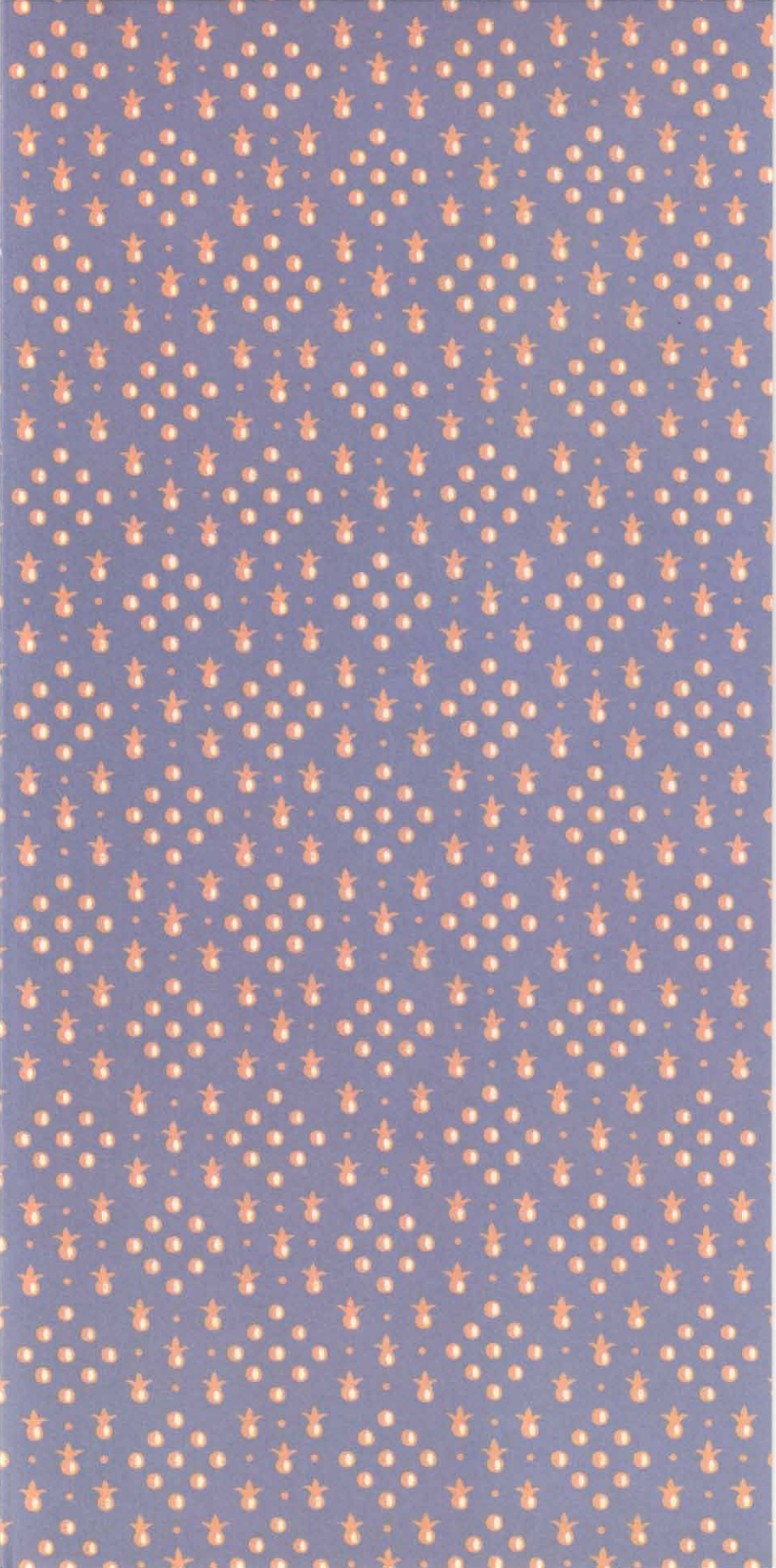


EMILY PATRICK
Recent Paintings



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Recent Paintings



EMILY PATRICK 1997

EMILY PATRICK

Recent Paintings 1995 -1997

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PLATE 1

INTRODUCTION

By Alistair Horne CBE

My wife (who is also a painter) and I first met Emily Patrick at the solo exhibition at Agnew's which launched her in October 1986. Neither of us will forget it: Sheelin was chatting to one of London's wildest dealers, who abruptly stopped her and said:

*'Don't think me rude, but waste no more time talking to me.
Go and buy a painting. They're wonderful...!'*

They were; and she did. We instantly fell under the spell of Emily Patrick's paintings, and of her personality, and at subsequent exhibitions acquired three more works. (That first exhibition, unique in conservative Agnew's giving a solo to so young an artist – Emily was then only 27 – sold out in three days, a record for the gallery.)

What struck me most forcibly about that exhibition was the remarkable harmony that exists between all Emily Patrick's paintings. They all hung remarkably well in the room together, not one jarred with another. This is a somewhat rare quality, achieved by geniuses of colour like Matisse, but outstanding in one still so young.

Emily Patrick was born in 1959 and grew up on a farm in Kent, child of parents with fairly conventional values – such as not approving of art schools as a suitable education for young women! Her paintings of farm animals and of foliage trace back to her delight in this rural upbringing. Because of parental opposition, she never went to art school or studied art history; but a trip around the galleries of Europe as a teenager taught her to observe closely. The nearest she had to any formal training was to draw in the studio of John Ward. Instead of art school her parents persuaded her to read architecture for three years at Cambridge. She got a degree in 1982, gaining expertise in draftsmanship – as well as her special sense of space and structure.

It was in 1981, while on holiday from university in Canada that she first realised her potential as a portraitist with a successful drawing of her host, Frank Cabot. She continued painting for her own pleasure, and exhibited at the Bath Festival of 1984. It was here that she was spotted by Christopher Kingzett of Agnew's, who offered her that exhibition; a risk that more than paid off for both gallery and painter, with a complete sell-out.

That same year she married Michael Perry. Typical of her romantic, rather unorthodox view of life, they chose to be married, barefooted, in Burma. Michael, on leaving university, had made furniture and picture frames for a living. Eventually he gave this up to become a merchant banker – but still prepares most of the frames for Emily's exhibitions, while she meticulously tints them herself.

As a consequence of the success of that first Agnew's show, she accepted a number of commissions for portraits. There were more requests than she could cope with. One important commission came from the Royal Hampshire Regiment, to paint their Colonel-in-Chief – the Princess of Wales. Emily, however, has always shown a curious reluctance to pursue her portraiture – despite receiving, in 1988, the Royal Society of Portrait Painters award for the most promising painting by an artist under 30, for *Self with Two Babies*. Averse to painting the society women who besieged her after the exhibition of the Princess's canvas, she explains:

'I love to paint old men who have done interesting things with their lives, and children ...'

She excels at her self-portraits, and those of her two small daughters, Isabel and Beatrice. Writing in *The Independent*, the distinguished critic, Geraldine Norman, has (with reason) praised these paintings as *'as good as Mary Cassatt'*.

As a historian, I have never before been invited to write a critique of an artist's work; for Emily Patrick I do so with utmost diffidence, but also with total delight. It is hard not to be enchanted by the shy, gently modest, but romantic personality that comes through the paintings. When asked what her professional objectives are, she says, simply

'I just want to get better each time at what I do.'



From the various enchanting self-portraits of her holding a child, unfortunately not included in the present exhibition, an almost frightened-looking young woman peeps back out of the mirror. Perhaps she is fearful of dropping the baby? Or is it general alarm at the world outside? Extraordinary is how she manages to hold her little subjects still enough long enough to portray them with such penetrating clarity. Sometimes (as in the delightfully humorous *Self-portrait*, all legs in long black tights (PLATE I)) she does her own beauty scant justice.

All Emily Patrick's canvases are anchored in real life. But only a neo-philistine would think her square, or trad. She never ceases to be the romantic. In distinction to the 'magic realists' of modern Latin American fiction, I would describe her a 'romantic realist.' Her canvases are filled with the loved objects of everyday life from the Patricks' enchanting 17th century house in Greenwich: an open cupboard with a dishcloth draped on the door (PLATE XVII), a Dresden doll, well-used vases with haphazardly gathered flowers from the garden, standing on ancient Pelican paperbacks (PLATE V). But I know no-one who can instil romance so poignantly into the leaves of a humble cabbage! The carefully observed detail of *A pink peonie* (PLATE VII) reminds me of Aldous Huxley's experiments with mescaline in the carefree days of pre-LSD, described in *The Doors of Perception*; you really sense that you are right inside the petals of the flower, looking out.

Emily Patrick astounds by her versatility. Is there anything she cannot do? She could – I think – be one of the great, academic portrait painters of our day; her still lifes are magical; her flower pieces, with a wonderful airy quality about the foliage, are, as Geraldine Norman has also remarked:

*'good enough to stand comparison with Fantin-Latour class,
though very different.'*

The all-too-few landscapes exhibited grip one; the scene at Blackheath Common in *Windy autumn day* (PLATE XIII), painted in subdued Corot tones, chills the body with its sense of whirling leaves driven by the elements. There is humour, too, in the joyously observed dog gazing apprehensively at the violin in *His Master's Voice* (PLATE III). (And how exquisitely the violin is drawn!)



Her restrained sense of harmonious colour in all these paintings almost persuades one there must be decades of experience behind them. Yet her technique of working on wooden panels with only a thin layer of gesso, and with little preliminary drawing, seems deceptively simple in its approach. What is clear is that, behind the immense tranquility of most of her paintings, an immense amount of passion and intensive work has been expended. She says of her portraiture:

'I find it incredibly exhausting; I am shaking at the end of most sessions'.

A most private person, Emily gently rapped my knuckles when I asked her about the subject of her new show:

'That's a question that I am often asked, and is a question that always raises my hackles (just a little). The subject of a picture for me, has almost no relevance. It is the abstract qualities of painting that drive me to look and paint. It is how the painting is done which will create the magic. The subject provides the spring-board.... Flashy subjects are often simply attention-seeking'

'How will the exhibition differ? Well, people tell me that the paintings have become much stronger. I just hope that each show will be a little closer to magic...'

Magic! She is right; there is the magic, the romantic realism, for all to see.

Dare I pick one picture that moves me most? It is hard. But, after a lot of thought, I think I go for her portrait, *French acrobat* (PLATE IV). To my mind, sheer genius, and immensely powerful: the extraordinary flesh tints and hinted meridional five o'clock shadow, the delicately observed sensual lower lip, the eyes full of the sad uncertainties and strain of the profession.

Given her known hesitance, Emily Patrick will kill me for saying this; but I hope the future will bring her way more portraits with the virtuosity of this one – and others she has shown in past exhibitions.

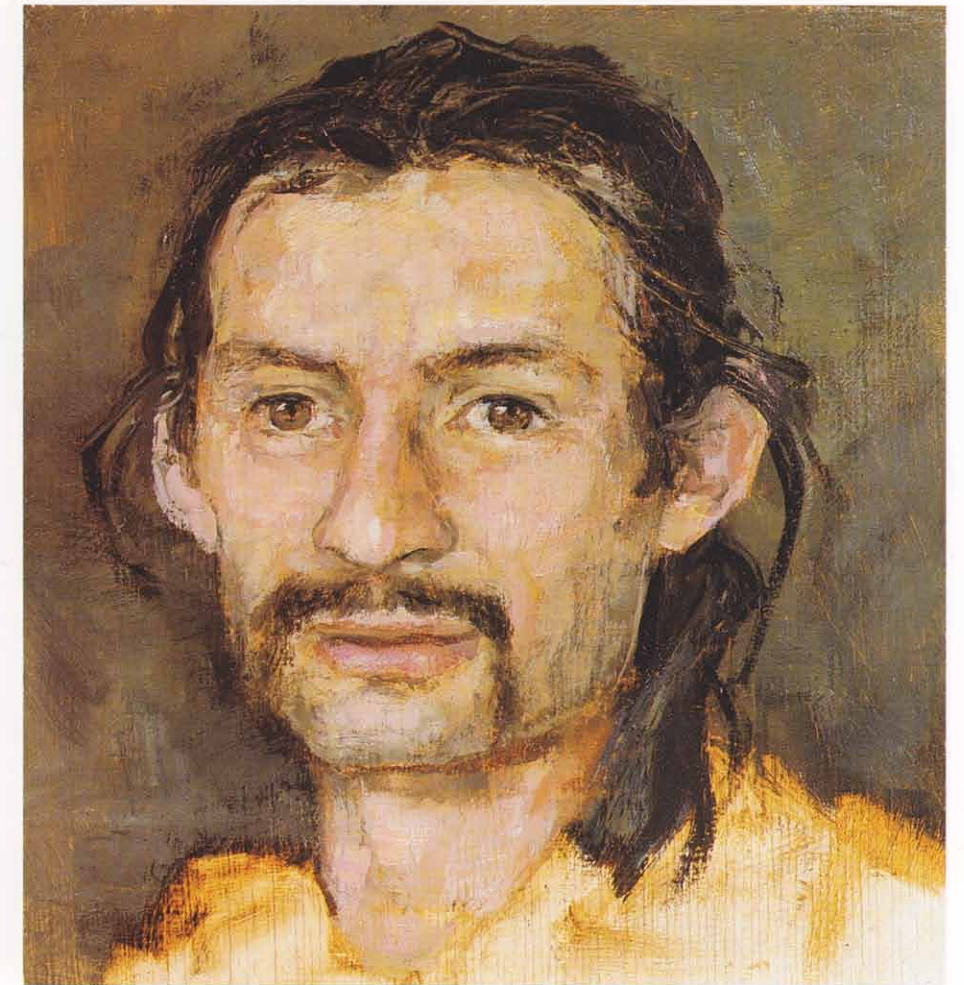




PLATE V

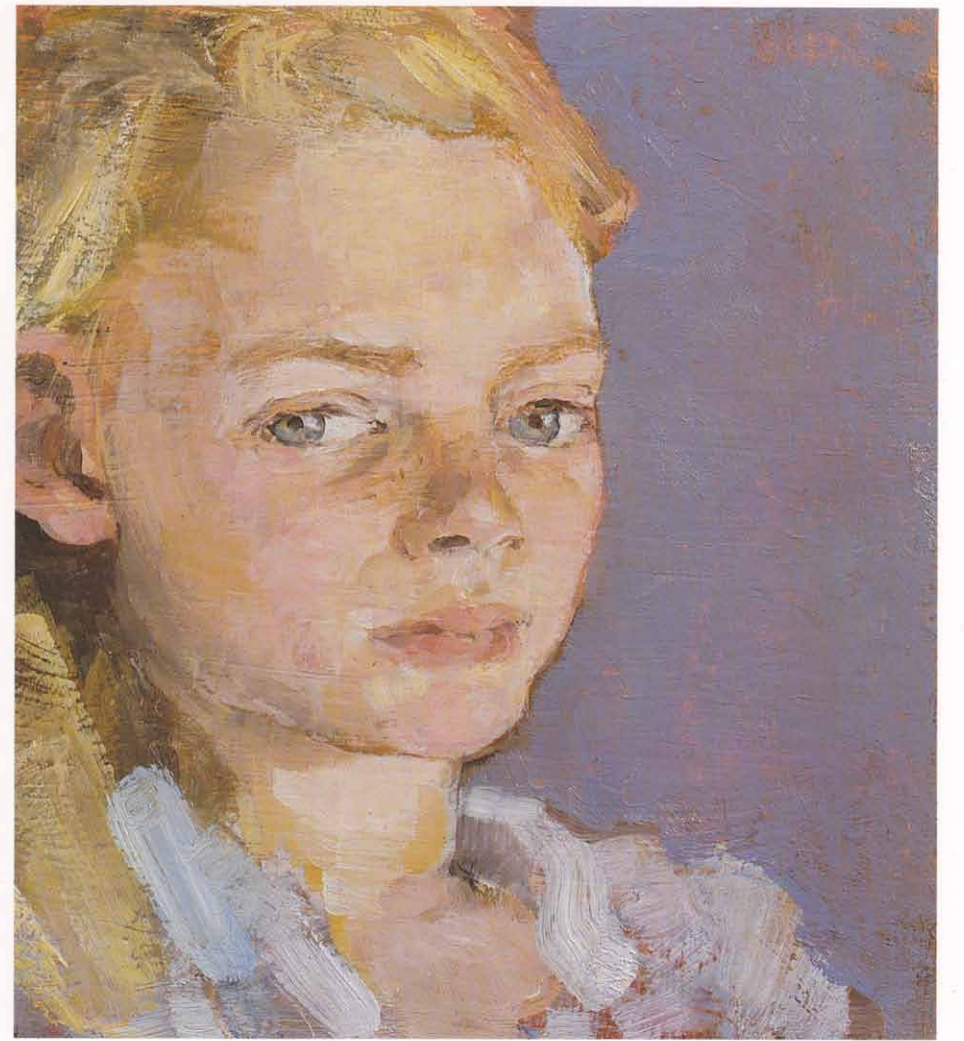
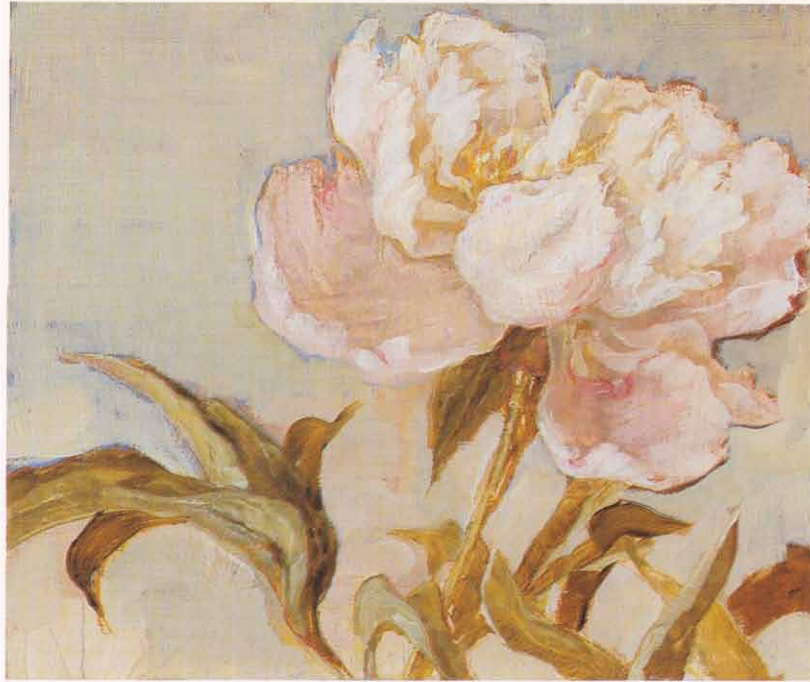


PLATE VI



EMILY PATRICK'S PAINTINGS

By Libby Anson

The vitality of Emily Patrick's work and the quality of her paint defies reproduction. In the flesh, the portraits, flowers, landscapes and still life, glow with vitality and celebrate nature's exuberance. Just as effective listening is the heart of conversation, perceptive looking is the bedrock of visual communication. Her precision is evident in the accomplished paintings: her eye is keen and selective, encouraging us to look at petals, skin, an expression, a reflection of wood on china, the peculiarities of natural light and the textures of fabric, or the patterns on wallpaper. The scale and treatment of the subjects which she scrutinises vary widely. Large, full-length portraits and complex arrangements of vegetation – whole branches of blossom, for example and an array of richly coloured beetroot, courgette leaves and runner beans – contrast with small, Corot-esque landscapes and single flowers. She is courageous in her choices.

The romantic, sensuous nature of Patrick's work results from a practical and straightforward approach. Her pragmatism extends to studying forms of beauty – including her own children – without a trace of sentimentality. Her painting is solidly grounded in the magic of reality and this she captures masterfully. She admits to finding portraits most difficult to paint if the sitter is trying to please, pose, or hide behind a socially acceptable mask. She can see the features, make-up and public persona, but the individual is absent: without a presence, there is little to depict with integrity. She needs to see something before she can paint. In the handsome face of *The French Acrobat* (PLATE IV), she sees the hardship of circus life and the fatigue in his face and translates it into paint. She interprets her own features harshly. We do not see her as the warm, gentle and gracious, youthful mother; the taut, concentrated stare that penetrates the distance or confronts the viewer is always a portrait of the artist at work, guarded and protective of her solitude.

The artist's palette has become bolder, richer. Hues are distinct and sometimes startling – blues and greens often take one by surprise. Colour, she acknowledges, is the unifying element that holds any composition together. In earlier work, it appeared that light, painterly brushwork and an emphasis on the linearity and lyricism of drawing structured the content of Patrick's images.

It is the more solid blocks of colour constructing her latest pieces that sculpt form, defining it clearly and distinguishing it from abstracted, often busy backgrounds. Usually, spatial depth is carefully depicted. Occasionally, as in *The Angora goat* (PLATE VIII), the subject of her attention stands defiantly in front of a flat, vibrant backdrop. In other pictures, *Beatrice* (PLATE VI) or *Self-Portrait* (PLATE I), the ground is as energetic as a van Gogh without the impasto; patches of bare gesso sometimes seem like small oases of calm in the midst of colourful distress.

There are pictures, *Furniture and blue walls* (PLATE XVI), *Open china cupboard* (PLATE XVII) and *His Master's Voice* (PLATE III), for example, in which the artist appears to have complete control and others, for example *A Jug of tulips* (PLATE IX), in which the painting itself seems to take over. Her success with potentially difficult compositions is due to bravery and determination and the use of beautiful pigments – aureolin yellow and rose madder being favourites. Her love of the oil medium and her craft is free from the cynicism that taints many art school trained artists.

It is tempting to refer to other masters in consideration of her painting, not because Patrick's work is derivative but because its inherent qualities are reminiscent of past achievements. In her flower painting, it is less the seventeenth century Dutch masters that come to mind, rather the exquisite compositions of Fantin-Latour. Patrick's talent for depicting a mass of leaves, grass, hair, wicker-work, or newsprint – without losing form or resorting to the tedium of Photorealism – has become more accomplished. This skill for rendering natural forms is at its most developed when she chooses to focus on a detail. Her single, glorious, *A pink peonie* (PLATE VII), is both delicate and powerful, subtle yet luscious and intense. The shape of the whole bloom is determined by a sharp, sky-blue contour defining the edges of its translucent petals. Her floral portraits are akin to the focused treatment of the same by Mapplethorpe, exuding the sensuality of her subject.

It is no surprise that the artist describes art history and the countryside as her teachers. However, she recalls that, as a teenager, she sought primary advice about painting from watercolourist John Doyle, Hugh Casson and William Coldstream; and drew in the studio of John Ward. Her approach to such figures could sound like a series of chance and innocent meetings. It was, in fact, an astute, logical move. Her keen professionalism has developed out of her conscientiousness and dedication to striving for perfection. This dedication is also seen in her frames, most of which she and her husband make themselves, thereby completing the extraordinary quality of her work.

Libby Anson contributes regularly to a number of national and international art publications and currently lectures at the Surrey Institute of Art & Design, Farnham.





PLATE IX



PLATE X



PLATE XI



PLATE XII



PLATE XIII

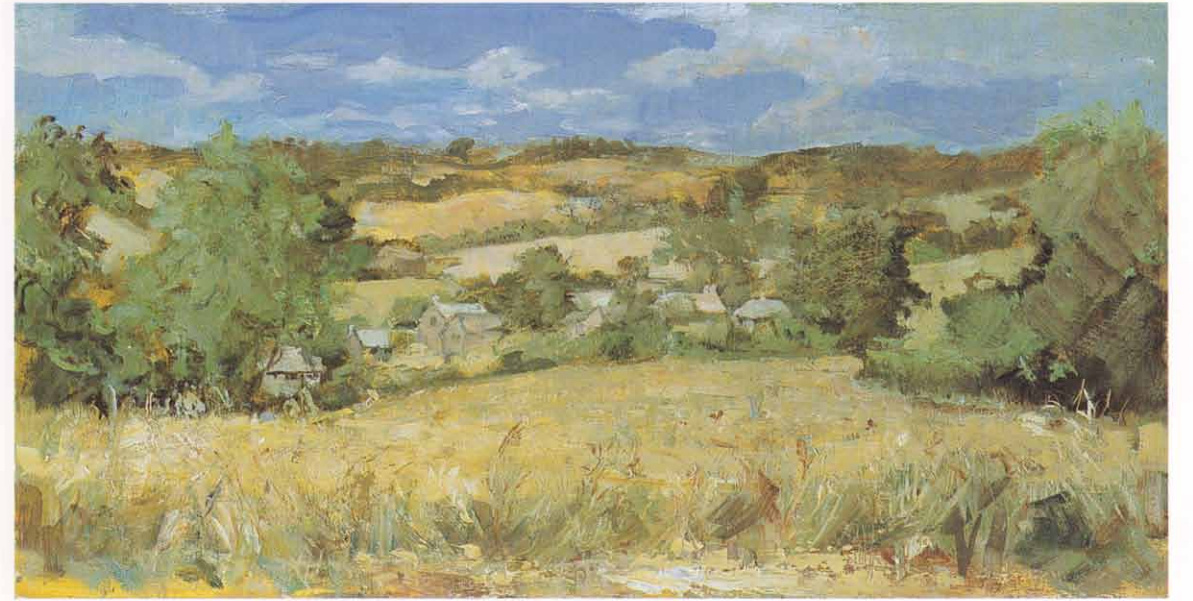


PLATE XIV



PLATE XV



PLATE XVI



PLATE XVII



PLATE XVIII

CATALOGUE

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Banana plant and conch shells
24 x 24 in (61 x 61 cm) | 11. Pelican books and lime leaves
20 x 24 in (51 x 61 cm)
PLATE V | 20. Cyclamen
16 x 12 in (41 x 30 cm) | 30. Furniture and blue walls
27 x 17 ³ / ₄ in (69 x 45 cm)
PLATE XVI |
| 2. Patchwork of Dorset fields
6 x 9 in (15 x 23 cm) | 12. Portrait of Beatrice,
the artist's elder daughter
7 x 6 in (18 x 15 cm)
PLATE VI | 21. Violin, teacup and shoes
11 x 16 (28 x 41 cm)
PLATE XII | 31. Open china cupboard
and table
29 x 19 in (74 x 48 cm)
PLATE XVII |
| 3. Self-portrait in black tights
48 x 36 in (122 x 91 cm)
PLATE I | 13. Pink peonie
8 x 9 in (20 x 23 cm)
PLATE VII | 22. Portrait of Isabel,
the artist's younger daughter
<i>oil</i> 12 x 11 in (30 x 28 cm) | 32. Small self-portrait in profile
6 x 8 in (15 x 20 cm) |
| 4. Dominoes and carnations
12 x 18 in (30 x 46 cm) | 14. Angora goat from
Docklands City Farm
26 x 31 in (65 x 79 cm)
PLATE VIII | 23. Windy autumn day
8 x 12 in (20 x 30 cm)
PLATE XIII | 33. Tulips in Jamaican colours
23 ¹ / ₂ x 28 (60 x 71 cm)
PLATE XVIII |
| 5. Chestnut leaves and apple blossom
30 x 24 in (76 x 61 cm)
PLATE II | 15. Jug of tulips
16 x 21 in (41 x 53 cm)
PLATE IX | 24. Dorset in August, Wytherston
9 ³ / ₄ x 19 ³ / ₄ in (25 x 50 cm)
PLATE XIV | 34. Priest and vase
8 ¹ / ₂ x 11 ³ / ₄ in (21 x 30 cm) |
| 6. Still life with wallpaper
27 ¹ / ₂ x 19 ³ / ₄ in (70 x 50 cm) | 16. Drawing beside a window
24 x 30 in (61 x 76 cm)
PLATE X | 25. Golden pears and leaves
18 x 21 in (46 x 53 cm) | 35. Collapsing white tulip
in a brown jug
10 x 8 in (25 x 20 cm) |
| 7. Fairies at the bottom of the garden
13 ¹ / ₂ x 11 ³ / ₄ in (34 x 30 cm) | 17. Beetroot and runner beans
24 x 29 in (61 x 74 cm) | 26. Open curtain,
pink blossom beyond
28 x 29 ¹ / ₂ in (71 x 75 cm) | 36. Window and figure at a table
28 x 36 in (71 x 91 cm) |
| 8. Lilac and blue ribbon
18 x 18 in (46 x 46 cm) | 18. Portuguese eucalyptus
20 x 28 in (51 x 71 cm)
PLATE XI | 27. Sky and girl in turban
30 x 30 in (76 x 76 cm) | 37. Wisteria tree in a garden
17 ³ / ₄ x 20 in (51 x 45 cm) |
| 9. His Master's Voice
32 x 28 in (81 x 71 cm)
PLATE III | 19. Scabious and two Pelican Books
14 x 11 in (36 x 28 cm) | 28. Pears and kiwi fruit on a plate
12 x 20 in (30 x 51 cm)
PLATE XV | 38. Spring leaves
12 x 18 in (46 x 30 cm) |
| 10. French acrobat, Denis Pech
8 x 8 in (20 x 20 cm)
PLATE IV | | 29. Tree trunk
35 ³ / ₄ x 48 in (91 x 122 cm) | |

All paintings are oil on panel

BIOGRAPHY

- 1959 born 4 October in Kent
1974 drew with John Doyle, the watercolour artist
1976 studied with Celia Ward in the studio of John Ward RA
1978-79 studied at the Architectural Association, London
1979-1982 studied Architecture at Cambridge University
1981 visited Canada
1982 *Contemporary Portraits*, King Street Galleries, London SW1
1983 New English Art Club, Mall Galleries, London SW1
1984 Wraxhall Gallery, London SW3
1985 Bath Festival
Oct 1986 first solo show at Agnew's, London W1
1987 married Michael Perry in Burma
1987 *John Player Portrait Award*, National Portrait Gallery, London WC2
1988 *Carroll Foundation Award*, Royal Society of Portrait Painters for the most promising portrait by an artist under 30
May 1988 *Mother & Child*, Birthright exhibition, Lefevre Gallery, London W1
Apr 1989 second solo show at Agnew's
1990 *BP Portrait Award*, National Portrait Gallery
Nov 1992 third solo show at Agnew's
Oct 1995 fourth solo show at Agnew's
Oct 1997 solo show at Gallery 27, Cork Street, London W1 curated by Magdalen Evans
Nov 1997 solo show at Hanover Square Gallery, New York

PORTRAIT COMMISSIONS AND COLLECTIONS INCLUDE:

HRH the Princess of Wales as Colonel-in-Chief for the Royal Hampshire Regiment, Lord Cottesloe (former Head of the Arts Council), Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, Mark Rylance (director of Shakespeare's Globe), Mr & Mrs Mark Fenwick, Francesca Denman, Amanda Craig, Marianne Cabot, Viscountess Bridgeman, Rt. Hon. Lord Justice & Lady Stuart-Smith, Derek Hill, Sir James Gowans (head of the Medical Research Council), Mercury Asset Management

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