The first visit of Tristram Hillier (1905–1983) to Portugal

Martin Ferguson Smith

In affectionate memory of Ana Maria Ema Vicente née Marques born in Lisbon 8 February 1943, died in Estoril 19 April 2015

In his autobiography, published in 1954, Tristram Paul Hillier (1905–1983), describing his activities in 1936, writes:

Most of the year I was to spend in Spain, a country which I came subsequently to love above all countries and where, since the last war, I have worked for several months each year. The translucent light of the south is comparable to that of Greece, which had so deeply fascinated me, with the addition of a dramatic quality, both noble and cruel, with which the landscape as well as the people are invested. The Iberian Peninsula is neither European nor Asiatic in character, a land set apart from all others, but one pre-eminently to inspire a painter.1

‘The Iberian Peninsula’ suggests that Hillier is thinking of Portugal as well as of Spain. The importance of Portugal to him is confirmed by part of the explanation he gives for not wanting to settle in Austria after his marriage to his second wife, Leda Millicent Hardcastle, in Vienna in January 1937:

Austria … is not a painter’s country, I imagine that this is due to the quality of its light. There is a lack of subtlety in the landscape, beauty as it is, and the lovely Baroque architecture, unlike its counterpart under the warm sun of Portugal which was later to provide the theme for so many of my canvases, never excited me in a pictorial sense.2

Although Hillier did not set foot in Portugal until after the Second World War, it was to it rather than to Spain that he went to paint as soon as circumstances allowed after the war ended. The visit was an important one for him both for his work as an artist and because it arose out of a crisis in his personal life. The purpose of the present article is to clarify the context, dating, and itinerary of the visit, and to focus particular attention on the artist’s portrayal of scenes in the city of Viseu (Vizeu).

After leaving Austria, the Hilliers spent some weeks in Italy and considered settling near Florence, but there, as in Austria, the political climate was uncongenial, and they decided on France. They moved there in the autumn of 1937 and, after a brief stay in Provence, determined to make their home in Normandy. There, in the village of Criquetot-l’Esneval near Étretat, they found a delightful 18th-century house called l’Ormerie. Its price was unaffordable for them, but Leda’s father generously bought it for her. So attractive were the house and its gardens and trees that Hillier declared:

I had a home in which we felt that we could very happily pass the remainder of our lives.3

Sadly, however, their idyllic stay there was to be all too brief. Only about 12 days after the birth of their elder daughter, Mary,4 in Le Havre on 8 May 1940, they were compelled to leave Le Havre, along with several packing-cases containing works, bedding, clothes, and other items saved from l’Ormerie, for Sierra Leone, before being employed ashore in Freetown. He was miserable for most of this time, partly because he missed Leda and Mary, partly because he was unable to paint. Health problems, psychological as well as physical, developed. The ordeal came to an end when he was certified as unfit to serve. On 30 September 1942 he sent a telegram from Liverpool to Leda in Somerset, announcing that he would be home the following afternoon.8

He was now able to paint again, but did not go abroad until after the war in Europe ended. His first destination, in September 1945, was Normandy. With Leda he shared the painful experience of revisiting l’Ormerie. From their devoted maid, Henriette,9 they had learned that the house had been trashed by the Germans, apparently when they learned that the owners were English.10 But, thanks to Henriette, Hillier’s paintings had been removed from his studio and hidden in the house of a neighbour, Monsieur Layet. In the spring of 1945, they were passed to Hillier’s notaire, Maître Maupéan.11

When the Hilliers arrived back in France, they rented a house called Villa la Pivoine in Ettretat, l’Ormerie being uninhabitable. The survival of the paintings was extremely welcome from every point of view, including the economic one, for, if they could be got to England, their sale should give a much-needed boost to the family’s finances. After a tussle, the Board of Trade gave permission for the pictures painted by Hillier prior to his departure from France in 1940 to be imported, but refused to issue an import licence in respect of any of the work he did after his return to the country in 1945. A condition of the licence was that he agreed to take up permanent residence in the United Kingdom. Life in Normandy at this time was not easy, with shortages of food, fuel, and materials, and it took some time, persistence, and ingenuity to get the pictures packed in readiness for transportation.12 There were 51 of them – 37 paintings and 14 drawings. They left Le Havre, along with several packing-cases containing carpets, bedding, clothes, and other items saved from l’Ormerie, aboard a vessel sailing for London on 7 March 1946.13

The Hilliers returned to England ten days later,14 and between 7 May and 1 June Arthur Tooth & Sons Ltd, the London art-dealers through whom Hillier usually sold his pictures, held a successful exhibition and sale of his rescued work in their gallery at 31 Bruton Street.

Hillier’s Somerset home was only 10 miles, as the crow flies, from Downside Abbey and the school run by its Benedictine monks. On 1 November 1944 Hillier had lunch with Dom Siegbert Trafford, sixth Abbot of Downside, and was asked to paint his portrait.15 Terms were agreed, and the first of several sittings took place on 15 November.16 The finished work was delivered to Arthur Tooth in London on 5 March 1945.17 Hillier had been a boarder at Downside School from 1914 to 1921,18 and Dom Siegbert had been his headmaster from 1918. In his later years as a pupil and after he had left, Hillier had seriously contemplated becoming a monk, although a Trappist one rather than a Benedictine, but, when he was still a young man, he lost this ambition, and his faith lapsed. It was Trafford who, to his surprise, had...
encouraged him to train to be an artist, which he did, in the first place, at the Slade School of Fine Art in London under Henry Tonks, enrolling there in February 1926. His renewed contact with the Downside community, in combination with his wartime experiences, brought him back to the Roman Catholic Church. Mervyn Levy says that this happened in 1945,19 but the year is much more likely to have been 1946, after Leda’s and his time in France. The later date is supported by his report of her unexpectedly unfavourable reaction to the news:

… when I announced my resolve to Leda she flew into a towering rage. I had never spoken to her seriously about my spiritual problems, and although she had known of my discussions with various monks at Downside she had, I think, regarded them simply as intellectual gymnastics in the company of old friends with whom I had agreed to disagree. My declared intention of resuming allegiance to Rome awoke in her all the bitterness of the Irish Protestantism in which she had been reared.20 She said that if I persisted in pursuing this superstitious fad she would seek a divorce… My relationship with Leda at this time became very strained, and since my convictions could permit no compromise I was able to do little in healing the breach between us. Thinking that a temporary separation would restrain her from any impetuous decision and enable her to regard the matter in a more reasonable light I told her that I intended to spend the next five or six months painting in Portugal. She seemed to welcome my decision.21

Jenny Pery mistakenly places this first visit to Portugal in 1945,22 misled by a slip of the pen on Hillier’s part when he dated one of the many letters he wrote Leda from Portugal ‘28.5.1945’ instead of ‘28.5.1947’, the slip very likely having been influenced by the preceding ‘5’ for May. Her mistake is unfortunate, because it involves misdating by two years a visit that was, as I have already indicated, of great consequence for him, both professionally and personally.

Hillier gives a brief account of his time in Portugal on the penultimate page of Leda and the Goose.23 The details of it can be found in the letters he wrote from Portugal to Leda and to Richard Smart of Arthur Tooth. The letters to Leda are in the Hillier Archive. Those to Smart are in the Arthur Tooth & Sons Collection in the Tate Archive in London and include also letters written before and after the trip.24

In a letter to Smart in mid-March 1947, he writes:

After an uninterrupted winter’s work in East Pennard25 I am feeling very stale and badly need a change of scene if it can be managed, and I am sure that from the point of view of painting Portugal would be the answer.26

This statement is the truth, but not the whole truth, Hillier’s difficulties with Leda understandably not being mentioned. He had mentioned his intention to Smart earlier, as the preceding lines of the same letter show:

When I saw you last in London you were good enough to say that you would send me Sine Fordham’s address if you could find it in order that I could write to her for information about Portugal.

Have you been able to find it or have you forgotten?
Sine Fordham (1901–96), better known by her maiden name, Sine Mackinnon, was born in Newcastle, County Down, Ulster. Like Hillier, but earlier than he, she had studied drawing at the Slade School of Fine Art, London, under Henry Tonks. She had exhibited several times in London and Paris. She shared Hillier’s preference for working abroad and lived mainly in France. In the spring of 1940 Arthur Tooth staged an exhibition of her Recent Paintings of France, Greece and Portugal. She had spent the first months of the Second World War in Portugal. An artist who deserves to be much better known than she is, she produced work that has one striking similarity to Hillier’s, which is the absence or fewness of human figures in her scenes, but her method of composition was very different from his: unlike him, she always painted en plein air, according to her daughter, Jan Fordham. One cannot tell how helpful she was to Hillier about Portugal. Smart immediately sent Hillier her temporary address in Dublin. It is not known whether he received a reply from her before he started his visit, but he did hear from her towards the end of it.30

Smart encouraged Hillier to go to Portugal and may even have suggested it as well.31 As we shall see, he was to join him there for nearly three weeks in August. In a letter to Hillier dated 1 May 1947 he writes, ‘The Portuguese [sic] conspiracy goes merrily on, and I now feel sure that you and Portugal are meant for one another. Could it be otherwise when the way is paved with gold, so to speak? Anyhow I am delighted, not to say envious, that everything has planned out so well.32 Hillier echoes the term ‘conspiracy’ in a letter, written just over a week later, in which he reports:

All is now arranged for the Portuguese trip. I received [sic] this morning the Bank of England’s authorisation to transfer £300[33] to Lisbon, and I have just telephoned the American Express and reserved an air passage on Saturday the 17th May. It really seems as though the Gods were in on this conspiracy, to send me to Portugal, as I have met both from the B.O.T.[37] and the Treasury with an immediate compliance with my requests, and I am sure that if I had asked for much more than £300 it would have been granted to me.34

On the same day that he wrote the above, he wrote again to Smart, requesting his help in contacting another person whose knowledge of Portugal he wanted to tap:

I cannot remember Sache Sitwell’s address and I urgently require some information about Portugal from him before I leave. You probably have it in your lists, but if not could you please find it out for me and forward the enclosed letter.35

Sacheverell Sitwell (1897–1988), younger brother of Edith Louisa Sitwell and (Francis) Osbert Sacheverell Sitwell, was an indefatigable traveller and prolific writer, best known for his books on baroque art and architecture. One of these, Spanish Baroque Art, discussed also buildings in Portugal as well as in Mexico, South America, Abyssinia, Goa, and China. The book appeared 16 years before Hillier’s first visit to Portugal. In the preface to Portugal and Madeira, published in 1954, Sitwell calls Hillier ‘my friend’, and the frontispiece of the book is a colour photograph of Hillier’s painting of the Church of the Misericordia at Viseu. It seems a reasonable conjecture that the information Hillier sought from Sitwell in May 1947 included ‘the lovely Baroque architecture ... of Portugal’ mentioned by Hillier in a passage quoted near the beginning of this article.

A few months before Hillier decided to visit Portugal, in September 1946, Rose Macaulay’s entertaining account of British people who for various reasons visited or settled in Portugal over the centuries appeared under the title They Went to Portugal (London 1946). An important part of the research was done in Portugal in March–May 1945. The book did much to enhance awareness of British links to Portugal and its people. Although there is no evidence that its publication influenced Hillier’s decision, Macaulay, who made an adventurous solo trip to Spain and Portugal in the summer of 1947 in preparation for her book Fabled Shore,36 was to have some contact with him. She admired the work he did in Portugal in 1947 and bought one of the drawings he made. When he went to Spain in April 1949, she ‘strongly recommended’ to him Guadix ‘as a painting terrain’.37 Unfortunately his visit to Guadix that year was not the success she and he had hoped. In a letter to her Portuguese friend Luiz Marques in July 1949, just after Hillier had returned to Spain, she writes:

Tristram Hillier, the artist, was disgusted because, when he went to the Guadix hill country to paint it (he is very good) the children surrounded him, threw stones and dirt, upset his easel, and made themselves so tiresome that he gave it up and went back to Torremolinos in a temper. He did some beautiful drawings and paintings in Portugal in 1947, of Vizeu and other places. He is among the several people who seem to have gone to the fabled shore after reading my book.38

Unless Macaulay let Hillier read her book prior to publication, the last statement cannot be correct. Hillier left England for Spain on 9 April,39 several weeks before Fabled Shore appeared.40 Several years later, he was to return to Guadix to draw and paint it.41

On 17 May 1947 Hillier flew with British European Airways from Northolt Airport, London, to Bordeaux and on to Lisbon, where he stayed his first nights in Portugal at the Grand Hotel Borges. In Lisbon he made the acquaintance of Susan and Luiz Marques, who had been very helpful to Macaulay and remained good friends of hers, and were to assist also Sacheverell Sitwell. Susan was a daughter of the author Marie Bellloc Lowndes and a niece of Hilaire Bellloc. Like them, she was a writer. She was co-author with Ann Bridge The Selective Traveller in Portugal (1949), a book praised by Sitwell.42 Luiz had been the Lisbon correspondent of The Daily Telegraph since 1936 and editor of Anglo-Portuguese News since 1937. Hillier met them at the British Institute, where he heard Susan give a lecture on Anglo-Portuguese relations in the arts during the past 400 years. He took to her and Luiz immediately.43 They invited him to visit them at their home in Estoril, although he did not manage to do that, but, in deciding where to base himself, he benefited from Luiz’s advice. After a brief stay in Nazaré, on the coast north of Lisbon, he went further north to Aveiro, ‘the Venice of Portugal’, but found it ‘awful’, and after what he describes, in a letter to Richard Smart, as ‘a rather abortive period of travel’ and, in a letter to Leda, as ‘a perfectly ghastly five days’, he followed the advice of Luiz Marques to abandon his plan of staying in ‘those miserable village inns’ and go to Foz do Arelho, a little down the coast from Nazaré.44

At Foz he found an extremely comfortable hotel on a long and solitary beach run by a most agreeable Englishman with whom I have become very friendly and have consequently been accorded most reasonable terms.45 The establishment was Hotel do Facho, and its proprietor was Charles Harbord (1906–81), a noted interior designer and theatre manager, a man named Hannibal (probably Anibal).46 Several years later, he was to return to Guadix to paint it (he is very good) the children surrounded him, threw stones and dirt, upset his easel, and made themselves so tiresome that he gave it up and went back to Torremolinos in a temper. He did some beautiful drawings and paintings in Portugal in 1947, of Vizeu and other places. He is among the several people who seem to have gone to the fabled shore after reading my book.47

When still in England, Hillier had heard of Foz from several sources, but had not paid much attention. One of his informants, through Richard Smart (he thought) was the celebrated Australian-born ballet-dancer and actor Robert (‘Bobby’) Helpmann (1909–86), who had stayed at Hotel do Facho the previous summer and made a remarkable impression on its manager, a man named Hannibal (probably Anibal).48 Helpmann was to buy two of the pictures that resulted from Hillier’s 1947 visit to Portugal. One of them was Rocks at Facho.49

Early in his stay at Foz, Hillier suggested to Leda that she and Mary fly out to join him in August.50 This was not to happen, but he was joined by several other visitors from England. One was Richard Smart, who arrived on 5 August and departed on 25 August. Hillier gave him advance warning that he must not expect any lively entertainment, the entertainment...
was much more significant. In a letter of 25 June to Leda from Portugal, probably just after his unenjoyable visit to Aveiro. On and perhaps three visits. The first was early in his time in the city and district capital in northern Portugal, east of Aveiro Foz and the surrounding area was Viseu, an ancient episcopal see. Its Cathedral, survives, and his painting of it is not the large one in the Misericordia (Igreja da Misericórdia), directly opposite the Church of the Misericordia, Viseu, not later than 1947. Postcard by Foto-Germano, Viseu. Hillier Archive

As well as Foz itself being attractive, ‘The surroundings’, Hillier declared, ‘are all that I could desire to paint.’ Nearby places that are scenes of his paintings include Peniche, Obidos, Nadasdouro, and Caldas da Reinha. Hotel do Facho remained his base until 11 September, but he was to make several expeditions to other parts of Portugal before he flew back to London on 25 September. In the first week of September, and again later in the month, he stayed at Quinta do Carmo, Estremoz, as a guest of Victor Hunter Reynolds (1901–85). Estremoz, east of Lisbon, is less than 30 miles from the Spanish border and, during the Second World War, Reynolds, whose mother was Portuguese, played a most valuable role in assisting the escape of Allied servicemen, agents, and refugees from occupied Europe through Spain and Portugal. He suggested to Hillier that he do a small drawing of the nearby house of the Duke of Palmela, the Portuguese Ambassador in London, and give it to him. When the exhibition of Hillier’s work in Portugal was held in London the following spring, the Ambassador agreed to be its patron, opened it, and purchased one of the paintings. Between his two visits to Estremoz, Hillier visited the Douro valley. Oporto, and nearby places in the north in the company of Max Graham and two of Graham’s acquaintances. Major G Maxwell A Graham (1883–1960), who had been resident in Oporto since 1907 or 1908, headed the operations of Grasens Trading Company Limited in Portugal, where it owned textile- and paper-mills and a printing works. His family also owned Graham’s Port. It seems that Hillier knew Max Graham before his trip to Portugal, but it is not clear how.

Much the most important destination for Hillier away from Foz and the surrounding area was Viseu, an ancient episcopal city and district capital in northern Portugal, east of Aveiro and southeast of Oporto, situated on a plateau on the left bank of the River Pavia, a tributary of the Mondego. Hillier made two and perhaps three visits. The first was early in his time in Portugal, probably just after his unenjoyable visit to Aveiro. On this first occasion he seems not to have done any drawing. His second visit, at the end of June and beginning of July, was much more significant. In a letter of 25 June to Leda from Foz, he writes:

The day after tomorrow I am motoring north with Harbord who goes to his other hotel, in order to spend a few days in a lovely mountain town called VIZEU where I have already made some notes and have several drawings to do.

The second establishment owned by Harbord was the Hotel Urgeiriça in Canas de Senhorim, a little south of Viseu. Hillier briefly described his time in Viseu on a picture postcard from Viseu written to Leda in the morning of Tuesday 1 July: Have been staying here last 2 days drawing –. Have completed an ambitious and successful drawing of Cathedral Square –. Quite magnificent – for a large picture –. Return this afternoon to URGERIÇA [sic] Harbord’s Northern hotel, which is 30 kilometres away, and back to Foz during the week –. V dirty and cafard and accommodation [sic] here, but worth putting up with for the drawing. The heat here is really overwhelming.64 The following day he wrote to Leda again from Hotel Urgeiriça:

I arrived here yesterday from Viseu, whence I sent you a card, after an appalling [sic] journey which took 5 hours, although the distance is only 25 kilometres… It is wonderful to be in this comfortable hotel of Harbord’s again after the very cafard surroundings in which I have been drawing for the past few days. But I did a really fine drawing, which makes any discomfort worth while. The heat up here in the mountains is terrific – enough for you, I think, – and I manage only to draw outside in the mornings, and work in my room during the afternoons.65

In a letter to Leda at the end of August, Hillier announced his intention of making a third visit to Viseu, which Richard Smart had visited without him a few days earlier:

Richard has absolutely insisted that I return to Viseu in the north to make a drawing, and subsequently a large painting of the ‘Misericordia’ there (which he went to see, and of which I had already made notes) so I am going to spend a week in Charles Harbord’s house (which is not far away) from 15th Sept.66

In the correspondence I have seen, however, there is no confirmation of a further visit to Viseu, and certainly the plan of spending a week from 15 September in Harbord’s Hotel Urgeiriça was not fulfilled. Hillier wrote to Leda from there on 11 and 12 September, when on his way to the Douro with Max Graham and companions, and in the letter of 12 September he reports an accident he had in the swimming pool the previous day, when he dived off the top board into water that was too shallow, hit his head on the bottom of the pool, and ‘came up with my face streaming with blood and feeling rather gaga’.67

There is no mention of Viseu. After the Douro and Oporto trip he went to Lisbon and Estremoz and seems not to have travelled north again. If, therefore, a third visit to Viseu was made at all, it seems to have been a very brief one, probably for no more than a few hours in the company of Graham and friends. No drawing he made of the 18th-century Church of the Misericórdia (Igreja da Misericórdia), directly opposite the Cathedral, survives, and his painting of it is not the large one Richard Smart and he had envisaged, but a small panel (Pl 1). Preserved in the Hillier Archive are three photographic images of the church. One is a large photograph giving the same view, from the same point, as the painting (Pl 2). Even the shadows are similar. The back of the photograph is stamped ‘Germano VISEU’.

There were two other images: one a slightly nearer view of the church than the photograph (Pl 2). The other is a more distant view, from just in front of the Cathedral (Pl 4). This second postcard is reproduced, very small, by Pery.68
nature’ items is an indication of how, despite the transition
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he had not shed all his surrealist inclinations. But, although
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scene and have the viewer guessing about their significance
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Author’s collection. © The Estate of Tristram Hillier / Bridgeman Images

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The similarities between the drawing and the painting are
obvious, being close and numerous, but there are also differ-ences. Most of the differences are minor, but several are more
significant. The most remarkable one is the omission from the
painting of the granite column, bearing the episcopal coat of
arms and surmounted by a cross, in Cathedral Square, of
which it is a prominent feature, as is clear in the Misericordia
painting and the photographs. It is to be seen in the drawing
in front of the left tower of the Cathedral. Given Hillier’s
usual attention to detail, it is hard to believe that its omission
from the painting is accidental. It is much more likely that he
thought that it spoiled the view of the Cathedral and detract-
ed from the ‘symmetry and harmony of the picture. It is
probable too that it was aesthetic considerations that
prompted him to make several alterations to windows – for
example, to give the house at the far end of the row three
first-floor windows instead of two, to remove the small dia-
mond-shaped window near the base of the tower of the
church, and to tidy up the building’s roof by removing not
only the second-floor window, but also the second floor itself.
In the drawing no face of a woman is to be seen in the win-
dow above the shop, no items of drapery are hanging in or
out of the windows, and there is no pot of flowers. The two
distant figures are easier to make out in the drawing than in
the painting, and the priest has his umbrella up, not down. As
for the quasi-surrealist assembly of objects in the foreground,
the jugs are in the drawing, but close together. There is just
one piece of drapery and no hat.

Another difference between drawing and painting con-
cerns the shadows. They are more extensive in the painting.
Some critics detect something unnatural and unsettling
about the emptiness of Hillier’s scenes and the presence of
long shadows.57 Their judgment is subjective and, with regard
to shadows, largely fanciful. There is nothing unnatural about
the shadows in either of the Viseu paintings. Perry thinks that
the painting of the Church of the Misericordia, ‘with its bare
piazza pierced by geometric shadows, has the hushed inten-
sity of a stage before the play has begun’. Perhaps, but
Hillier's letters he had mentioned his depression and inability to paint, and his two days in July he told Richard Smart: 'My long period of 1946, when he returned home, he received a letter from her containing an astonishing piece of news. His reply began:

My darling—,

Your letter of September 9th reached me yesterday in Oporto, and I cannot tell you how happy it has made me. That you should wish to become a Catholic is something I have prayed much for, but others must too have prayed for you, because I cannot imagine that the prayers of such an old sinner as I would be so quickly answered!

Your change of heart is, of course, as you say, miraculous, and I can so well understand the deep happiness it has brought to you and will, I am sure, bring to our children together.

How Leda's conversion had come about is described by Hillier in his autobiography. Their daughter, Mary, now aged seven, was attending a convent school (in Shepton Mallet) open to all denominations. Leda had become friendly with one of the French nuns, and their conversations and the various books the nun obtained for her had made her want to be instructed in Roman Catholicism and received into the Church.

Leda did indeed become a Roman Catholic, and it would be nice to be able to report that the rift between husband and wife that brought about his first visit to Portugal was as successful for his personal life as it was for his professional career. From the closing paragraph of Leda and the Goose one would think that it was:

We have now lived in Somerset for seven years, the longest period I have ever spent in one place. Another daughter has been born to us (2) and my sons pay me visits from time to time. I spend a few months of each year painting in Spain lest my palette and my mind become as misty as the gentle landscape which surrounds us, but I have found my happiness and my home at last, in Leda and in England.

Sadly, the reality was very different. Despite Leda's conversion and the welcome addition to the family in 1950, the marriage never again became the closely loving one it had been in its earliest years, before Hillier's wartime service and breakdown. The differences in their interests and, although he enjoyed riding horses, he did not fully share her passion for them, or her social life. He would have loved them to make their home abroad again. Soon after the war this would not have been possible, because of the undertaking he had given the Board of Trade in 1946 to live in the United Kingdom. Later it would have been possible, but Leda would not agree. As early as the summer of 1948, just after the successful exhibition and sale of his Portuguese pictures, he was suffering from depression.

At the end of July he told Richard Smart: 'My long period of gloom and frustration seems to be coming to an end.' To earlier letters he had mentioned his depression and inability to paint. Depression was to continue to blight him periodically for much of the rest of his life.

But his memories of Portugal in 1947 will undoubtedly have been happy ones — in complete contrast to those he had of the war years and the months in Normandy in 1945–46. His concern about the future of his marriage was outweighed by his recently rediscovered faith in Roman Catholicism. Once he had based himself in Roiz, he was generally relaxed and happy, and he made friends with several interesting people. The whole visit was artistically congenial, stimulating, and productive and set the pattern for his future way of working — drawing abroad in the summer, painting at home in the winter.

Hillier was to return to Portugal many times, especially from the mid-1960s, when he began a routine of spending the summer months at Quinta da Belva near Portalegre in the east of the country, north of Estremoz and near the Spanish border. His first visit to the estate was in response to an advertisement in The Times in 1965, offering accommodation to paying guests. The owner was (Helen) Letitia Frazer (1948–2008), whose mother was a member of the Robinson family that owned a large cork business. Hillier established a close and enduring friendship with Letitia after her partner, the writer Huldaune Violet Beamish, died in October 1965. He loved to be at Belva, drawing, riding, and swimming. Portugal became a second home to him, and it is there that he would gladly have settled.
A welcome exhibition of 31 of her paintings and drawings was presented in a private collection, illustrated in A Timeless Journey: Tristram Hillier R.A. 1905–1983, Bradford Art Galleries and Museums, 1983, p25 (fig. 26) and by Percy, p75 (fig. 57).

Hillier, p174, but he is strangely mistaken about the year.

According to Hillier, p174, the pictures 'had been hidden throughout the war in my lawyer's cellar', but letters of 21 April 1945 and 18 May 1945 from Hillier to Dudley Tooth make clear that Layt had the pictures in his house for the duration of the German occupation and then passed them to Meaupas, the lawyer – a hand-over that had to be managed delicately because Layet and Meaupas were 'enemies enemis' (TGA 20106/1/6/26, 50, 31). Hillier was to meet up with Meaupas early in his time in Portugal in response to a letter from TH to RS, 28 March 1947 (TGA 20106/17/59).


Postcard from TH to RS, 21 May 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/51; letter from TH to RS, 19 March 1947, TGA 20106/1/6/25.

Hillier, p92, 225. Hillier's recommendation is in a letter to Richard Smart, 30 July 1948, TGA 20106/1/7/59: 'I am glad about the British Council and hope they manage to borrow 3 pictures which will not dishonour me in tour country. I think Kay [the owner] ought to lend "Viseu" to make up for all the trouble he has given me.'

Information and copies of relevant correspondence kindly supplied by Wolverhampton Art Gallery.

Pery, pp54, 77–79.

Letter from TH to RS, 19 January 1948, TGA 20106/1/7/56. In 1975 Hillier developed a severe problem in his left eye – a problem that led to the loss of it.

Letter from TH to RS, 28 March 1949, TGA 20106/1/7/53. Truefitt & Hills, established in 1895, still offers a lton of this name.

Letter from TH to LH, undated but written early in his stay at Foz do Arelho, HA.

Letter from TH to LH, 25 June 1947, HA.


Although reasonably described as 'northern', Viseu is actually in Portugal's Centro region.

Letter from TH to LH, 25 June 1947, HA.

Letter from TH to LH, 12 September 1947, HA.

Pery, pl 88.

The equivalent of just under £12,000 in 2018. The normal foreign travel allowance at this time was £75 (just under £3,000) for 12 months, but from 1 October 1947 it was reduced to £45 for 14 months, and extra allowances for those carrying out business abroad were also more strictly limited (The Times, 7 August 1947, p4).

Board of Trade.

Letter from TH to RS, 9 May 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/51.

Letter from TH to RS, 9 May 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/51.

Sacheverell Sitwell, painter of Portugal, 1948, TGA 20106/1/7/59. See, eg, Pery, pp109–110.

Letter from TH to RS, 1 June 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/52. 'Grotty'.

Letter from TH to LH, 1 July 1947, HA.


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