

TRIBUTE TO SHEILA ISHAM

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I wish to pay tribute to the life and work of one of our Nation's great artists, Sheila Isham, on her 80th birthday.

Sheila was born in New York City, 80 years ago today. She grew up in Cedarhurst, just outside the city, and on an 80-acre island in the St. Lawrence River in Canada, which for years lacked both electricity and running water. She graduated from Bryn Mawr College in 1950 and married Heyward Isham, an officer in the U.S. Foreign Service, and the couple moved to Berlin. There began her path to becoming an artist.

Sheila became the first foreigner to gain admission to the Berlin Art Academy in the years following World War II. There, she studied with Hans Uhlman, a student of abstract painter Kasimir Malevich, and absorbed the works of Wassily Kandinsky.

In 1955 Heyward Isham was posted to the American embassy in Moscow, and the Ishams moved to Russia, where life became very restricted. Sheila has told of having to import several years' worth of food from outside the country, of being watched and followed constantly, and of being unable to meet with other artists or to draw freely. A 2004 profile in the St. Petersburg Times reported that "once, Isham was almost arrested by a vigilant Soviet officer who noticed that an American was drawing a building, which, according to Isham, turned out to be a center for KGB interrogations."

But Sheila continued her work. She met George Kostakis, a prominent collector of the Russian avant-garde, including works by Malevich, Kandinsky, Tatlin, Popova, Goncharova, and Larionov, and she traveled through Georgia, St. Petersburg, Yalta, Sochi, and Tbilisi to sketch and meet with local artists and writers.

After a few years back in the United States, Sheila and her family traveled to Hong Kong, where she would live and work for 5 years. She taught contemporary arts at the Chinese University, exhibited her work in China and Japan, and studied with a master of classical Chinese calligraphy. "I chose calligraphy because it seemed to me to be abstract and perfect at the same time," she said.

On her return to America in 1965, Sheila began painting, exploring colors and the nexus between Eastern and Western cultures. She would later live and travel in France, Haiti, India, and finally New York, where she has made her home.

Sheila Isham's work is part of the permanent collections of some of America's most important institutions, including the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum, the Library of Congress, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Smithsonian, the National Museum for Women in the Arts, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She has been the subject of major one-person exhibitions at the Smithsonian,

the Corcoran, and the Russian Museum, and countless gallery and traveling exhibitions, including at the Island Arts Gallery in Newport, Rhode Island.

Sheila's life has not been without periods of darkness. Susan Fisher Sterling, the chief curator of the National Museum for Women in the Arts, wrote: "In unpredictable and often dramatic ways, Sheila Isham has been challenged by forces that threatened to overwhelm her . . . yet, despite these upheavals, her spirited work prevails."

After a fire destroyed many works in her Washington, DC, studio, Sheila said: "I thought that the burnt studio looked like a painting, like a myth, something you might want to take the picture of. I had to come to terms with that. I became freer in a way."

When her daughter Sandra contracted HIV/AIDS through a blood transfusion, Sheila began work on the enormous, five-painting Victoria series, which she calls "at once a celebration and a working through the darkest period of my life." She said: "It spans all human emotions from love to terror to hope and finally triumph and joy. It is an epic poem in paint, expressed in brilliant color and strong forms." The series was exhibited for the first time in its entirety by the National Museum of Women in the Arts in 2005, 9 years after Sandra passed away.

Sheila Isham's work reflects the iconic melting pot of our Nation's history. Though she draws inspiration from places as diverse as postwar Berlin, Russia, China, Haiti, France, and New York City, her work remains clearly and vibrantly American. Her art, which resides all over the world, is itself an ambassador both for her creative vision and for her country. We are enriched by her talent and her acquaintance.

Alexander Borovsky, head curator of contemporary art at the Russian State Museum, wrote this:

As an artist, Isham is marked by an incredible restlessness. Even the calm of an "oasis" created by her own hand . . . is only relative. She continually explores new paths and returns to the old. Few artists—including Isham, I expect—can say precisely what they are seeking. Having mastered the art of return, Sheila Isham knows to whom it is that she returns—to herself. Truly a rare gift in contemporary art.

I come to the Senate floor today to offer congratulations to Sheila on her 80th birthday. I trust this day will be an occasion for all of us to recognize her extraordinary contribution to American art, and anticipate the many achievements still to come.

TRIBUTE TO SCOTT HIGGINS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I wish to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of petty officer Scott Higgins of my State of Rhode Island, who today will be awarded the Coast Guard Commendation Medal for his efforts in the heroic rescue of the crew of

the sailboat Sean Seamour II off the coast of New Jersey in May.

On May 7, Aviation Machinery Technician 2nd Class Higgins was part of a four-man Coast Guard HH-60 helicopter crew, including LCDR Nevada Smith, LT J.G. Aaron Nelson, and aviation survival technician 2nd class Drew Dazzo, deployed in response to a distress signal from the 44-foot sailing vessel Sean Seamour II. The vessel, on a recreational sailing trip from Green Coves Spring, FL, to Portugal's Azores Islands, had capsized amidst the hurricane-force winds of Subtropical Storm Andrea. The three sailors aboard were forced to evacuate to a small raft just before their ship was swallowed by the ocean.

Higgins, serving as flight mechanic, worked closely with Nelson, who piloted the helicopter, and Dazzo, the team's rescue swimmer, to execute their mission. Working quickly and expertly, Higgins lowered Dazzo over and over again into the towering waves to reach the sailboat crew. Once the first two sailors had been lifted to safety, Higgins and Nelson demonstrated what the Coast Guard's Summary of Action called "the utmost of crew coordination, teamwork and aeronautical skill" as they hoisted Dazzo only 30 feet above the water to position him closer to the life raft and the last survivor.

As Higgins worked to raise the final survivor from the ocean, he felt the hoist cable begin to fray with the rescue basket still 100 feet below the helicopter and the rescue swimmer still in the water. Despite suffering from exhaustion and the effects of saltwater inhalation, Dazzo waited to request an emergency pickup until he could see that the last survivor was in the aircraft.

Again demonstrating extraordinary skill and teamwork in a life-or-death situation, Higgins managed to get the rescued sailor safely aboard and immediately redeploy the compromised hoist cable to retrieve Dazzo. In the midst of an intense storm, all aboard were safely returned to shore.

Higgins and the rest of his team successfully rescued the crew of the Sean Seamour II despite a punishing storm that threatened their lives and the lives of those they were sent to help. As the Coast Guard's Summary of Action stated:

High winds, treacherous seas and extreme off-shore distances created a situation that required intense operational risk management, exacting crew coordination, and incredible skill and courage. Without the complete competence, concentration, and professionalism of every crewmember, this operation could have had a disastrous outcome. Each crewmember was essential to the life saving rescue of three mariners.

The Coast Guard Commendation Medal recognizes meritorious service resulting in unusual and outstanding achievement. The courage, bravery, and skill demonstrated by Machinery Technician Higgins in May shows that he is more than worthy of this great honor.