

SARAH QUILL

PHOTOGRAPHS

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Richard Burton (Richard Wagner) in *Wagner, Venice* 1982

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PIERS FEETHAM GALLERY

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SARAH QUILL AND VENICE

As a photographer, Sarah Quill has many strengths, as this exhibition so clearly and beautifully demonstrates. Her work in the theatre, and on film sets as a stills photographer, shows her natural gift for the salient, and often intimate, informal moment. Her portraits are marked not just by their formal distinction but by true sympathy and insight. But it is as a photographer of Venice, where she has worked now for some 40 years and which she has come to know with a profound intimacy, that she is best known.

Venice is, however, a most dangerous muse. It is, of course, never the subject of itself that sets the quality of the work: yet, since so many seem to see no farther than the seductive image and the souvenir, there can be no subject more vulnerable to this mistaken response than Venice. But on real artists, even so, she still lavishes her rewards, if only they court her discreetly and patiently enough. Whistler put it quite simply, that the artist "has only to find his own secret Venice", or words to that effect, and he should know. And though this may often take some time, Sarah clearly found 'her Venice' straight away.

In fact hers is not one but several Venices – for in immersing herself of necessity in its daily working round as a living city she has discovered it in all its aspects and seasons, and in doing so she has come to know its material fabric as well as her own hand. Indeed it is by the immaculate architectural account of Venice that she has put together over these past four decades, from the closest detail or decoration to the grandest monument, that perhaps she is best known, in providing at once the ornament and visual reference of so many books on Venice. Rather less well known, but of no less social and historical importance, is the continuing record she has kept of the Venetians themselves through successive generations, as they have gone about their business over the years, in the cafes, bars and shops, in the churches and the markets, in the streets and squares, and of course on the water. And she has marked Venice itself, changing 'per mutare di secoli', as it always has and always will. Who knows but this now vast and truly remarkable body of work will prove an archive of inestimable worth to the social scholar, quite as much as her record of the city's fabric will be to the art and architectural historian of the future.

But such intrinsic interest, fascinating and engrossing though it is, can never mask the technical command that Sarah has always enjoyed over her medium – a command never obtrusive or demonstrative, but always there and always sure. It is to be found quite as much in the chance moment or incident caught on the wing, or in the colourful near-abstract compositions caught on the surface of the water, that in recent years have become a particular creative focus for her, as in the most formal of her architectural studies. Light, tone, structure, composition: all are held with the lightest of touches. It is by such innate technical mastery that she turns the ever-seductive image into a true work of art.

William Packer 2010



Campo Santo Stefano, dawn fog 1998



Siesta, Campo SS Giovanni e Paolo 1975



Water gate, Palazzo Barbaro 1997



Elephants in Rio Terra della Mandola 1981



Caffè Florian 1988



The Dogana and Santa Maria della Salute from the Molo 1977



Cantine del vino già Schiavi 1992



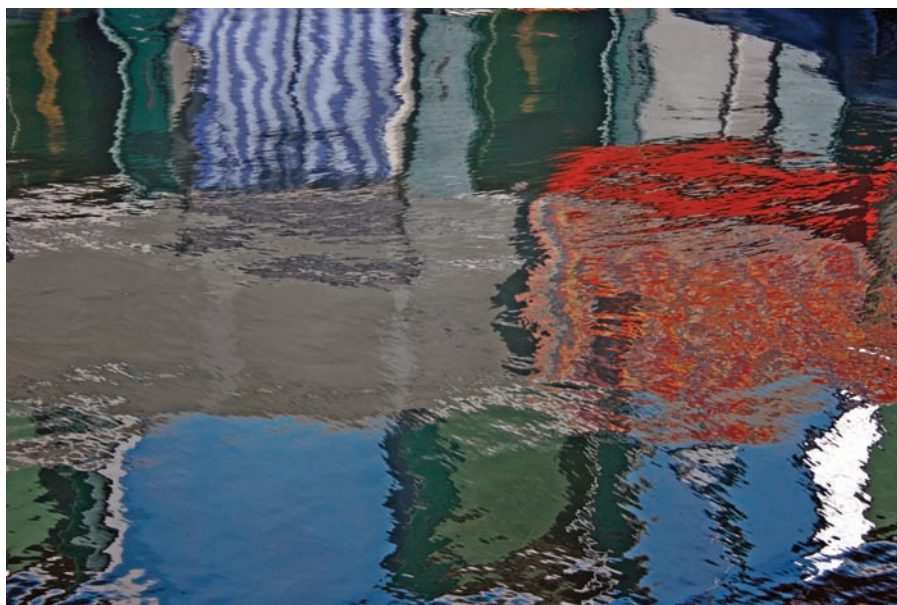
Geoffrey's studio with Piera, Giudecca 2010



Chess game at the edicola, Accademia 2009



Window, Ca' d'Oro 2010



Rio di San Mauro (i) Burano 2010



Rio di San Mauro (ii) Burano 2010



Rio Pontinello (ii) Burano 2010



Rio della Giudecca (i) Burano 2008

SARAH QUILL, STILLS PHOTOGRAPHER

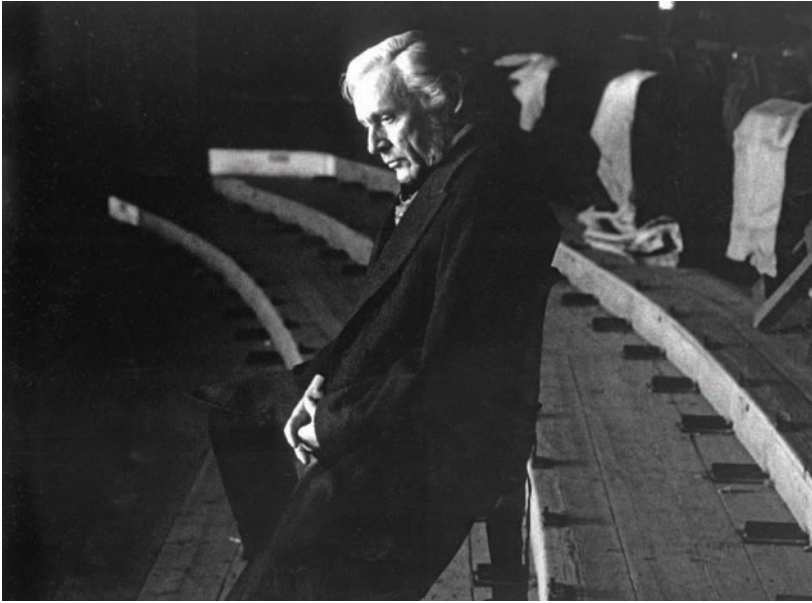
For nearly forty years, Sarah Quill has been compiling an unrivalled photographic record of Venice and Venetian architecture, the results of which, taken from an archive of some 90,000 images, can be seen in innumerable publications on Venice, Italy and Italian art, including her own bestseller *Ruskin's Venice: The Stones Revisited*. Less well known, however, are her early portraits, her photographs of opera productions in Britain, and her secondary career in feature films.

Her work as a stills photographer began in 1981 with Tony Palmer's *Wagner*, in which she caught the profoundly brooding presence of Richard Burton, through Michael Radford's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and James Ivory's Oscar-winning *A Room with a View*, to the Kenyan murder mystery *White Mischief* and Joseph Losey's last film *Steaming*. The skills of an on-location stills photographer in the 1980s were somewhat different from those needed to catch the morning light on the Venetian lagoon. Tact and diplomacy were key requirements, as much with the movie's sound and camera departments as with the actors themselves; and when photographing actors in rehearsal just before a take it was helpful if a sympathetic director ensured that make-up and hair were ready and collars done up.

The old Hollywood craft of the stills photographer – when a studio portrait of Greta Garbo or Clark Gable fixed the image of the actor in the hearts and minds of a worldwide



Helena Bonham Carter (Lucy) in *A Room with a View*, Florence 1985



Richard Burton (Richard Wagner) in *Wagner, Bayreuth* 1982

audience – has gone forever. And when Sarah Quill was working on stills, shortly before the advent of digital photography, feature film producers were increasingly dispensing with the career stills photographer as an integral part of the film crew. And thus, in one light, the stills exhibited here may be seen as among the last blooms of a hard-won professional art – vital to both the marketing of a movie and the image of a star.

Sarah remembers the trials of shooting in the glare of the Rift Valley and at night in the disused vastness of Battersea Power Station. 'Studio-based films, usually shot at Pinewood, Shepperton or Lee International, were highly structured and seemed easier. On location – much more exciting in visual terms – you had no real base and were constantly worried about your camera bag. There were no mobile phones – and one prayed for a nearby telephone box. An added complication was that both colour and black-and-white film were required for publicity purposes, and you had to use both film types, pretty well simultaneously. Three or four cameras had to be loaded, often with different film speeds, and one measured the exposures with a separate light-meter. In the early 1980s, fixed lenses were focused manually and had to be changed continually, depending on the scene. Switching hurriedly from a 85mm portrait lens to a 28mm wide-angle, you watched for signals from the first assistant director, focus-puller or sound-recordist, telling you that now – and you'd better be quick! – was the one and only chance to catch that elusive moment that would never come again.'

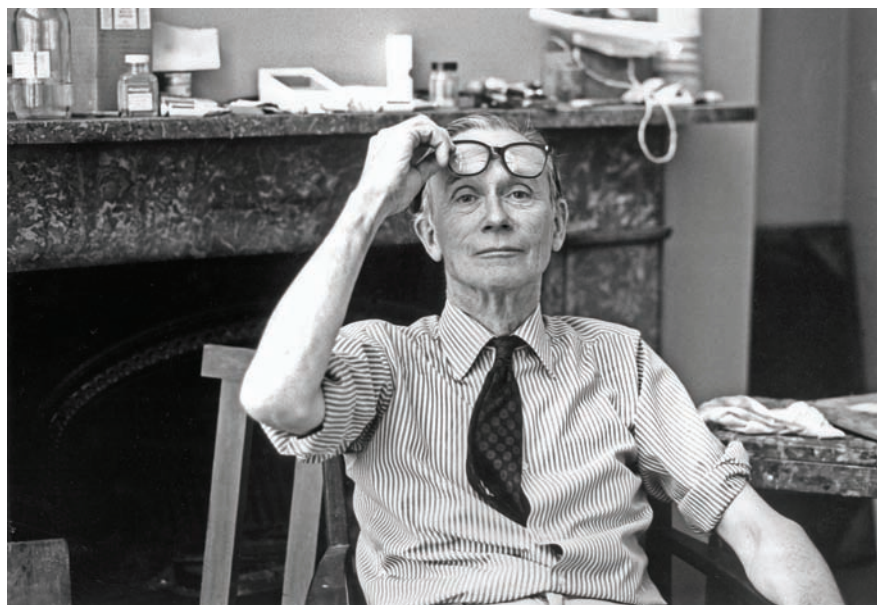
John Pym 2010



Sarah Miles (Alice) and Charles Dance (Joss) in *White Mischief*, Kenya 1987



Joss Ackland (Jock) and Greta Scacchi (Diana) in *White Mischief*, Kenya 1987



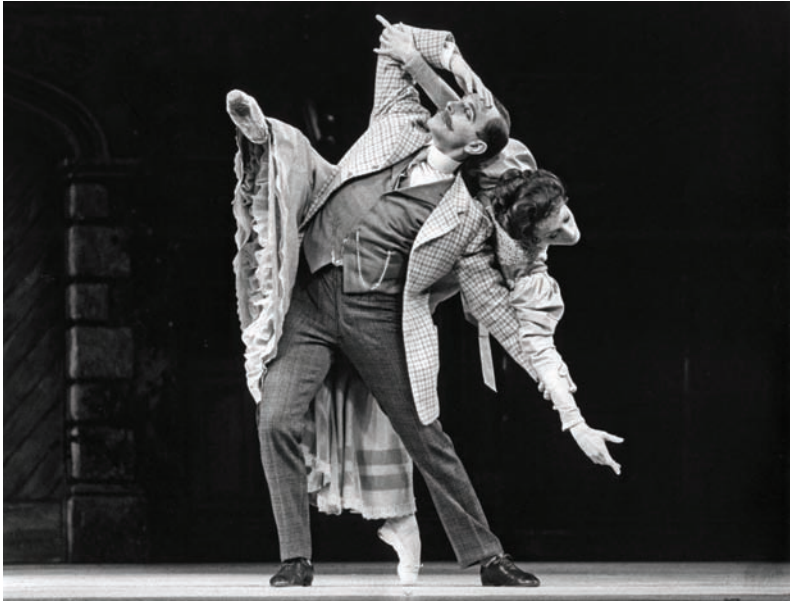
Sir William Coldstream in his studio at the Slade 1975



Howard Hodgkin, Venice 1980



Felicity Lott, London 1976



Monica Mason and Derek Rencher in *Enigma Variations*, Royal Ballet, Covent Garden 1974



Valerie Masterson (Sophie) and Sandra Browne (Octavian) in *Der Rosenkavalier*, English National Opera 1975



José Carreras (Nemorino) and Ileana Cotrubas (Adina)
in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, Covent Garden 1976



Procuratie Vecchie with banners (ii) 1992



Peacocks, carved panel on exterior wall of the Treasury, Basilica of San Marco 1993



Capital with vine leaves, exterior of the Zen Chapel, Basilica of San Marco 2006



**Monument to Bartolomeo Colleoni,
Campo SS Giovanni e Paolo 2009**

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