



Books

Roses and Rose Gardens by Claire Masset
National Trust. 176 pages. £14.99.
ISBN 978-1-911358-68-8.
Rose by Catherine Horwood
Reaktion. 238 pages. £16.00.
ISBN 978-1-78914-013-2.

Claire Masset packs a lot into her small book: practical advice on rose growing as well as descriptions of rose gardens and individual roses. The 'how to' sections include planting, dealing with pests and diseases, choosing roses for particular sites, such as walls, and mixing roses with other plants. The gardens she describes are all in England but are not all owned by the National Trust, in spite of the heritage organisation being her book's publisher. Privately-owned properties such as Hever, Borde Hill, Broughton Castle and Kiftsgate all find their place, as does Coughton Court – though, when describing the new rose garden there, I wish she didn't repeat the calumny that Eleanor of Aquitaine poisoned her husband's mistress, Fair Rosamund.

NT gardens include Sissinghurst and Mottisfont, both famed for their roses, such as 'Sissinghurst Castle' (*above*), and also the less well-known Bateman's, home to Rudyard Kipling, where the author spent the money that came with his Nobel Prize for Literature on a rose garden and lily pond, designing and planting them himself.

The National Trust is often accused of having a deadening hand on all it touches, but there is much here that is quirky and personal: the author's childhood memories, for instance, and her non-banal choice of quotes as chapter headings. My only caveat – there is too much pink!

Where Masset's chapter on the rose's history is intentionally slight, Catherine Horwood devotes her whole book to how the flower evolved, starting with fossilized roses millions of years old and ending with modern DNA research. She looks, of course, at botany but also at philosophy, literature and symbolism, painting, the perfume industry – even the White House Rose Garden.

Like all the best books, her treatment of the great sweep of rose-related history leads the reader to make unexpected comparisons, for instance, between the numerous varieties of rose mentioned in Wang Xiangjin's *Cyclopaedia of Flowers* published in 1621 and Nicholas Culpeper's *Complete Herbal*, published in 1653; or between the Roman custom of strewing rose petals on the ground at religious festivals and Muslims' reluctance to step on rose petals fallen in a garden because they represent the beads of the prophet's sweat.

Horwood's choice of illustration is as wide-ranging as her content – for instance a postcard (*right*) from the early 1900s showing a scene from the musical adaptation of Tennyson's mid-19th century poem 'Maud'.

Rose is the latest in a series of excellent plant biographies published by Reaktion. Others include a delightful volume on *Snowdrops* by Gail Harland, *Pine* by Laura Mason, *Oak* by Peter Young and the thought-provoking *Weeds* by Nina Edwards. A full list is on Reaktion's website.

Alice Crabb



Ivon Hitchens: The Painter in the Woods by Andrew Lambirth

The Garden Museum. 64 pages £15.00.

ISBN 978-1-5272-3921-0.

A Lesson in Art & Life by Hugh St Clair

Pimpernel. 216 pages. £30.00.

ISBN 978-1-910258-36-1.

Eileen Hogan: Personal Geographies edited by Elisabeth R. Fairman

Yale. 272 pages. \$70.00.

ISBN 978-0-300-24147-1.



Books about the relationship between artists and gardens have tended to concentrate, almost ad nauseam, on the Impressionists and their immediate followers. So hurrah for the current interest in 20th century artists and the landscape.

Ivon Hitchens (1893-1979) was a founder member of the 'Seven and Five Society', originally seven painters and five sculptors who gradually moved away from traditional art and whose final exhibition in 1935 was the first entirely abstract exhibition to be held in London. 'Poppies in a Green Bowl' (*above*) was painted in 1930 before he turned to abstraction. The garden outside his studio in Sussex was always important to him as a subject, though he was not a great practical gardener; but, as the title of this book implies, it was the woodland beyond that really inspired him. He bought the 6 acres (2.4ha) in 1939 and camped there at weekends in a gypsy caravan until the bombing of his London studio impelled a permanent move.



Cedric Morris (1889-1982) was another member of the 'Seven and Five Society' and the only one of these flower-loving artists to be a serious horticulturalist. His paintings, such as 'Mottled Irises' (*left*) were informed by deep botanical knowledge, his work as a breeder of bearded irises earning him three RHS Awards of Garden Merit. *A Lesson in Art & Life* is subtitled 'The Colourful World of Cedric Morris and Arthur Lett-Haines' and is a joint biography of Morris and Lett-Haines (1894-1978), a painter and sculptor who became Morris's lifelong companion. Their circle included cookery writer Elizabeth David and gardener Beth Chatto (who named a narcissus after Morris) as well as artists such as Lucian Freud and Kathleen Hale.

Eileen Hogan, born in 1946, was influenced by different artistic and social factors and is more involved with the past than Hitchens or Morris. As well as plants, she paints gardens, including Chiswick House and other historic sites, and her work includes studies of items within them, such as a watering can and bee hives at Little Sparta.

Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden is one of the closest to her heart and she shares the poet/artist/gardener's interest in words and lettering. Her painting (*right*) of the South London Botanical Institute (see *HGR 23*) is typical of the way she incorporates such elements.

Of these three very individual but equally interesting books, the Hogan is the one I will return to. All were published to coincide with exhibitions in London, now sadly over, though 'Ivon Hitchens: Space through Colour' is on at the wonderful Pallant House Gallery in Chichester until 13th October.

Gillian Mawrey

