/8 in) shaped



16 **Untitled (sailing at sea), 1973** signed and dated gouache 25.4 × 44.5 cm (10 × 17½ in)



17 **Untitled (dinghy), 1974** initialled and dated gouache 38.1 × 45.7 cm (15 × 18 in)



18 **Untitled (boats at sea), 1974** initialled and dated gouache 33 × 46.4 cm (13 × 18¼ in)



19 Untitled (circus cart), 1974 initialled and dated gouache and pencil 29.8 × 21 cm (11¾ × 8¼ in)



20 Untitled (hen), 1974 initialled and dated gouache and charcoal 34.3 × 48.3 cm (13½ × 19 in) shaped



21 Untitled (flowers), 1975 initialled and dated gouache and charcoal 21 × 29.8 cm (8¼ × 11¼ in)



22 Untitled (circus horse), 1975 initialled and dated gouache and charcoal 48.9 × 25.4 cm (19¼ × 10 in) shaped



23 Untitled, circa 1960s gouache and charcoal 25.4 × 17.8 cm (10 × 7 in)

24 Untitled (goat), circa 1973 gouache and charcoal 40 × 55.9 cm (15¾ × 22 in)



25 Untitled, 1975 initialled and dated gouache and charcoal 44.5 × 40.6 cm (17½ × 16 in) shaped

26 Untitled, 1974 initialled and dated gouache 52.4 × 36.5 cm (20¾ × 14¾ in)



27 Untitled (seated nude), circa 1968 pencil 20.3 × 25.4 cm (8 × 10 in)

28 Untitled (portrait), 1974 initialled and dated charcoal 43.2 × 33.7 cm (17 × 13¼ in)



29 Untitled (reclining nude in red), 1973 initialled and dated gouache and charcoal 39.4 × 55.9 cm (15½ × 22 in)



30 **Untitled, 1953** signed, dedicated and dated gouache on board 29.7 × 40 cm (11¾ × 15¾ in)



31 **Untitled (standing figure), circa 1950s** charcoal 52.1 × 30.5 cm (20½ × 12 in)



32 **Untitled (washing figure), circa 1968** charcoal 20.3 × 25.4 cm (8 × 10 in)



33 **Untitled, 1974** initialled and dated gouache and charcoal on board 31.1 × 45.7 cm (12¼ × 18 in)



34 **Untitled, 1973** initialled and dated gouache and charcoal 36.8 × 55.9 cm (14½ × 22 in)



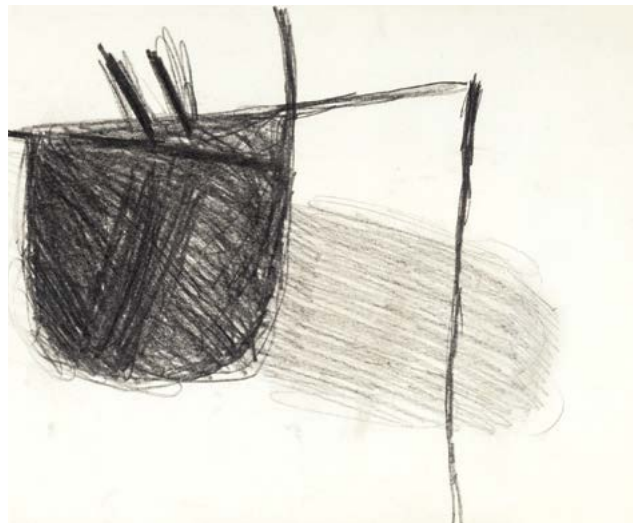
35 **Untitled (nude and hat), circa 1973** gouache and charcoal 25.4 × 38.1 cm (10 × 15 in)



36 **Untitled (seated figure), circa 1960s** ink 25.3 × 8.2 cm (10 × 3¼ in)



37 **Untitled (dancing figure), circa 1968** biro 25.4 × 20.3 cm (10 × 8 in)



38 **Untitled, circa 1963** charcoal 17.8 × 22.9 cm (7 × 9 in)

39 **Untitled, circa early 1960s** charcoal, pencil and pastel 40.6 × 25.4 cm (16 × 10 in)



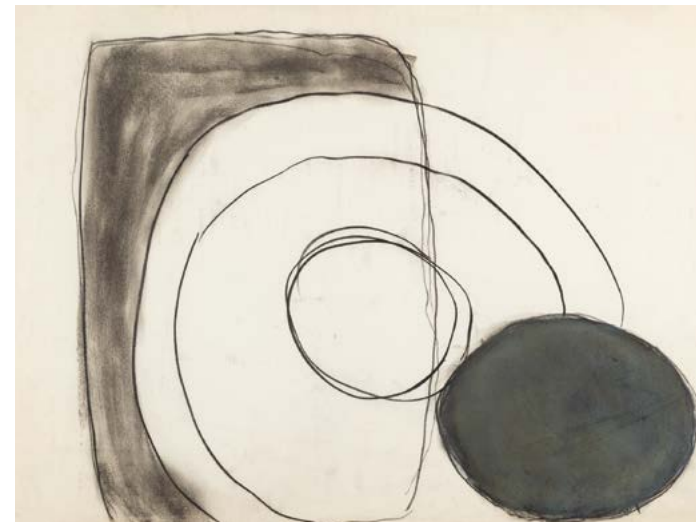
40 **Untitled, circa 1960s** gouache and charcoal 12.7 × 20.3 cm (5 × 8 in)



41 Untitled (head), circa 1950s charcoal and pastel on buff card 22.9 × 17.8 cm (9 × 7 in)



42 Untitled, 1973 initialled and dated gouache and watercolour 14.3 × 27.3 cm (5½ × 10¾ in)



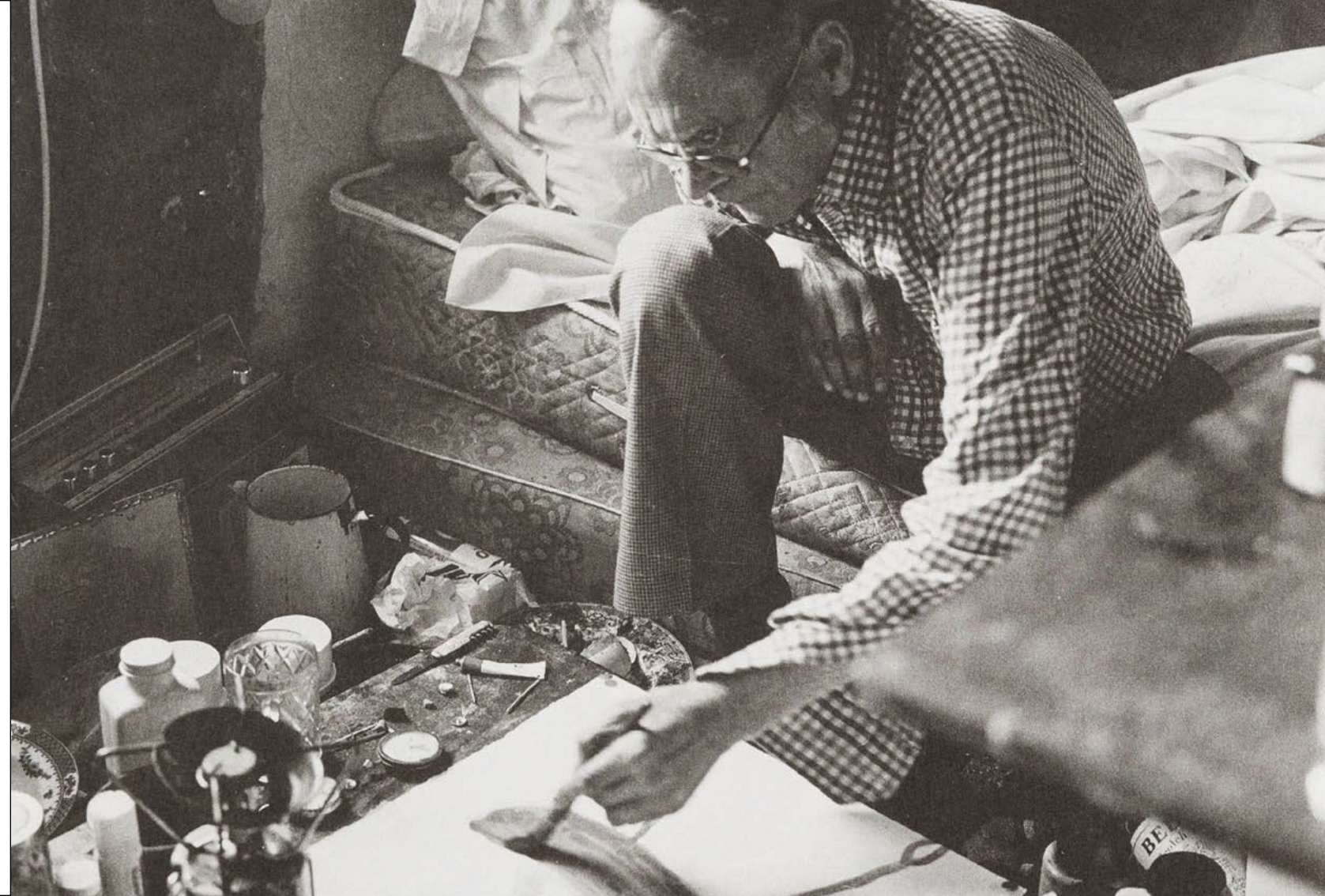
43 Untitled, circa 1960 charcoal 35.6 × 50.8 cm (14 × 20 in)



44 Untitled, 1960 signed and dated on the backboard charcoal 17.8 × 22.9 cm (7 × 9 in)

Biography

1911	Born on 23rd March in Northwood, Middlesex
1929-31	Slade School of Art, London, studies under Henry Tonks
1931	Academie Ranson, Paris, under Roger Bissière: also attends Atelier Colarossi, Paris
1933	Academy Schools, London
1935-6	Shows with London Group (and again in 1938, 1948, 1949 & 1951)
1936	Teaches at Dunmow School, Yorkshire
1937	Living and working in Paris
1940-5	Fights in the War with Commandos: P.O.W. from 1942-45
	1945 Central School of Art, London
1946-7	Teaches at Port Regis and Bryanston Schools
1947	Marries Ruth David
	Visits Cornwall for the first time and spends seven months working in Polzeath
1952	Meets William Scott and Patrick Heron, who introduce him to Peter Lanyon and Bryan Wynter
	Joins Gimpel Fils Gallery and has first solo exhibition in London
1953	Introduced by ex-Slade colleague Stephen Gilbert to Dutch Neo-Plasticist painter Constant
	Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam is first public institution to purchase work
1954	Included in Lawrence Alloway's ground-breaking book 'Nine Abstract Artists'
1954-6	Teaches at Central School of Art, London
1955	Heron publishes 'The Changing Forms of Art' devoting a section to Hilton
1957	Member of Penwith Society (remains so until 1960)
	Takes a studio in Newlyn, Cornwall
1958	Tate Gallery buys its first Hilton painting, 'January 1957'
	Meets Rose Phipps, his future wife (they marry in 1965)
1959	Moves to Waddington Galleries
	Prizewinner at 2nd John Moores Exhibition, Liverpool
1961	Wins First prize at 4th John Moores Exhibition, Liverpool
1964	Represents Britain at the British Pavilion, XXXII Biennale, Venice and wins the UNESCO prize
1965	Moves to a farmhouse at Botallack Moor, near St Just in Cornwall
1968	Awarded a CBE
1974	Arts Council Retrospective at Serpentine Gallery, London
1975	Dies on 23rd February, buried at St Just, Cornwall



Frontispiece: Roger Hilton © Tony Evans/Timelapse Library Ltd.
Page 6: Hilton's bedroom Botallack. Photographed by Ander Gunn. 1975
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