

# 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.<sup>1</sup>

'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, beautiful 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.<sup>2</sup>

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:

We had a home in which we felt that we could very happily pass the remainder of our lives.<sup>3</sup>

Sadly, however, their idyllic stay there was to be all too brief. Only about 12 days after the birth of their elder daughter, Mary,<sup>4</sup> in Le Havre on 8 May 1940, they were compelled to flee their home, just ahead of the advancing German forces. Their escape was a narrow and dramatic one, and they had to leave behind virtually all their possessions, including Hillier's paintings.<sup>5</sup> After various adventures, the family rested for a few days at Château Mont Gouje, St Maclou, whose owner, Madame Turquet, previously considered a friend, refused them admittance until Hillier demanded sanctuary and, when they departed, charged them for their stay, despite not having had to feed them.<sup>6</sup> They then had an anxious wait of a week in St Malo before they managed to get aboard a ship sailing to Southampton in early June.<sup>7</sup>

Hillier soon volunteered for service in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. He served first ashore, then on local

The illustrations are of works by Tristram Hillier (1905–1983) unless otherwise stated

1 *Church of the Misericordia, Viseu, 1947*. Oil on panel, 25.4 x 29.2 cm. Southampton City Art Gallery.  
© The Estate of Tristram Hillier / Bridgeman Images

convoy-duty, then aboard a Free French naval vessel heading 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.<sup>8</sup>

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,<sup>9</sup> they had learned that the house had been trashed by the Germans, apparently when they learned that the owners were English.<sup>10</sup> 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 Maujean.<sup>11</sup>

When the Hilliers arrived back in France, they rented a house called Villa la Pivoine in Étretat, 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

The Hilliers returned to England ten days later,<sup>14</sup> 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 Sigebert Trafford, sixth Abbot of Downside, and was asked to paint his portrait.<sup>15</sup> Terms were agreed, and the first of several sittings took place on 15 November.<sup>16</sup> The finished work was delivered to Arthur Tooth in London on 5 March 1945.<sup>17</sup> Hillier had been a boarder at Downside School from 1914 to 1921,<sup>18</sup> and Dom Sigebert 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,<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>[20]</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

Jenny Pery mistakenly places this first visit to Portugal in 1945,<sup>22</sup> 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*.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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

After an uninterrupted winter's work in East Pennard<sup>[25]</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup> 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*.<sup>28</sup> 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,<sup>29</sup> she produced work that has one striking similarity to Hillier's, which is the absence or fewness of human figures in her scenes,<sup>30</sup> but her method of composition was very different from his: unlike him, she always painted *en plein air*, according to her daughter, Jan Fordham.<sup>31</sup> One cannot tell how helpful she was to Hillier about Portugal. Smart immediately sent Hillier her temporary address in Dublin.<sup>32</sup> It 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.<sup>33</sup>

Smart encouraged Hillier to go to Portugal and may even have suggested it as well.<sup>34</sup> 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 Portugese [*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.'<sup>35</sup> 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 recieved [*sic*] this morning the Bank of England's authorisation to transfer £300<sup>[36]</sup> 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.<sup>[37]</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup>

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.<sup>40</sup> That 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',<sup>41</sup> 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 1943. 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 by car in the summer of 1947 in preparation for her book *Fabled Shore*,<sup>42</sup> 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'.<sup>43</sup> 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 from 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.<sup>44</sup>

Unless Macaulay let Hillier read her book prior to publication, the last statement cannot be correct. Hillier left England for Spain on 9 April,<sup>45</sup> several weeks before *Fabled Shore* appeared.<sup>46</sup> Several years later, he was to return to Guadix to draw and paint it.<sup>47</sup>

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 Belloc Lowndes and a niece of Hilaire Belloc. Like them, she was a writer. She was to co-author with Ann Bridge *The Selective Traveller in Portugal* (1949), a book praised by Sitwell.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup>

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'.<sup>51</sup> The establishment was Hotel do Facho, and its proprietor was Charles Harbord (1899–1991). Harbord, said to have had links to the British security services,<sup>52</sup> was an elder brother of (Cyril) Felix Harbord (1906–81), a noted interior designer and theatre designer, with whom Hillier had become friendly years before in London. Another link with Charles Harbord, was that 'we both at different times enjoyed the favours of the same Lady in Paris – also some years ago – which he seems to consider a bond of real brotherhood'.<sup>53</sup>

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).<sup>54</sup> Helpmann was to buy two of the pictures that resulted from Hillier's 1947 visit to Portugal. One of them was *Rocks at Facho*.

Early in his stay at Foz, Hillier suggested to Leda that she and Mary fly out to join him in August.<sup>55</sup> 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



2 Church of the Misericórdia, Viseu, 1947.  
Photo (by Foto-Germano, Viseu?). Hillier Archive



3 Church of the Misericórdia, Viseu, not later than 1947. Postcard.  
Hillier Archive

4 Church of the Misericórdia, Viseu, not later than 1947.  
Postcard by Foto-Germano, Viseu. Hillier Archive



being 'almost entirely in liquid form (i.e. either the Atlantic or the Bar)'.<sup>56</sup> A surprising item he urgently requested him to bring him from London was nothing to do with drawing or painting, but a bottle of Truefitt & Hills' Monte Carlo Special Hair Lotion, because 'Portuguese hair lotions are very sticky and smell like a tarts' bedroom'.<sup>57</sup>

As well as Foz itself being attractive, 'The surroundings', Hillier declared, 'are all that I could desire to paint.'<sup>58</sup> Nearby places that are scenes of his paintings include Peniche, Obidos, Nadadouro, and Caldas da Rainha. Hotel do Facho remained his base until 11 September,<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> 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 Grahams 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<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup>

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 URGERIECA [sic] Harbord's Northern hotel, which is 30 kilometres away, and back to Foz during the week –. V. dirty and cafarad<sup>63</sup> accommodation [sic] here, but worth putting up with for the drawing... The heat here is really overwhelming, ...<sup>64</sup>

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 cafarad 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 even for you, I think, – and I manage only to draw outside in the mornings, and work in my room during the afternoons.<sup>65</sup>

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 'Misericórdia' 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 15<sup>th</sup> Sept.<sup>66</sup>

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!'<sup>67</sup>

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'. Germano was a leading photographic business in Viseu in 1947, and the two cars parked in front of the church suit that sort of date. It is not clear whether the photograph was taken by Germano, or whether it was taken by Hillier and developed and printed by them. The two other images are picture-postcards. One gives a slightly nearer view of the church than the photograph (Pl 3). 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.<sup>68</sup> In

her caption she dates it 1982, which is puzzling: the postcard carries no indication of date, but, like the photograph, it is a production of Germano, and the look of the parked cars points to 1947 rather than 1982, the year before Hillier died.

Hillier sometimes used photographs as aids when he was painting his pictures,<sup>69</sup> and, although the notes he made on the Church of the Misericórdia may well have included some sketches, it seems very likely that he relied on photographs to a greater extent than usual when painting the church. The picture, signed 'Hillier 1947' lower right, was painted late in 1947, very soon after he had completed his large Viseu painting – the one for which he made the drawing. He tells Richard Smart that he found the job difficult: 'I have done a painting of the Baroque facade of the Misericórdia which has nearly sent me blind, but it is rather a 'tour de force' of detail, and now I am on to the large canvas of boats at Peniche, which looks promising.'<sup>70</sup> Smart replies: 'I feel that the Misericórdia facade will be one [large picture] much to my liking. For daring to tackle it you deserve a really high-grade Portuguese [sic] decoration – if they still hand out such things'.<sup>71</sup>

It is not known if Smart was disappointed when he discovered that the picture was not the 'large' one he had been expecting.

The drawing Hillier made in Viseu on 29–30 June was preparatory to one of his finest and best-known paintings, now in Wolverhampton Art Gallery. The painting (Pl 5), a large canvas signed lower right 'Hillier 1947', was completed in November of that year.<sup>72</sup> Like the *Church of the Misericórdia*, both it and the drawing for it were included in Arthur Tooth's exhibition of Hillier's 'Portuguese' work, held at 31 Bruton Street, London W1, from 27 April to 22 May 1948.<sup>73</sup> There are 38 items in the catalogue: 28 paintings and 10 drawings. Both the large canvas and the drawing are titled *Viseu, 1947*, but a more helpful title would be the one indicated in Hillier's communication of 1 July 1947 to Leda, *Cathedral Square, Viseu*. It is indicative of the special importance that Tooth and Hillier attached to the painting that it is reproduced on the title-page of the catalogue. Its importance to the artist is confirmed by his choice of it to be one of only six of his paintings reproduced in his autobiography,<sup>74</sup> and by his recommendation of it to be one of three works of his selected to form part of a British Council exhibition 'Eleven British Artists' presented at the National Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, in 1949.<sup>75</sup> His high opinion of the painting has been implicitly endorsed by others: for example, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London obtained the loan of it from Wolverhampton Art Gallery to make it part of its 'Object of the Month' display in August 1985,<sup>76</sup> and Pery has a double-page colour photograph of it immediately before the start of her first chapter as well as a much smaller colour photograph of it as plate 1 alongside the first paragraph of the same chapter.<sup>77</sup>

The view in the painting is from the northern corner of the public fountain in the Largo da Misericórdia, across the Cathedral Square (Praça da Sé or Adro da Sé), to the west front of the Cathedral, with its two towers. On the right is a row of houses, the nearest of which is, on the ground floor, a shop with a red and white striped awning. On the left, past the corner of the fountain, is part of the Church of the Misericórdia. Between the Church and the Cathedral is part of the former Bishop's Palace (Paço dos Bispos de Viseu), home, since 1916, to the Museu Grão Vasco. The only human beings visible are a woman looking out of a second-floor window of the house with the awning and two distant figures in front of the right tower of the Cathedral. Only when one closely views the actual picture can one properly see that the figure on the left is that of a priest holding a furled umbrella, and the figure on the right that of a woman wearing a red shawl.

On the platform in the foreground is a colourful assortment of objects. From left to right they are: a two-handled red jug with a narrow neck; a piece of blue cloth; a one-handled red jug; and a broad-brimmed yellow hat that partly conceals pieces of golden and brown cloth. The inclusion of these 'sig-

5 *Cathedral Square, Viseu, 1947*. Oil on canvas, 61 x 81 cm. Wolverhampton Art Gallery. Photo Wolverhampton Arts and Culture. © The Estate of Tristram Hillier / Bridgeman Images

6 *Cathedral Square, Viseu, 1947*. Pencil on paper, 34 x 42 cm. Author's collection. © The Estate of Tristram Hillier / Bridgeman Images

nature' items is an indication of how, despite the transition Hillier describes himself having made in the late 1930s 'from abstraction and surrealism to representational painting',<sup>78</sup> he had not shed all his surrealist inclinations. But, although the aforementioned objects are imaginative additions to the scene and have the viewer guessing about their significance and symbolism, they are far removed from the incongruous items 'on the pale yellow sands' in Lord Berners' poem 'Surrealist Landscape' – items that include

A commode

That has nothing to do with the case.<sup>79</sup>

The hat in Hillier's picture is appropriate to a sunny summer's day, and the jugs are not out of place beside a fountain.

Whereas the painting is well known, the drawing of which the artist was so proud has not been seen in public since it was exhibited 70 years ago, in the spring of 1948, and has not been published before. It is the work bought by Rose Macaulay and is in the present writer's possession. The drawing (Pl 6), in pencil on paper, is a little more than half the size of the painting. Before his signature and the date, 'Hillier 1947', lower right, the artist has written the title '*La Misericórdia de Viseu*', which is unexpected, given that the church is not the main subject of the drawing. Like the painting, it is best titled *Cathedral Square, Viseu*.

The similarities between the drawing and the painting are obvious, being close and numerous, but there are also differences. 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 Misericórdia 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 detracted 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 diamond-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 window 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 concerns 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.<sup>80</sup> Their judgment is subjective and, with regard to shadows, largely fanciful. There is nothing unnatural about the shadows in either of the Viseu paintings. Pery thinks that the painting of the *Church of the Misericórdia*, 'with its bare piazza pierced by geometric shadows, has the hushed intensity of a stage before the play has begun'. Perhaps, but



comparison with the photographic images in Pl 2 and 3 suggests that the shadows in the painting are not exaggerated. It may be added that Pl 3 shows a solitary woman passing the church, whereas his painting shows three figures. It is undeniable that, partly through the influence of the young Giorgio de Chirico, Hillier liked to show squares and other spaces uncluttered with human figures, but it seems that he may have found Viseu's Cathedral Square so quiet in 1947 that he did not need to depopulate it, and this may have been one of its attractions for him.

The drawing of Cathedral Square is of obvious interest and value for being essentially the work Hillier produced *en plein air* in preparation for the painting he executed in his studio, and at least one sensitive viewer has felt that it scores over the painting in respect of immediacy and freshness.

Throughout Hillier's time in Portugal he and Leda exchanged letters. On 17 September, just over a week before he returned home, he received a letter from her containing an astonishing piece of news. His reply began:

My darling—,

Your letter of September 9<sup>th</sup> 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 life together.<sup>81</sup>

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,<sup>[82]</sup> and my sons pay me visits from time to time.<sup>[83]</sup> 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 couple had different 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.'<sup>84</sup> In 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.<sup>85</sup> Once he

had based himself in Foz, 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 Relva 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 (1918–2008), 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 Huldine Violet Beamish, died in October 1965. He loved to be at Relva, drawing, riding, and swimming. Portugal became a second home to him, and it is there that he would gladly have settled.

#### Provenance of the Viseu paintings and drawing

##### *Church of the Misericordia, Viseu*

Arthur Tooth & Sons Ltd to Arthur Tilden Jeffress in 1948 for £65;<sup>86</sup> acquired by Southampton City Art Gallery, along with Hillier's *Portuguese Farmhouse* (1960), as part of the Arthur Jeffress Bequest, in 1963.

##### *Cathedral Square, Viseu* (painting)

Arthur Tooth & Sons Ltd to Major Edwin Ody Kay in 1948 for £200; to Kay's nephews Nicholas and Lt.-Col. Michael Hicks after Kay's death on 7 September 1969; sold for £472.50 by Christie, Manson & Woods, London, on 19 March 1971, lot no. 67, to a London art-dealer whose name Christie's cannot divulge because of a fifty-year client-confidentiality commitment; soon after the sale, Arthur Tooth & Sons, who had left a commission-bid of £400 for the picture, acquired it from the purchaser; bought by Wolverhampton Art Gallery, with assistance from the Victoria & Albert Purchase Grant Fund, at Sotheby's, London, on 23 May 1984, lot no. 206, for £7,600. Sotheby's cannot divulge the name of the consignor.

##### *Cathedral Square, Viseu* (drawing)

Arthur Tooth & Sons Ltd to Rose Macaulay in 1948 for £21; to Jean Isabel Smith after Macaulay's death on 30 October 1958; to James ('Jim') Stewart Smith, probably c1963;<sup>87</sup> to Jim Smith's widow, Rosemary Stella Middlemore Smith née Hughes, after his death on 13 February 1987; to Martin Ferguson Smith, November 2001.

#### Abbreviations

HA: Hillier Archive, private collection, Somerset  
LH: Leda Hillier  
RS: Richard Smart  
TGA: Tate Gallery Archive, London  
TH: Tristram Hillier

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- 1 Tristram Hillier, *Leda and the Goose: An Autobiography*, London 1954, p39.
- 2 Hillier, p150. The Hilliers' decision not to stay in Austria was also influenced by the political situation.
- 3 Hillier, p158.

- 4 Hillier, p165.  
 5 Hillier, pp158–73.  
 6 Hillier, p171, does not name the house or its owner. The information is to be found in the typescript carbon copy of a letter of 30 May 1940 to Hillier from Richard Smart, TGA 20106/1/6/6 – a letter Hillier probably never received.  
 7 Jenny Pery, *Painter Pilgrim: The Art and Life of Tristram Hillier*, London, 2008, p73, says that they arrived in England in May, but Hillier's artist-friend Edward Wadsworth, writing on 7 June, reports that on 1 June the Hilliers were in St Malo, and that news of their arrival in England was still awaited (letter from Edward Wadsworth to Richard Smart, 7 June 1940, TGA 20106/1/6/70).  
 8 Pery, p78, quotes the telegram, which is in the Hillier Archive. Hillier himself writes: 'I was invalided from the service in the autumn of 1944' (Hillier, p174), but he is strangely mistaken about the year.  
 9 Henriette is portrayed, wearing her maid's uniform and carrying a bottle and glass on a tray, together with the Hilliers and their two dogs, on the lawn of l'Ormerie in a painting by Hillier in a private collection, illustrated in *A Timeless Journey: Tristram Hillier R.A. 1905–1983*, Bradford Art Galleries and Museums, 1983, p25 (fig. 20) and by Pery, p73 (fig. 57).  
 10 Letter from Hillier to Dudley Tooth and RS, 24 September [1945], TGA 20106/1/6/33.  
 11 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 Layet hid the pictures in his house for the duration of the German occupation and then passed them to Meaujean, the lawyer – a hand-over that had to be managed delicately because Layet and Meaujean were 'sworn enemies' (TGA 20106/1/6/26, 30, 31). Hillier was to meet up with Meaujean early in his time in Portugal in 1947 (letter from TH to LH, 28 May 1947), HA).  
 12 On the Hilliers' time in Normandy in 1945–46, see Hillier, p174–77.  
 13 Letters from TH to RS, 25 February 1946, with enclosed inventory, and 7 [March 1946], TGA 20106/1/7/39.  
 14 They crossed the Channel from Dieppe on 17 March. Letter from TH to RS, 7 March 1946 (TGA 20106/1/7/39).  
 15 Letter from TH to Dudley Tooth, 1 November 1944, TGA 20106/1/6/25.  
 16 Letter from TH to Dudley Tooth, 11 November 1944, TGA 20106/1/6/25.  
 17 Letter from TH to Dudley Tooth, 18 February 1945, TGA 20106/1/6/28.  
 18 Hillier's father, (Edward) Guy Hillier (1857–1924), the manager of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank in Peking, had converted to Roman Catholicism after going blind. Tristram was born in Peking on 11 April 1905, but brought up mainly in England.  
 19 Mervyn Levy, 'Hillier, Tristram Paul', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: 1981–1983*. Oxford 1990, p194.  
 20 Leda's father, Engineer-Captain Sydney Undercliffe Hardcastle, RN (retired) (1875–1960), was from northeast England (of Yorkshire ancestry, but born and school-educated in County Durham). Her mother, Annie Hardcastle (1886–1915), was the daughter of James Preston, a veterinary doctor of Mallow, County Cork. Sydney and Annie married in Haydon Bridge, Northumberland, on 9 August 1908. Leda Millicent was born in Southsea, Portsmouth, on 28 November 1911. She was only three or four when Annie died, and was then brought up by her mother's family in County Cork.  
 21 Hillier, p182.  
 22 Pery, pp94, 97.  
 23 Hillier, p183.  
 24 Pery's book was published in 2008. The Tate Archive purchased the Arthur Tooth Collection from Simon Matthews, grandson of Dudley Tooth, in April 2010. Although Pery thanks Matthews for giving her information, she does not appear to have had access to the Hillier correspondence in the collection, which is a rich source of information.  
 25 Yew Tree House, East Pennard, Near Shepton Mallet, Somerset, had been the Hilliers' address since 15 July 1946 (letter of 13 July 1946 from TH to RS, TGA 20106/1/7/43), and it was to be his home for the rest of his life.  
 26 Letter from TH to RS, 17 March 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/50.  
 27 She entered the Slade in October 1918, when she was 17.  
 28 25 April – 18 May 1940. Exhibition catalogue, TGA 20106/6/1/224.  
 29 A welcome exhibition of 31 of her paintings and drawings was presented by Gorry Gallery, Dublin, in 2012 (20 May–2 June). The leading authority on her work is Professor Antoin Murphy of Trinity College, Dublin.  
 30 Cf Thomas MacGreevy, 'In the World's Art Centres: London: Sine Mackinnon', *Studio* 120, 568 (July 1940), p22: 'Human beings seldom appear in the villages of France, Greece and Portugal as seen by Miss Sine Mackinnon'.  
 31 Letter from Jan Fordham to the Tate Gallery, 26 February 1996, cited in the Tate's catalogue entry on Mackinnon's painting *Farm Buildings in Provence 1934*, ref. N05135.  
 32 Letter from RS to TH, 19 March 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/50.  
 33 Letter from RS to TH, 8 September 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/53.  
 34 Postcard from TH to RS, 21 May 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/51; letter from TH to RS, 1 June 1948, TGA 20106/1/7/52.  
 35 Letter from RS to TH, 1 May 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/51. One would expect 'panned out'.  
 36 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 £35 for 14 months, and extra allowances for those carrying out business abroad were also more strictly limited (*The Times*, 7 August 1947, p4).  
 37 Board of Trade.  
 38 Letter from TH to RS, 9 May 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/51.  
 39 Letter from TH to RS, 9 [May 1947], TGA 20106/1/7/51.  
 40 Sacheverell Sitwell, *Spanish Baroque Art, With Buildings in Portugal, Mexico, and Other Colonies*, London, 1931.  
 41 Sacheverell Sitwell, *Portugal and Madeira*, London, 1954, 10. A presentation copy of the book, inscribed 'To Birdie Hillier best wishes from Sachie 3 September 1954' remains with the Hillier family. Hillier was always 'Birdie' to family and friends.  
 42 Rose Macaulay, *Fabled Shore: From the Pyrenees to Portugal*, London, 1949.  
 43 Letter from TH to RS, Thursday [21 or 28 April 1949], TGA 20106/1/7/62.  
 44 Letter from Rose Macaulay to Luiz Marques, 3 July 1949. Photocopy kindly supplied by Marques' elder daughter, the late Ana Vicente.  
 45 Letter from TH to RS, 28 March 1949, TGA 20106/1/7/61.  
 46 Letter from RS to TH in Spain, 3 May 1949, TGA 20106/1/7/62: 'The Rose Macaulay book is just out but I am afraid there's not much point in offering to send it to you. It would most likely be stolen or even seized [sic] by the Customs as an obscene publication as it happens to be written in English'.  
 47 See Pery, pp130–31, 133 figs109–110.  
 48 *Portugal and Madeira*, p9.  
 49 Letter from TH to LH, 21 May 1947, HA.  
 50 Letters from TH to RS, 1 June 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/52, and to Leda Hillier, 28 May [1947] (misdated by TH '1945'), HA.  
 51 Letter from TH to RS, 1 June 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/52.  
 52 Ana Vicente, *Arcádia: Notícia de uma Família Anglo-Portuguesa*, Lisboa, 2006, p165.  
 53 Letter from TH to LH, undated but written early in his stay at Foz do Arelho, HA.  
 54 Letter from TH to RS, 1 June 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/52.  
 55 Letter from TH to LH, 28 May [1947], HA.  
 56 Letter from TH to RS, Saturday [12 July 1947], TGA 20106/1/7/53.  
 57 Letter from TH to RS, 17 July 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/53. Truefitt & Hills, established in 1805, still offers a lotion of this name.  
 58 Letter from TH to RS, 1 June 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/52.  
 59 Letter from TH to LH, 11 September 1947, HA.  
 60 Letter from TH to LH, 5 September 1947, HA. The Fifth Duke of Palmela, Domingos de Sousa Holstein-Beck (1897–1969), was ambassador 1943–49.  
 61 Although reasonably described as 'northern', Viseu is actually in Portugal's Centro region.  
 62 Letter from TH to LH, 25 June 1947, HA.  
 63 'Grotty'.  
 64 Postcard from TH to LH, 1 July 1947, HA.  
 65 Letter from TH to LH, 2 July 1947, HA.  
 66 Letter from TH to LH, 31 August 1947, HA.  
 67 Letter from TH to LH, 12 [September 1947], HA.  
 68 P108, pl 88.  
 69 Pery, pp34, 77–79.  
 70 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.  
 71 Letter from RS to TH, 28 January 1948, TGA 20106/1/7/56.  
 72 Letter from TH to RS, 23 November 1947, TGA 20106/1/7/55.  
 73 *Paintings of Portugal by Tristram Hillier*, London, 1948.  
 74 Hillier, opposite p109.  
 75 TGA 9712/2/35. Hillier's recommendation is in a letter to Richard Smart, 30 July 1948, 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!'  
 76 Information and copies of relevant correspondence kindly supplied by Wolverhampton Art Gallery.  
 77 Pery, pp8–10.  
 78 Hillier, p151.  
 79 'Surrealist Landscape', lines 18–19. The poem was first published in *Horizon* 6, 31 (July 1942), pp5–6.  
 80 See, eg, Pery, pp109–110.  
 81 Letter from TH to LH, 18 September 1947, continued and completed 19 September 1947, HA.  
 82 Anna-Clare Hillier, born 8 August 1950.  
 83 Jonathan Daniel Hillier and Benjamin Paul Hillier, Hillier's twin sons by his first wife, Irene Rose ('Georgiana') Hillier née Hodgkins, later Varley (1904–43).  
 84 Letter from TH to RS, 30 July 1948, TGA 20106/1/7/59.  
 85 Hillier, p183.  
 86 The prices of Hillier's paintings and drawings of Portugal exhibited by Arthur Tooth in April–May 1948 are shown in Richard Smart's copy of the catalogue, TGA 20106/6/1/243. The copy has the initials 'RS' on the front cover, lower right.  
 87 For Jean and Jim Smith, both converts to Roman Catholicism, the drawing had considerable significance, since in March–April 1947, shortly before Hillier's visit to Portugal, they had spent three weeks together in that country.