



**SENSE OF HUMANITY:** Claire Phillips is to visit several American states on her ten-day trip

## Artist to paint Death Row inmates

**AN ARTIST** has been given £5,000 to paint portraits of condemned men on Death Row in America.

Claire Phillips, 43, is travelling to the Deep South next month to record on canvas prisoners facing execution by lethal injection or the electric chair.

Mrs Phillips will travel to Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Texas during her ten-day trip, which starts on March 2.

She applied for a grant from the Arts Council after painting veteran journalist Charles Wheeler, patron of Reprieve, a charity which provides legal representation for people on death row.

Mrs Phillips, who graduated from Northbrook College, Worthing, said: "I have been supporting this British-based charity for a long time and got more and more involved.

"I have also painted the legal director, Clive Stafford Smith, who talked about using whatever talents you have to raise awareness.

"We came up with this idea of having a series of portraits of people who have faced or are facing death."

Mrs Phillips, of The High Street, Partridge Green, near Henfield, said she hopes to interview two inmates awaiting execution.

She also intends to talk to British subject Krishna Maharaj, originally from Peckham, south London, who, after being convicted of murder, spent 15 years on death row before his sentence was commuted to life without parole.

Mrs Phillips, who is travelling with husband Mike, also 43, already had photographs provided through Reprieve of those

she intended to visit but felt it was difficult to paint someone you had not met.

She hoped her portraits, which will take about two years to complete, will make people think about the death penalty.

Mrs Phillips, who has three daughters: Emma, 16, Sally, 14, and Sophie, 12, said: "Personally I think the risk of executing an innocent person is way too high.

"One of the people I will be painting, using documentary footage, is Edward Earl Johnson who was executed some years ago even though there was a very strong case that he was innocent.

"I don't think it is grisly - it is a question of humanity. A lot of these people are there because they don't have the money for a good defence.

"It could be anyone's father, son or brother."