

In 'The Temporary Operating Theatre', a group of medical personnel are engaged in a fraught struggle to manhandle a stretcher up some awkward stairs. Rutherford's depiction of the scene – in a blur of rapidly scribbled pen and ink cross hatchings and circular swoops – perfectly conveys the orderly chaos of the movements involved but it is more than reportage. It is a remarkable picture, prefiguring by ten years Barbara Hepworth's National Health Service paintings, where surgical procedures are invested with an almost spiritual significance.



The Operating Theatre

The end of the war saw Rutherford transported to the other side of the world - via a troopship, whose depiction fairly sparkles with a sense of adventure - to the squalor and intense colours of Ceylon and the Far Eastern campaign. The change of scene is reflected in a brilliant but characteristically assured and controlled change of palette. The subfusc of hospital life in England replaced by waves of intense tropical colour.

Rosemary remained a dedicated artist throughout her life. She was associated with Cedric Morris and Lett Haines' East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing at Benton End, Hadleigh, Suffolk. Her war work was put away in folios, where it has remained for over 60 years until now.

Andrew Sim



The Shelter

With thanks to Ian, Jenny and Naomi Weston



Refugee children, Broomfield, Essex



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ROSEMARY'S WAR



The Rediscovered War Folios of
Rosemary Rutherford (1912 - 72)

ROSEMARY'S WAR

By the summer of 1940, hundreds of thousands of young women had volunteered for war service. Brimming with a vague mixture of excitement, altruism and patriotism, few had any practical experience to offer. Rosemary Rutherford, a 27 year old Slade-trained artist, was one of their number, becoming, with a bare minimum of basic training, part of a Voluntary Aid Detachment of the Red Cross.

VADS were intended to perform the thankless tasks that would otherwise have taken up the time of fully trained personnel. But, as commonplace as her role may have been, Rosemary Rutherford was far from ordinary. A gifted artist, with a career just beginning to burgeon – she'd exhibited at the New English Arts Club – she was keen to bring her artistic skills to bear on her war work.

Rosemary was granted permission by the War Artists' Advisory Committee, who appointed Official War Artists and doled out specific artistic commissions, to record her work as a VAD.



She performed a variety of jobs: driving a mobile canteen round gun batteries on the east coast and working as a nurse in hospitals and convalescent homes for servicemen.

"It was an exhausting struggle trying to be a good artist and a good nurse," she remembered. "In the end, I gave up being a good nurse."

Rosemary's tender and occasionally transcendent drawings, sketches and paintings provide the most eloquent account of her wartime life.

Her ability to capture a likeness is obvious but there is also a strong

◀ 'Make do and mend'
The life of a VAD



'Waves of intense tropical colour' - A Ceylonese panorama



Sailors

"It was an exhausting struggle trying to be a good artist and a good nurse. In the end, I gave up being a good nurse"

sense of the subjects' inner spirit: the swaggering, slightly louche engagement of one young sailor, the haunted, glazed stare of another. Rutherford was a devout Christian and what interested her was not just a fidelity to the appearance of things but also to what she would have described as their underlying spirit.



◀ The Troop Ship

▶ 'The Listeners'
An acoustic device designed to help anti-aircraft batteries.

