

## **Michelle**

Life had seemed pretty normal that day in Michaelmas Term 1980, until mid-morning, that is, when Michelle walked into my room in Rewley House. When I say walked in, that doesn't quite capture it, she blew in rather like a benign and charming whirlwind. After some brief introductions and chit-chat, Michelle came straight to the point. She thought that the Department, then called External Studies, was admirable, but seriously lacking in one regard - its provision in the History of Art, about which she then spoke passionately. She said she would like to help address the Department's deficiency, or, rather, she announced that she proposed to address the deficiency.

From that point onwards, Michelle's recollection of that first meeting diverged somewhat from mine. Having known something about Michelle's earlier successes in London, I believe I said that her proposal was a splendid one which I would be happy to support. Michelle, however, loved to claim that I had expressed some doubts about what she proposed. I like to think that my account was the more accurate. After all, what she was proposing was an excellent idea, but in any case I doubt that I would have had the temerity to express any reservations about it whatsoever. If I had, I could well have imagined her seizing me by the lapels, at least figuratively, and pointing out the error in my thinking and the inappropriateness of my response. Actually, being literally yanked out of my chair by my lapels might well have been a real risk!

In any event, Michelle's plan was put into action, and her progress through the University's lifelong learning programme thereafter was wonderful to witness. By the following session, the History of Art programme was under way, with Michelle's own classes immediately popular. And thereafter the programme continued to grow and develop from year to year. When we started offering award-bearing courses, Michelle ensured that the History of Art was among them. I know that Mary will say something about that. The progress still continues.

For a number of years in the first decade of the new millennium, the Department had the contract to organise the lectures offered by Cunard on their flagship QM2. I scarcely need tell you that Michelle was a natural for that, and a huge success from day one. Judith and I attended one series she gave, when following every lecture she was besieged by members of the audience who wanted to know more. I can still see her now, sitting on the edge of the platform, surrounded by a crowd of questioners and admirers long after the time we were scheduled to have vacated the lecture theatre.

One additional word, if I may. In addition to her truly outstanding contributions to the University's outreach work, in the Ashmolean as well as in Rewley House, Michelle was a wonderful member of Kellogg College, where she became an Honorary Visiting Fellow. Vincent will say more about that, but I also want to pay tribute to Keith in that regard, because, together, the company of Keith and Michelle added a great deal to the college, not least through their invariable good cheer and *joie de vivre* - and Michelle's outrageous laugh - things enjoyed by colleagues and students alike. I used to describe Keith in his professional capacity as the only man who has put more people to sleep than I have. Their company in college was always a delight. So thank you also, Keith, for your own part in that.

The world, our world, was so much better a place for Michelle's part in it. Edgar Degas famously said, "*Art is not what you see, but what you make others see*". That could have been Michelle's motto - she opened the eyes and enriched the lives of so many people. Her legacy is tremendous. Her company was always a pleasure. Her friendship was a huge privilege.

Truly a life to be celebrated.

**Geoffrey Thomas**