

# THE ARTS SOCIETY AT 50

As we mark the golden jubilee of our organisation in 2018, it's time to celebrate our successes, be proud of our past and look ahead to what's next. Here, we talk to just a few of those who have been involved in The Arts Society over the past half-century: from our national office team and Accredited Lecturers to the grass-roots members who have gone on to flourish as volunteers within our organisation, or to run local societies in their own right.

Plus, we catch up with a recent grant recipient, now reaching the culmination of her ballet training, and a Young Arts alumnus, who today is partnering with us on our spring exhibition with The Bulldog Trust, to help reflect on our impacts.

PHOTOGRAPHY **JOHN MILLAR**

Left to right; new Accredited Lecturer Kate Aspinall; member-turned-volunteer Pat Wood; Chief Executive Dr Florian Schweizer; Chairman June Robinson; President Dr Loyd Grossman;

veteran lecturer Bertie Pearce; President of Chiltern DFAS, Lionel Anthony; grant recipient and trainee ballerina Rishan Benjamin; and Young Arts alumnus Mary Rose Gunn



‘IT’S REWARDING TO  
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**BERTIE PEARCE**  
THE VETERAN LECTURER

‘As a member of the Inner Magic Circle, I discovered The Arts Society when a friend asked me to perform a magic show for the Wealden Society. I imagined it to be a very illustrious organisation, so I decided to give a lecture on the history of magic, performing all the tricks.

‘I put together a second lecture on Punch and Judy shows, and unbeknownst to me, a ‘secret shopper’ was in the audience for my first performance: Pat Wood [see page 28], who gave me the green light on my journey towards becoming an Accredited Lecturer. In 2007, I headed off to the annual Directory Day. Delivering your two-minute presentation to all the society secretaries is a baptism of fire! But from then on, I’ve never looked back.

‘The Arts Society has taken me to every corner of the UK, and abroad to locations including Berlin, the Costa del Sol and Paris. For me, the magic of the Society is the people. I never tire of the thrill of bringing my lectures (or performances, as I call them) to a curious audience. I have so many happy memories of warm-hearted people, of weird and wonderful places, and of celebrations that I have been a part of. It is a privilege and a joy.’

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**KATE ASPINALL**  
THE NEWLY ACCREDITED LECTURER

‘I had heard great things about The Arts Society for years, so when I saw the call for its first Lecturing Academy, a five-day residential course for budding lecturers to develop their skills, I jumped at the opportunity. My research focuses on 20th-century British and American art, a period that encompasses a range of styles, from the Ben-Day dot-printing techniques of Roy Lichtenstein to the impasto painting strokes of David Bomberg. At first glance, works from this period can seem difficult to understand – for example, Francis Bacon’s distorted paintings of the human figure – so I aim to demystify and make these works accessible. It’s always rewarding to see people engage with artworks they previously found challenging.

‘My initial experience at the Academy encouraged me to apply to become an Accredited Lecturer. The Arts Society’s vetting process is incredibly thorough. It took five months, and it involved an audition in London, and an anonymous observation of a lecture I gave at Pallant House Gallery in Chichester.

‘As a new lecturer, I am excited to share my passion for 20th-century art, and to raise awareness of artwork that remains underappreciated or poorly understood.’

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