



Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for Business and Planning
Date:	16 October 2020
Classification:	For general release
Title:	Commemorative Green Plaque to Halima Nałęcz, artist, patron and owner of The Drian Galleries at 5 Porchester Place, W2 2PE
Wards Affected:	Hyde Park
Key Decision:	No
Financial Summary:	The Green Plaque Scheme is funded by sponsorship, which has been secured for this plaque
Report of:	Richie Gibson, Head of City Promotions, Events and Filming

1. Executive summary

Halima Nałęcz (1914-2008) was an artist, patron and co-founder of the New Vision Gallery and owner of the Drian Galleries (1957-1989) at 7 Porchester Place where she promoted and supported emerging artists. The gallery was later extended to 5 Porchester Place, the proposed location of the Green Plaque and had a long running role in avant-garde art history.

2. Recommendations

That the nomination for a commemorative Green Plaque to Halima Nałęcz at 5 Porchester Place, W2 2PE, is approved.

3. Reasons for decision

Halima Nałęcz was regarded as eminent in her day and remains respected as a gallery owner today. Many distinguished artists were loyal to the gallery throughout their careers and The Drian Galleries archives are in the Tate Gallery.

The Drian deserves recognition for its role in promoting and supporting avant-garde art of the 1950s and 60s and Halima Nałęcz deserves the same for her role as a patron of the arts, especially in and for Poland. She nurtured careers and donated works of art to Polish national museums.

The application is supported by an independent Green Plaque panel and Gill Hedley, independent curator and a consultant on contemporary visual arts.

4. Policy context

The Green Plaques scheme aims to highlight and improve awareness of Westminster's diverse cultural heritage and social history, provide information for visitors and to create a sense of pride in neighbourhoods.

5. Background

Early Years

Halima was born in 1914 as Halina Maria Krzywicz-Nowohonska in Antonowo, near Vilnius in Lithuania, then part of Poland. She spent a childhood of displacement travelling through Eastern Europe as a result of the First World War before studying painting at the Stefan Batory University in her hometown. She married a corporal engineer in the Polish Army in 1936 who died in a concentration camp in 1941, the same year her mother also died.

Finally, Halima got to Moscow, then with the help of an uncle, a Colonel in the Polish Army based in London, went to Israel where she worked as scenographer for the Polish Army.

London, post-war

The geo-political situation in Poland prohibited her return and she worked in Jerusalem until, in 1947, she signed a contract to work in England as a European Volunteer Worker. It was while working in a London stocking factory that she met Zygmunt Nałęcz, who she married in 1952, while at the same time changing her name to Halima.

Halima continued her painting studies under Marian Bohusz-Szyszko at the School of Easel Painting, part of the Polish University Abroad, founded in 1949 and staffed by Polish expatriates from her own University of Vilnius. She next studied in Paris where she met gallery owner Denise René, a specialist in kinetic and op art who gave Mondrian his first solo show in Paris in 1957.

The Drian Galleries

Halima returned to London in 1956 and had a solo show of her abstract paintings at the long-established Walker's Gallery. Frustrated at the lack of modern art in galleries, artists Denis Bowen and Frank Avray Wilson convinced her to help them set up the New Visions Gallery at 4 Seymour Place, realising her involvement and contacts in Paris would make the venture more professional and international. With fresh exhibitions every fortnight, they focused on artists whose work was disregarded in the West End.

In October 1957, after a year, the three parted company amicably and Halima set up her own gallery in an old butcher's shop nearby at 7 Porchester Place. Her gallery was first called the Drian Gallery, named after the Dutch abstract artist Piet Mondrian, who lived in London in the late 1930s.

In 1960 the gallery expanded and became the Drian Galleries. It was one of only a small number of avant-garde galleries and far away from the more commercially minded and well-established equivalents on or near Bond Street. It was not unusual but still noteworthy for a woman to run a successful gallery at the time.

The Drian Galleries did not only champion abstraction, Halima's first love, but also a more general international avant-garde including constructivism and new figuration. She was a continuous supporter of Polish art and gave a retrospective to Marian Bohusz-Szyszko, her teacher. He later married Dame Cicely Saunders, the founder of the modern hospice movement, after she saw his paintings in the Drian Galleries.

She gave many artists their first major solo show in Britain including John Bellany, William Crozier, Michael Sandle, Yaacov Agam, Douglas Portway, Leon Zack, Dario Villalba, Maryon Kantaroff, Paul Foujino, Moshe Tamir, Cecil Stephensen and Joseph Lacasse.

Many distinguished artists stayed loyal to the gallery throughout their careers including Portway, Bellany and Crozier. Gillian Wise and Anthony Hill were amongst significant constructivist artists whose work Halima continued to promote when others did not. Stephen Willats, a pioneer of conceptual art, started work there as her assistant.

She acquired works of art both to sell and support the gallery but also to form her own distinguished collection which she gave to the national collections in Warsaw and Gdansk. For every painting of her own that she sold, Halima would buy artwork to add to the Drian's permanent collection. By 1983, she was able to donate 565 contemporary works of art to Polish national museums, including 80 of her own.

Eventually the Drian galleries went out of fashion and the last exhibition of over 320 was held in 1989, although the business continued to trade until 1998, 10 years before her death.

Halima continued to paint until her death in 2008. She painted spontaneously with a natural rhythm and when asked about her canvases, she declared: "I believe in the medicine of colours." The National Gallery holds images by photographer Bob Collins of Halima in her studio surrounded by examples of her mature work.

6. Financial implications

The cost of production, installation and administration will be covered by the sponsor, The Church Commissioners for England. There is no cost to Westminster City Council.

7. Legal Implications

The property at 5 Porchester Place is a Grade II listed building and an application for Listed Building Consent has been submitted.

8. Consultation

The building at 5 Porchester Place is owned by Church Commissioners for England who submitted the nomination for a Green Plaque and have given their permission for the installation. Ward members have been informed of the proposal and no objections have been raised.

The nomination is supported by members of the independent Green Plaque panel chaired by Cllr Matthew Green. Members are: Adrian Autton, Development Manager, Westminster Archives and Local Studies; Helen Glew, Senior Lecturer in History, University of Westminster; Richard McHardy, Acting Chair, Westminster Guides and Colin Thom, Senior Research Associate, Survey of London, UCL Faculty of the Built Environment.

Contemporary visual arts curator and consultant Gill Hedley supports the proposal for a Green Plaque on the site previously occupied by the Drian Galleries for its long running role in avant-garde art history and significance to the Polish cultural community and that it was the creation of a woman artist and patron.

If you have any queries about this report please contact Claire Appleby on 07971 026 113 or cappleby@westminster.gov.uk.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Location plan of 5 Porchester Place at 1:1250 scale

Appendix 2

Photo Montage showing the proposed location of the Halima Nałęcz Green Plaque at 5 Porchester Place.

Appendix 3

Wording and layout of proposed Green Plaque.

For completion by the **Cabinet Member for Business and Planning**

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____

NAME: **Councillor Matthew Green**

State nature of interest if any

.....
(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled Commemorative Green Plaque to Halima Nałęcz, artist, patron and Drian Galleries owner, at 5 Porchester Place, W2 2PE.

Signed

Cabinet Member for Business and Planning

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:
.....
.....

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Strategic Director Finance and Performance and, if there are resources implications, the Strategic Director of Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the

criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.

Appendix A

Other Implications

1. Resources Implications

1.1 There are no resources implications arising from this report

2. Business Plan Implications

2.1 There are no Business Plan implications arising from this report

3. Risk Management Implications

3.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report

4. Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment including Health and Safety Implications

4.1 There are no health and safety and wellbeing issues arising from this report

5. Crime and Disorder Implications

5.1 There are no crime and disorder issues arising from this report

6. Impact on the Environment

6.1 There are no environmental issues arising from this report

7. Equalities Implications

7.1 There are no equality issues arising from this report

8. Staffing Implications

8.1 There are no staffing issues arising from this report

9. Human Rights Implications

9.1 There are no issues relating to responsibilities under the Human Rights Act 1998 arising from this report

10. Energy Measure Implications

10.1 There are no energy measure issues arising from this report

11. Communications Implications

11.1 The council's media team will be informed of the proposed Green Plaque should it be approved