

Fionn Wilson

Interviews Andrew Crane

FW: Why did you start painting?

AC: My father was an excellent draw-er. He would sit me on his knee and say ‘What shall we draw?’ I guess that’s where it began. My first painting that I remember was of sheep by a brook - a watercolour. I must have been about 8. It was quite good and my mum framed it. I didn’t study painting at art school but chose graphics instead...thinking it would provide more security. It was a cowardly choice at the time, but one that I don’t regret. Graphics in those days was pre-computer and client visuals done by hand needed to be convincing. I particularly loved the typographic aspect, which taught me so much about space and composition. There was lots of hand drawing of Helvetica and Garamond. I remember we took a whole term learning how to draw the perfect box with a pen. Mostly though, I read a lot of Zen books and played a lot of tennis in Lincoln’s Inn Field. Gambling on the horses with my compositor tutor also took up quite a lot of time.

Painting happened now and again during the graphics career, but didn’t get serious till my daughter (herself a very fine artist) persuaded me to show a piece in a street festival in Sherborne. After that, I knew which way I was heading. I rode two horses for a while - graphics and painting, and gradually the graphics dropped away. The early paintings were watercolours of banal subjects, usually from photographs. They sold well...and affirmed my direction.

FW: Your paintings are sublime, lyrical and poetic. Where does this aspect come from and how do you nurture it?

AC: Not sure I can handle three compliments at once. Thank you Fionn. If they are lyrical and poetic, then a lot of credit must go to my typography teachers...the likes of Froshaug and Kitching. They taught me how to use space. I know I’m not what I would call a good painter, but things present themselves and I put them down as best I can. If there is poetry, then it likely comes from what’s not painted....or maybe the combination of what is and what isn’t...the silence around the noise. Zen could be a contributor. Tapiés too. I suppose I ‘nurture it’ by doing it (or not doing it).

FW: How do you decide what size canvas to use?

AC: If there isn't a painting to obliterate, I'll see what stretchers are around. My favourite shape is just off square or 5 x 4. That feels really solid. I find that working on smaller canvases can build confidence to working big. I've never painted on unstretched canvas, I might give it a try.

FW: Is there a mystery to painting?

AC: I like to think so. Just as I like to think there's a mystery to Life. Actually, mystery often plays a big part in my painting. It's a mystery when I start a painting and hopefully a mystery when it's finished. If I don't recognise what's on the canvas at the end, then it's usually finished. A mystery is good medicine for me and possibly the viewer. Questions are asked that might not have been asked. To present all the answers in a painterly way, doesn't really drive me....which is probably just as well with my skill factor. Numbers and letters are great, because while the characters themselves are instantly recognisable, they can lure you in and be used to create a new language, a new feeling / set of feelings.

FW: Have there been periods of your life when you haven't painted? If so, how do you feel when you haven't painted for a while and how do you get back into the process of painting?

AC: I still get the occasional graphics job (mostly from a dear poet friend in Somerset), which is good, because it helps with the dog food. But there is always a feeling of being away from my natural environment...albeit a messy shed. I don't find it too difficult to get back to painting. Whatever happens outside of painting, feeds into painting.

FW: What is 'the art world' and is it of any importance?

AC: I'm not sure what 'the art world' is. I suppose it's where certain people get 'recognised' and lauded, and get loads of shows and make lots of money. With the internet it's possible to make some sort of a living and not get too involved in the machinery. What I do find fascinating, is how certain artists rise to the top. Someone 'spotted' them. What did they spot? What is that quality that makes it undeniably good art? Because there is universal agreement that it's good. A new good. I like to think that it is some sort of spiritual ingredient (whatever that means)...a message that is re-cognisable to all, yet until now, not seen. An art critic may try and pin it down with a nice set of words....but in my view, it can't be pinned down, and that's what makes it great. An expander of consciousness perhaps. A page is added to who we are, or who we thought we are.

FW: Do you compartmentalise your artistic life from your everyday life? Are there boundaries?

AC: Not really. I'm pretty selfish. I'm very lucky too. My artistic life IS my everyday life. I do make sure the dog has three walks a day but even then I'm usually 'carrying' a painting with me.

FW: What do you look for in a painting?

AC: I like it if it gets me to think a different way. A bit of wit is good too. I want to see if it changes my mind. Basically though, I'm looking for myself in a painting, or the possible me, not yet experienced. The bits that hold my attention are likely indescribable.

FW: What concerns you about painting today? What are the obstacles for artists?

AC: I don't really have 'concerns'. People will always paint. Artificial Intelligence has been posed as a threat to painting, but AI is programmed with the knowable, while the painter is dealing with the unknowable, whether consciously or not.

FW: Are there too many paintings?

AC: No, because I don't have to look at all of them.

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