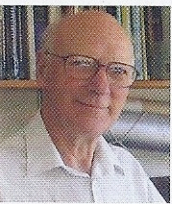


Chamberlain's way

Stuart George talks to landscape painter **Trevor Chamberlain** about his distinguished 60-year career.



Most of Trevor Chamberlain's overseas forays have been trouble-free, but on his 1996 trip to India, he was forced to share

a king-size double bed at the Maharajah's Palace in Dungarpur with fellow artist (and then president of the Royal Society of Marine Artists) Bert Wright. Sadly, there isn't a painting to commemorate this important

moment in British art. Chamberlain's paintings often depict constantly moving figures but, however adventurous his travels might be, his heart belongs in Hertfordshire: "I enjoy travelling but I always like coming back to my roots."

During the 70s and 80s, Trevor held regular one-man shows at the Munnings Gallery, Hertford, as well as the Ash Barn Gallery, Petersfield, and the Oliver Swann Gallery in London, but has no formal arrangements

with galleries. "If you work with one or two galleries, it's like running on a treadmill. The demand so much."

Although he would certainly have made more money with gallery representation, he's made a reasonable living from his painting. Despite this, he has driven the same car for 17 years and cherishes his independence more than lucre. "I don't take commissions; I paint to please myself. I've been lucky enough to do that without any restrictions." He also turns down opportunities to teach or demonstrate, because he says he has little talent for either.

At 13, he sold his first painting, an oil, for

half a guinea. Nowadays, his paintings sell for £700 for a small watercolour, rising to £3,000 for an oil canvas such as *Shady Mornings*.

Chamberlain taught himself how to paint in watercolours in 1974, by experimenting with different papers and colours. His initial forays were influenced by John Singer Sargent, whose work he describes as “bravura fluid statements, full of life and vigour”; John Sell Cotman for his “carefully constructed compositions”; Turner for his “unrivalled depictions of weather, light and atmosphere”. He also cites Turner’s less well-known contemporary, Richard Parkes Bonington (1802-1828), as an influence. “Had he lived longer, who knows what he would have achieved?” says Trevor.

As his influences suggest, Chamberlain is a craftsman of the old school. When asked for his thoughts on modern art, he admits to sometimes feeling like an anachronism. “It’s a tragedy that good craftsmanship and a good grounding is being passed over. However you paint, you need a sound grounding in drawing and composition. You can then apply it however you want, but if you don’t do your five finger exercises, as in music, you can’t say what you want to say.”

Chamberlain’s work is characterised by small canvases, evocative and atmospheric light; minimal detail; balance of soft and hard

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edges; skilful use of composition and colour, and lightness of touch. All of this elevates what are often mundane subjects, into very fine works of art. More often than not, he paints en plein air, braving wind, rain, sun, and snow with the aid of a well-worn hat. Now 69 years old, he remains extremely active. When I visited him, he was about to embark on a trip to Poland. Although he has a small studio at his Hertfordshire home, he works mostly outside.

When working outdoors, he often paints for no more than two hours, usually making a preliminary drawing, followed by two or three washes and minimal use of masking fluid. He always covers as much of the white paper as he can with the middle tone of the painting, as this makes subsequent layers of colour easier to judge. As much time again is sometimes spent in the studio, assessing and

above: Mooring
Richmond,
on canvas, 18x25cm.
right: In the Spotlight,
watercolour on
paper, 18x25cm.
overleaf: Udaipur Ghats,
Chamberlain, oil on canvas,
61cm.

