

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND BERKSHIRE LIVING

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BRUSH STROKES

Isobel Pigott is an artist from Reading. **Hester Grainger** chatted to her to find out how she moved from a garden designer and became a full-time artist



Tell us how you became an artist

The art department at my secondary school was well-funded and the teachers were enthusiastic. This is where the first serious artistic seeds were sown and I was encouraged to study Fine Art at university.

So I arrived in Reading with a solid and slightly traditional art education, which was then duly torn apart and restructured in a new, exciting and somewhat challenging way. I was lucky enough to study at Reading when Terry Frost was professor of art and he and a number of the St Ives artists made a big impact on me.

Looking back, have you always loved art?

My love of art was always there but not necessarily tapped into. It truly began when the most exciting and motivating moment came in my third year at Reading. We were sent to Paris for a few weeks to study the galleries and museums. My eyes were opened to a riot of colour by such artists as Bonnard, Kandinsky, Chagall and, most importantly, Matisse. I returned in my final year with sketchbooks overflowing, my mind in overdrive and a new-found enthusiasm.

What were you doing before?

After my studies I exhibited for a couple of years whilst working at the art shop



'Artworker' in Gun Street, Reading. I loved that job, being surrounded by a wealth of art materials and talking to the many talented artists who came through the doors looking for help and advice.

That was followed by a few years selling computer systems, then marriage and raising a young family became priority and my art took a back seat for quite a while. After my children started school, I decided to merge my two passions of art and gardening. I studied for a diploma in garden design at the Berkshire College Of Agriculture. With these new skills I was able to set up my garden design and landscaping business.

How long were you a garden designer for?

I was extremely busy for nearly 20 years, building and transforming gardens in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and beyond. To be able to take something that was often in a very sorry and neglected state and transform

it into a beautiful and relaxing space was a joy. For me, the icing on the cake, was when I enabled clients to find pleasure in their gardens for the first time.

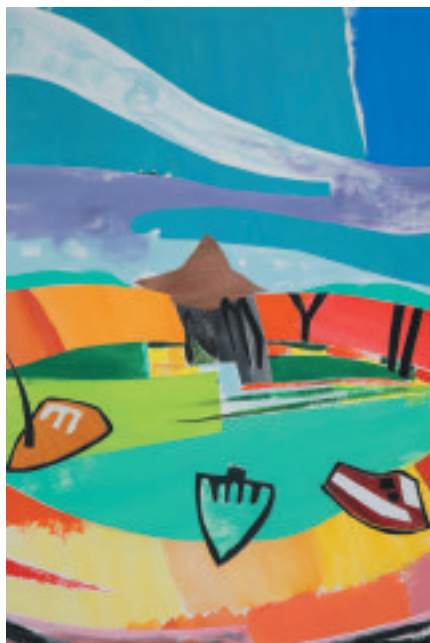
Obviously a garden can take a few years to reach maturity, but the wonderful relationship that I built up with many of my clients meant that I was invited back on a regular basis to see the seasonal progress.

When some moved house, I was contacted to design and build the garden in their new property. It was hard making the decision to close a successful and rewarding business. However, I had always promised myself that I would return to my painting and a few years ago I hung up my spade and began the process of rediscovering my artistic abilities, interests and confidence.

What are the similarities between being an artist and garden designer?

My garden designs were all hand drawn and occasionally in colour, so creating them →





was similar to producing a painting. A few customers even framed the drawings for display. On a deeper level, the thought processes of relationship between size, shape, pattern and colour combinations are no different. Working on a planting scheme was like painting with nature. Clearly with gardens the detail in structural calculation, weather and soil conditions and plant growth are additional elements to deal with.

Where do you find inspiration from for your work?

Inspiration has come from the local West Berkshire downland landscape. I spend so much of my time walking in the beautiful countryside around me, taking in the soft curves of the hills etched with crops and tracks. I see this as a feast of pattern, colour and shape to be applied later to paper or canvas.

However, I also love the human aspect and have completed a number of paintings of the Morrismen dancing at our village pub, the Bell Inn, Aldworth. I have also spent a lot of time painting in Cornwall inspired by the shapes and patterns made by boats in the harbours. Everyday household items and interiors also feature regularly in my work and more recently I have revisited the curves and folds of the human form.

Tell us about the painting techniques you use

Since returning to my art, I have had so much pleasure trying out different materials, making mistakes and meeting new people. I began with watercolour, moved on to oils followed quickly by acrylics, then pastels.

Matisse's use of paper cut-outs has been the catalyst for my latest body of work. The way that I respond to my subject is very instinctive and physical and cutting into the paper and the colour with scissors allows me to express this. The way that the paper



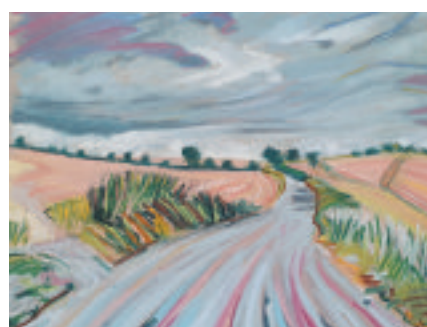
is painted and prepared before cutting produces different textural qualities.

Sometimes one application of colour crosses another, leaving marks where the brush was placed. Choosing where to cut and for which element is, on the whole, well thought out but quite often it is a happy accident. I also enjoy the process of adding new shapes, removing and rearranging and visiting an extensive choice of combinations. For example, the relationship between positive and negative. Going forward with the cut-outs, I would like to abstract more and work on a larger scale.

What do you love about being an artist?

That feeling of total passion and absorption. A whole day can go by in an instant. And then the 'eureka' moment when it all feels worth it.

What are your top tips for someone wanting to paint but who isn't confidence with a brush?



The most important thing is to enjoy yourself and then the good things will come. Don't get too hung up about precision and don't be frightened to experiment. There is no right or wrong. The best art captures the soul and essence of its subject.

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