

## NEWS

Artist visits America's South to highlight the ultimate penalty

# Drawing Death Row

by PAUL HOLDEN

PICTURE: TERRY APPLIN

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AN ARTIST who met condemned men on Death Row in America has returned shocked by her experiences.

Claire Phillips, 43, spent ten days touring the Deep South, visiting maximum security prisons where inmates were killed by electric chair or lethal injection.

She said it has been an emotionally challenging trip, especially when meeting men awaiting execution.

Mrs Phillips will spend the next two years painting her subjects from sketches she made after her visits.

Mrs Phillips, who graduated from Northbrook College, Worthing, met three prisoners, including two on Death Row.

She also talked to and took photos of three men who spent between six and eight years awaiting execution before they were cleared, plus the brother of a British man who was killed despite begging for DNA evidence to be tested to prove his innocence.

Mrs Phillips, of High Street, Partridge Green, said it was very intimidating in prison, with armed guards in watchtowers and huge rolls of razor wire.

It sometimes took an hour to get through security, with lots of waiting around, before she could conduct an interview through bullet-proof glass with prisoners in chains.

Mrs Phillips said many of the inmates had committed awful crimes but she was also shocked by the miscarriages of justice she says she encountered.

Mrs Phillips travelled through Florida,

Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Texas, well off the tourist trail, and was struck by how poor many people were.

She said she could not draw Death Row prisoners inside jail but as soon as she got outside she sketched frantically from memory.

Mrs Phillips will paint her subjects in oils using the sketches, photographs and video footage.



**SHOCKED:** Claire Phillips hopes to raise awareness of the death penalty by putting her pictures on display in a London gallery

The married mother of three's trip was funded by a £5,000 grant from the Arts Council.

Mrs Phillips was inspired by the British charity Reprieve, run by civil rights lawyer Clive Stafford Smith, which provides legal representation for people on Death Row.

Its patron is veteran journalist Charles Wheeler, whom she has painted.

She hopes her portraits will go on show in a London gallery to make people think about the death penalty.

Mrs Phillips also visited flood-devastated New Orleans.

She said: "It was quite shocking. There are huge areas of boarded up houses, completely abandoned, and people living in trailers."

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