

LIFE IN WATERCOLOUR



An interview with Ric Hinchliffe

"Absolutely Piffing Down"

I always loved watercolour paintings, they seemed to have so much life about them. They have a freshness and brightness that other media can't match. Oils and acrylics leave me cold. Pastels! I get more on my clothes and my immediate surroundings than I ever do on the paper. I'm a mucky pup. Watercolour is different. Put some water on the paper, add some colour and hey, look what it's done. You can never be sure what will happen. The picture takes on a life of its own and it grows organically. Bin it or go with it.

I come from a privileged background - Dad was a successful businessman and in those days, you bought a large house in millionaires' row and sent your children to expensive boarding schools to become brilliant students. Unfortunately I was a slow learner and my handwriting was ghastly - dyslexia hadn't yet been invented - but I liked drawing and illustrating. Dad wasn't keen on me going to study at the Birmingham School of Architecture, but his mates said "Oh for goodness sake Ernest, let the lad go." One of the first things I did was buy myself a copy of "Teach Yourself Hand Writing".

When I finished the Architecture course I went to London to seek my fortune. By now, Dad was very proud of me. Things were not so rosy at the works, so he started a new business manufacturing aluminium windows

and curtain walling. Then he died - an old man of 57. The next day, I was in the factory assuring everyone we were carrying on. I spent five years as Technical Director, the business grew five-fold and I grew bored with it. I joined an architects' practice in Birmingham in 1967 and left fifteen years later when recession meant 70% of architects were unemployed. I found work surveying hospitals in Warwickshire and developing my Hayfever Helmet which brought fame and my picture on the cover of the National Geographic. I was then offered work at the Worcester Royal Infirmary. I stayed 19 years.

Lis Embley was the artist who influenced me the most. I loved her work from the moment I first saw it and yearned to emulate her. She had a wonderful touch, she always seemed to be in control. When I retired, I spent my leaving present money on watercolour paints and equipment, with advice from Lis. The day after, Lis and I went with friends to Lodeve, near Montpellier, for a weeks' painting. At the end of the first day Lis exclaimed " Oh God, he can draw!" Well I would wouldn't I, after 40 years at a drawing board. Lis taught me the basic techniques of mixing and applying watercolour and the importance of darks. "Where are your darks, where are your darks?" she'd demand of anyone who made this basic omission. But I went my own way. Lis would paint beautiful tranquil scenes

where everything had its place. "You can't put that there, it should be here!" "No, I'm the artist. I want a bit of discord" I'd tease.

It's no surprise to hear that I love to paint buildings. But I also love to combine buildings with trees or magnificent trees with simple rural structures. Like a shed. I also like a touch of humour. Last year I painted a rainstorm scene featuring umbrellas. The title is "The Unjust". I also had a commission to paint someone's house, and I've just had another to paint a house in Bridge Street. Earlier this year I exhibited at Number 8 with the Elmley Castle Art Group and this month in the Library with Pershore Arts. Elmley Castle Art Group has a small exhibition in the Physio corridor in Pershore Community Hospital. I hope to be back in Number 8 in June and exhibiting in Pershore Abbey on August Bank Holiday with Pershore Arts' offering to Worcestershire Open Studios.



"Belle House"