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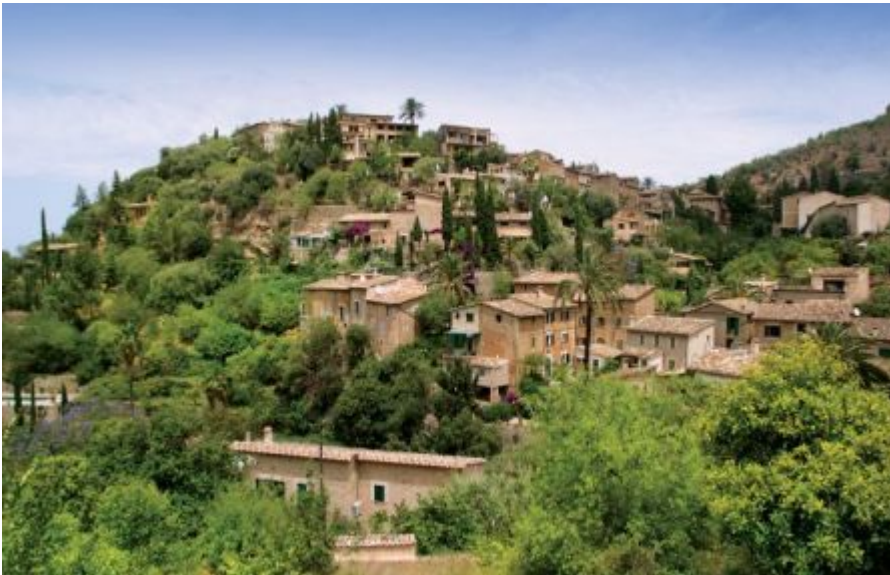
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## Packing An Artistic Punch

19th September 2014

**This year marks the 30th anniversary of Sa Tafona, a small art gallery in Deia, Majorca, crammed with work from local artists. In the grounds of the luxury hotel in which it's located is a sculpture garden. As well as having over 800 pieces of modern art itself, the hotel has a resident sculptor and a resident painter and collaborates with a local ceramicist. The gallery's curator, herself an artist – and widow of a local painter who first came to Deia in the 1960s – organises art walks to local studios. Olivia Greenway visits Deia, and explores why art is so important in this tiny place and how the gallery came to be here...**

You don't happen to stumble upon Deia; you have to set out to get to it. It's a small hilltop village in Majorca on the rugged west coast, so named by the Moors who conquered the island in the 10th century. 'Ad-Daya' means 'village' in Arabic and throughout its several hundred years of existence, it has managed to remain relatively unspoiled by modern development, even today. Installing stepped irrigation channels early on in its history meant the steep hillsides could be cultivated and explains why they are today covered with ancient olive trees with the later addition of orange and lemon. Narrow winding streets that were built for pedestrians and donkeys are difficult for modern traffic to traverse, so any vehicles tend to be going about local business. There are no high rise buildings here; it's hemmed in by the Teix Mountain, part of the Tramuntana range and as the ground is hilly, 1960s and 1970s developers were drawn to the easier builds on the south or east coast, to Deia's advantage. There no sandy beaches either; it's a twenty-minute descent through orange groves to a couple of rocky coves, perfect for scuba diving but not for topping up the tan on a sunbed. You won't find karaoke bars or nightclubs; it's not that sort of place. People live here because they like the peace and quiet and the natural beauty of the place. They also like the 'arty' feel; it's attracted European artists for many years, with some from even further afield.

The most famous expat is probably Robert Graves, poet and writer; *Goodbye to All That* and *I, Claudius* are his most well known and successful works. Badly injured in the First World War, it could be that the warm climate in Deia aided his slow recovery, as well as being a handy escape

with his mistress following the breakdown of his marriage. The couple arrived here in 1929 but left with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. He returned in 1946 with his new partner, Beryl, and lived there until his death in 1985. Deia became his 'refuge'. He lived a quiet life, walking down to a rocky cove and going for a daily swim and having the occasional visitor, who was sometimes high profile. Their house is now a museum and Graves was buried in the village, in a simple grave. Beryl, who died in 2003, is buried with him.

Before package air travel arrived, getting to the island by ferry was cheap and living in Deia was less expensive than France and other parts of Europe, so attractive to impoverished artists, who like Graves fell in love with the wonderful light and climate, the seclusion and the simple way of life. Such was the case with George Sheridan, an American artist who arrived in Deia in the 1960s and set up permanent residence in 1972. Things have changed now, though; a two bedroom flat in this magical place costs the same as one in London. The millionaires have moved in. Most prominent of these is probably Richard Branson, who in the 1990s bought what is now the hotel La Residencia – but sold it to Orient Express in 2002.

However, the local artists, including the aforementioned Sheridan, who died in Deia in 2008, put art first and fame (and fortune) second. Art was his life, and according to his widow, Cecilie, he encouraged young artists and those with genuine talent, nurturing their success and helping them to sell their work. The gallery he created is a genuine response to the talent in the village and not a casual bolt-on, as it is in so many hotels. Artists need to sell their work to survive, as Cecilie explains, so rely on tourists and patrons and by working together, the Deia artists have a better opportunity of doing that. As curator of the gallery, Cecilie tries to maintain a high quality of work but offer opportunities to all serious artists in the area, by which she means "artists dedicating time and talent to developing their art." The gallery holds exhibitions of specific artists every two weeks and collective shows twice a year, from high profile artists as well as relative unknowns. Cecilie organises popular weekly circular art tours. Within a quarter of a mile of the hotel are various studios where guests meet the artists as well as see their work. "Guests may know a lot about art or nothing," Cecilie explains, giving the impression that prior knowledge of art is not necessary or even expected to enjoy the tour.

Near the gallery is the studio of Juan Waelder, originally from Chile, but involved in art and living in Mallorca since 1970, when he was the youngest member of a community art group on the island. As sculptor in residence (since 2010), he works in clay, iron and bronze. When I visited his studio with its open door policy – you just wander in – he was working on a clay figure. All around the room and on the walls are examples of work from this man who has worked in a variety of mediums over the years. A huge mural of Robert Graves is also in progress.

Waelder was instrumental in establishing the sculpture garden in the hotel grounds in 2012. Sculptures need space to be appreciated, so outdoors suits them best, rather than a small studio or exhibition space, and he has been able to provide a home in the garden for eighteen pieces of work from international and Mallorcan artists, including three by Patrick Guino, who lives nearby. Waelder offers workshops for guests and told me he is occasionally surprised with the innate talent of his pupils who have never worked in clay, or in fact, done any sort of art before.

Alan Hydes, a well-known Yorkshire artist, is another in residence with an open door studio. He specialises in vivid still life canvases, his former life as a London television director and producer presumably a distant memory. He first established himself as a portrait artist, with high profile sitters, gained a television series and wrote books on the subject. He interviewed Hockney among others, and was encouraged by him to use bright primary colours, inspired by the light in

Mallorca, as he did in California. In all Hydes' paintings, the subjects appear ready to jump from the canvas. His work is in private collections and art galleries all over the world, and he offers workshops and private lessons in painting.

Joanna Kuhne, a local ceramicist, produces pieces for the hotel as well as giving hour-long demonstrations and hands-on workshops to show how ceramics are created. Originally from Chicago, a chance docking in Palma when on a yearlong sailing trip in the 1980s, brought her to Deia, where she has been ever since.

Deia has a lure for artistes of all persuasions and for visitors who would either like to 'have a go' themselves or just potter around and appreciate what other people have done. This little village in Mallorca certainly packs an artistic punch, and like the best of punches, it takes one completely by surprise.

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