

CHRIS INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

- 1. Hi Chris, would you mind telling us more about yourself and the links to your creative practice?**

A lot of my art and the way that I am is my childhood so that is really quite important. I have looked really deeply into that and have had loads of therapy around this area recently, which is good. So, when your mother leaves when you are 4 years old and your father dies when you are 6, you tend to make a few odd decisions and I have made a lot of wrong decisions in my life but I am now starting to get that right.

- 2. Can you explain how your interest in painting came about?**

I started painting when I was in prison from '84 to '86. I refused to paint after that because people liked them.

I began to take the mickey out of the artist Maggi Hambling about 11 years ago. I painted a blue tree and a blue cloud from which she said "I think you've got something." So, I painted another one and I have painted every day for the last 12 years.

- 3. What is the purpose of your art?**

I paint to stay well. Any feelings that I have that are really quite possibly negative, I put into the work.

- 4. Would you say that your creative practice has become almost like a self-therapy? It brings an aspect of calm into your life?**

Yes. I frame pictures for people to make my bread and butter and then I can paint whatever I want, whenever I want and then I don't have to worry about anything else and that keeps me mentally well.

- 5. We were discussing chaos earlier today; do you feel there is an element of chaos within your creativity?**

I would say it is a sort of organised chaos. I know how to build the paint up. I know the materials. I am going to say that beauty comes from chaos because you don't know where things are going. You just put everything on, attack it and just see where it takes you. A lot of my work is definitely around that. Expressionism rather than abstract...definitely.

- 6. How do you want people to feel when they see your work?**

You should be able to look at one of my pictures and be able to hopefully feel the feeling of the picture rather than...well let's just say, I don't do pretty pictures! You know, I don't do pretty roses around doorways. It has got to be a bold statement of oil paint and one of the biggest lessons that I have learnt over the years is that I don't care whether people like it or not... I really don't care whether people like them or not!

- 7. What is the reasoning behind that?**

It used to bother me in the first three years. I used to listen to people's comments - "oh my child could do that." That is something I have heard on numerous occasions. "Well, get your child down here then and I will sort him out some oil paints." That is the way I use to speak to them, and I use to get really upset about it but now I just go "pfff it's up to you!"

In fact, I get more of a buzz out of people coming in and running out than I do someone just going around and having a look. If I can shock, not so much shock but If people come in and get that feeling that they've got to get the hell out of here, then good! I get as much of a buzz out of that then I do if somebody comes in and tells me what a genius I am, which is very difficult to live up to.

8. Can you tell me more about the materials you use?

I use a palette knife, fingers...I was even using a bit of wood this morning. Umm...palette knife a lot, paint brushes sometimes but you know, to me, using a paint brush...real artists use them! I just tend to use my palette knife! I have no respect for oil paint whatsoever. I have a real deep love affair with it, but I have no respect for it whatsoever and that works.

9. Would you ever choose another medium?

No! How dare you say that! No, oil paint...I do not choose anything other than oil paint...pure oil paint. People say, "why don't you put pesto in it?" I mean, pesto is what you put on fucking pasta! I don't play with things.

10. With this in mind, there will not be a twee watercolour of flowers in a field amongst your work?

No, but I did paint three poppy pictures for remembrance Sunday called 'lest we forget' with big poppies, dripping. I was moved when I thought about the soldiers in The First and Second World War who died for this country. I put myself back in that position when painting. I can explore that as an artist. It gives me inspiration to be able to paint...to have that feeling like the Syrian war series that I did. But I ended up selling them as streets in Venice!

11. Is there a reason as to why you don't name a lot of your work?

I like to look at it in a Brechtian sort of way...mother courage and all that kind of stuff where the audience is almost the forth wall. Well, that's what I now like to do with my art. If someone sees a street in Venice, it's a bloody street in Venice! It's not a War story. Whereas, if I put down Syrian War, I am alienating the individual to see what I want them to see. That is not what I am about. I want them to see what they want to see, which kind of works a little bit more for me, plus I don't have to make labels to go on the frigging walls!

12. I think that is a key part of your work. The more you look at it, the more you start to see further depth, details, faces, meanings, emotions, am I right in saying this?

There is a lot more in the work than first impressions. There is a lot you can look at and see and that is what I want, that's great. I don't mind that at all.

13. Could we talk about your photography? It is clear that this is something you are also interested in?

Yeah, I am interested in it. People say "you are a brilliant photographer Chris, you are a great actor, you can write" ... yes, I can do all this but what happens is, I start to believe that I am bullshitting, a bit. If I end up doing too many things, I end up doing

nothing. So, I have had to put the photography, the film making, the acting on the backburner.

I have recently been taking photographs of the moon. I have some lovely ones, so the photography has turned into a hobby now and I really enjoy doing that. But there is no pressure because there is no money involved and I don't have to go down that route painting a picture knowing that I have a photoshoot to do tomorrow or this afternoon when my energy and my thoughts have to be on that. It doesn't work. I end up doing nothing because I have too many fingers in too many pies and I learnt a long time ago to cut them off and say this is what I do now. I paint.

- 14. It is interesting because I feel that the photographs, which you take for a hobby, are very different to your paintings. They are often of nature; they reflect an element of the calm. Why do you think that is?**

Because it is Gods natural beauty I suppose. You can't help but be moved by a beautiful sunset. You have to look, if you look, you will find it. There are some beautiful places in Suffolk as well - we are so lucky.

- 15. Does your relationship with nature create the calm in you?**

Yes. To be in a middle of a field, a corn field with an oak tree stuffed in the middle of it, with a sunshine over the top of it, is my place like heaven. That is where I want to be.

- 16. Do you feel today's society has had an impact on your creative work?**

I have conformed quite a bit to society, which has pissed me off a little bit but that is why a lot of the time in my paintings I am allowed to show it. [Chris points to a particular painting] it is not called you are a cunt, but you can see it!

My latest series of paintings, capturing fighting and pulling is my way of depicting how I feel society has got a lot of people at the moment so that's another way I can show that I am pissed off.

- 17. Does your studio space have an impact on your creative process? In other words, do you have to be in the right mindset and setting for you to able to create something?**

The right mindset yes but it doesn't matter where you are. As Brâncuși once said "things are not difficult to make; what is difficult is putting ourselves in the state of mind to make them." And, yes I have to be in the right frame of mind to do it but I have got the technique of the way that I paint now so I can kind of force myself through that but sometimes I have to force myself to paint...really force myself and also, about 10 minutes before that, I am never going to be able to paint again. I am useless, I am shit and then you have to go pfff...you know something? I am not going to listen to that and get back in it and that's like riding a horse. Once you are back on the horse, and back in it, then the series will just flow out. Then, I can sit back a little bit and frame them whilst I am waiting for the next thing to inspire me.

- 18. What is next for you? Have you got any new creative projects?**

Well, I don't want to put all my eggs in one basket ever, so it is just to be able to keep painting, which is the most important thing. But I have got through the first round of the Royal Academy Summer show this year and if I get through to that then its brilliant. The exhibit is a painting; a real personal picture of me having to walk away from my son, which is real

painful image for me. The reason it hurts is because of my past - the rejection and abandonment, which I suffered when I was a child.

- 19. It is clear that the process of doing your art, helps to bring calm and positivity and balance into your daily life and mental health. Is this something you could talk about in more depth?**

As long as I can stay mentally healthy, which is important as I have spent 3 years in prison, been to 5 rehabs and 3 long term mental institutions. I have also tried to kill myself 3 times over the years. The post-traumatic stress disorder that I suffered when other relationships broke up through my life has also majorly impacted on me.

The first thing I have done in the past is turn to alcohol and drugs, which was comfort in me but what I was really after was just comfort. I find a lot of comfort in my painting. So that really does help me be able to deal with my past and to make a decent future for myself. I bring everything in to today. I plant acorns and if they grow, brilliant and if they don't, it is not a problem. I don't look backwards, and I don't worry about what is happening. If I worry that I haven't got an exhibition coming up, or I need to do more, I need to do this, then it stops me being in the day. So, I just get back in the day and stay there.

Once a week I go to IA meetings and therapy, which I have been doing for the last two years. As long as I can keep well, keep painting, I am alright. Money is always a big problem for me. I sell my paintings far too cheap!

- 20. There are several paintings of the sea amongst your work. In the past, I have heard you say that you don't enjoy painting these as much. Is this because they don't have that same personal and raw quality, enriched with a chaos of emotion that your other paintings have? How do you overcome this?**

Well it isn't too difficult when there is a little red dot on the wall! There is a balance. I can paint these little blue sea pictures all day without really too much hassle now. I used to struggle a lot more. I would put a lot more into it. When I was ill, painting a still picture use to take so much energy out of me then it would to paint the chaos. I now just say, "it is just a little sea picture...come on Chris, just paint the fucking thing!" The tourists are quite happy. It is about getting the balance.

- 21. Do you feel your work comes from the head or the heart or perhaps both?**

Oh wow that is a really good question. Umm...heart. The head bit is just, you know you are picking up the tools to do the job, to put the paint on where you think it should be, how thick it should be blah blah blah! So, there is quite a bit of thought into it but then the heart takes over. I literally let go and I never know what I am getting unless I am doing a series, which I am doing at the moment. I know that I am going to have to paint something similar to that. But, they are all going to be different. And as soon as the series is finished, I just can't be bothered, that's it, I will move on again.

22. **So you would say your work is very in the moment? There is almost a sense of immediacy. If you feel something, you will capture it in that scenario?**

Yes. If I have been in a situation where I have felt manic or if I am too upset or if I am in real pain, then I paint the feelings. To be able to paint the image, that I don't want in my head, I paint it and then I don't have to think about it anymore. I get rid of the feelings and thoughts in my head and express it through paint instead of sitting there crying in my soup.

23. **I also guess this is why there is such a range of emotion displayed throughout your work? It isn't all negative feelings.**

Yes, there is also a lot to do with love, family and my son.

24. **Do you think you would eventually like to move more towards the calm than the chaos within your work?**

No, absolutely fucking not! Calm is boring!

25. **Some may argue that the colour palette you adopt is sometimes quite calming, particularly your use of blue tones. Is this intentional?**

There is a lot of white involved with the colours as well but really, they are just the colours which come out of the tubes, so I don't really make a big thing regarding this. I don't look at it as well...yellow is for jealousy, red is for anger or I am feeling really black, let's use black! It does come into it but really it is just the colours from the tubes!

26. **Where does the process begin with you?**

Priming the canvas, making the frame or cutting the board.

27. **Do you do this before you even have the idea?**

If I can afford the canvases it is wonderful because I can just go bosh, bosh, bosh. But normally I have to make the frames.

I will also paint the picture because I really want to paint. I will then make a frame straight away and when it is still wet, I will put it in there and then I will hang it on the wall so that's why there are big signs all over the place saying: 'wet paint.' I create something, one picture every single day, sometimes two or three. I don't feel as though I can go to sleep that night unless I have created something artistic every single day and that is just the way I do it. There is not a day that goes by where I get up and think "I am not going to create something today because I have to." I create it because I want to.

28. **How would you describe your work?**

Abstract expressionism is the closest label.

29. **Is there a particular painting which you have in mind, which you feel reflects an element of the chaos?**

Organised chaos. I think my work is more organised chaos. This one here [Chris points to a painting Fig...] I got my son to lay down and I drew around him. I then just got the paint and dripped it out the tin, all over it to see where it would go. You never know where it is going to go. You don't know what is going to come out and that is the energy. If you can get

the energy to come out through organised chaos then that will work. You don't know what is going to happen and that is the beauty of it.

Now I can feel quite smug and clever and say when I put a white, a green and a blue oil paint on top of each other, I know that I have got a white, a green and a blue so I can get white or I can get blue or I can get, if I push down a little bit further, I know I am going to get the other colours but you don't know exactly how it is going to be. You have a rough idea of what it is going to look like but no idea what is going to come out and that bit, all of a sudden, the organised chaos appears. You can almost work off the chaos. To bring it into some kind of controlled chaos. The whole thing is chaos.