

MIKE DEMPSEY – PROFILE

ABSTRACT ART IS ACHIEVING ITS EFFECT THROUGH COLOUR AND IMAGES RATHER THAN ATTEMPTING TO REPRESENT RECOGNISABLE REALITY.

I was born in Manchester in 1936, grew up on a Farm. my Family moved to South East London after the War. I went to Secondary School off the Old Kent Road. My first 'commission' was to draw a Roman Soldier for one of the toughies at School for the sum of 2 shillings. At 15, I was enrolled into Brixton Commercial College where 7 Boys and 250 Girls were receiving further education. Economics was the order of the day.

National Service loomed and in 1954 I joined The RAF. After training, I was posted to Egypt and Cyprus. A very enjoyable and the biggest life-learning curve that can be imagined. Back in the UK I continued in Uniform by joining the Dock Police in London. Night duty gave plenty of scope, and free time, to indulge in some drawing and sculpture. One of my Pals from that time tells me he still has 2 of my small wooden Sculptures on his Sideboard. I met, and married, Margaret in 1960, so some good came from that period.

I left the Police and joined an Alarm Company in London and now Sculpting and some Painting started to materialise. I began to take a keen interest in the Masters, being impressed by Rodin and being amazed at his skill in the production of works like 'The Thinker'. Barbara Hepworth was my most inspiring Sculptor and my current work owes much to her approach to shapes. I also enjoyed some of Henry Moore's work. In the early days, funds were tight, and you will see from (Fig.1) a Sculpture made from Cocktail Sticks and Polyfiller, that expensive materials are not always necessary.



I Joined Chubb, selling Safes in the West End of London which also provided a good opportunity to visit Museums and Art Galleries. 18 months later I took over the Export Department which led to years of World travel in North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, and South East Asia. During this time I started to use Dental Plaster (very hard) to create many pieces, one of which is shown (fig.2) Travelling the World provided me with sight of Sculpting and Art on the widest possible scale. A well-known Sculptress in Thailand, Mrs.YipInTsoi, offered to get some of my (plaster) work cast in Bronze, but I declined, and have kicked myself ever since.

In 1974, as a Family, we moved to Dublin to head up the Irish Operations for Chubb. During this interval I started Wall Relief Sculptures. Anchoring wire-mesh to the Wall, and using plaster or quick-drying cement, shapes were created, dependent on the use of the area; The finished Sculptures were either left natural or painted to match the surrounds. This type of Art left some very nice effects which were fully appreciated. (See Fig.3)

The next role was as Export Director of the Main Company, so more travelling and more sights to experience, including travelling by Concorde to New York. It was difficult to readjust at home after a 6/8 week trip, working very long days, so sculpting or Painting helped me relax. During visits to East Africa, I was fortunate to do a couple of short Safari-type trips. This inspired Painting of wild animals which I found fascinating. (Fig 4) Having done a market-survey of America, I was asked to start Chubb operations in the USA. As a Family we moved to Philadelphia which, together with New York, housed the largest collection of Art. I was able to visit most States, including Hawaii. During these travels I got the opportunity to see wonderful Art in Galleries and Museums and Street Art, which was most inspiring.



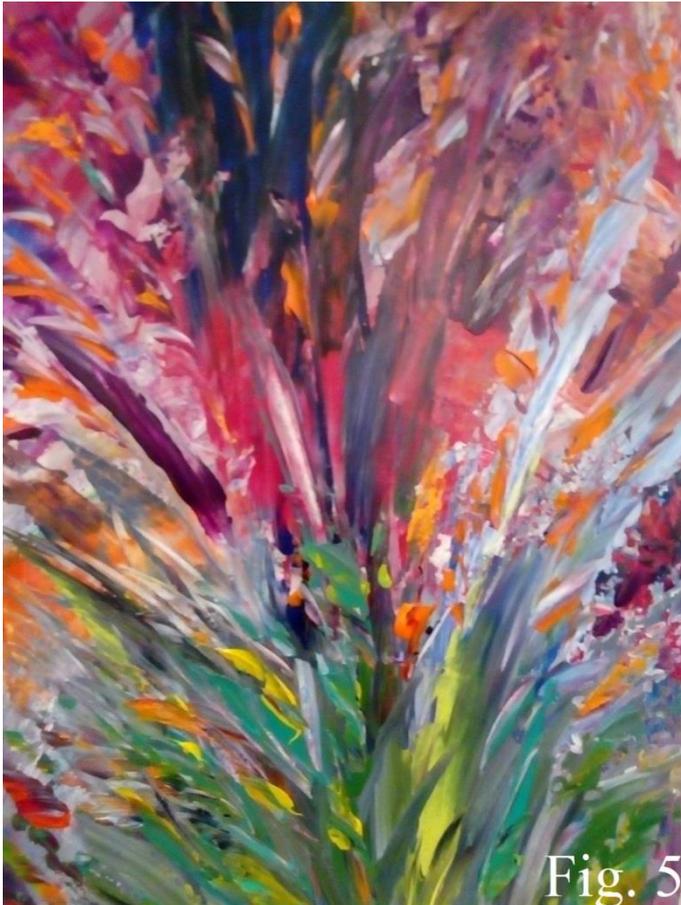
I left Chubb but continued travelling with companies in the Semi-Conductor and the Fire Security Industries. Visiting Toshiba of Japan for Laser Technology. Fire Protection of the Royal Palaces in Scandinavia, was particularly interesting. Swedish Palaces were my favourite sites. Carrying out Surveys of the Palaces, including the Palace of Westminster and Big Ben and being able to visit every nook-and-cranny of a Building, gave me insight into all manner of wonderful Art.

In 2001, I was honoured to receive The Freedom of The City of London.

When I finally retired, I had more time to devote to Sculpting and Painting. I built a Studio, with plenty of light and counters for easels, vices and storage for Paints and Tools. Abstract Art has always attracted me and whilst I have my favourites, there are some works, particularly Paintings, which leave me cold. I like Abstract primarily because every piece is unique. I can start afresh each day, and if I am working on a piece of Wood or on a Canvas, I can change that piece dependant on my mood. This is not possible if working on a fixed design or a copy.

For Painting I use Cryla Acrylic paints, as they are water-based, do not smell, brushes can be cleaned in water and the paint dries on the Canvas fairly quickly. (I place 2 sheets of Newspaper under a sheet of Baking Paper, on a tray, and add a small amount of water. Provided the tray is sealed when the session finishes, this Palette can last for up to 10 days).

Brushes are the most important tools for Painting and are expensive. So I clean them thoroughly, in water, before drying them and storing ready for use. (Oil is messy and smelly, turpentine is needed for Brushes and the finished work takes 2/3 months to dry, before varnishing). I also use MDF, (10ml), because it is cheaper. An 8' x 4' Sheet, can, when cut, provides any number of Surfaces to work on. By carrying the Paint over the edges, there is no need for a Frame. I use an industrial stapler to fasten the cord for hanging. (Fig.5)



Wood Carving became more important in later years. The biggest change came when we moved to Burgess Hill and I was invited by Brian Campion to join SWS. I was lucky to make friendships with some excellent Carvers. The work they collectively do is excellent. By association, I was able to acquire Tools, electrical and manual, gain knowledge of finishing, and was able to publicly display my Work in the Annual Shows organised by SWS.

I use Hardwood, of which there is an enormous variety. I might begin by forming a piece on a lathe, or by handsaw or Drill. Drilling a hole (or 2) randomly in a piece of wood, gives me a fair indication of the beauty of the Wood and a rough idea of what can be achieved. If I make a mistake, there is also the challenge in finding a way out of it.

I use a Dremel or Rotary Sander, which is slow but allows variation. An unusual work was on a Rudder removed from a damaged

Yacht. It is made from 5 pieces of Mahogany. After I removed the brass screws (no easy task) holding it together, I drilled the holes which were left, and continued to get some shapes on each of the 4 sides. I used Marbles in the holes to compliment a water effect, and also left some of the original Blue Paint on the piece and finished it with 4 coats of Oil.

The Yacht owner showed the finished piece to the Scandinavian Yacht builder, who was very complimentary.

I am now experimenting with highlighting parts of wooden Sculptures using Acrylic Paint. This creates very attractive pieces whilst retaining the beauty of the Wood.

I am most grateful to SWS for their support and friendships during the last 6 years. This has helped the creation of some very nice pieces of Sculpture.

Mike Dempsey.

