

RONA AT BLOOMSBURY

# LOUIS TURPIN

*River Valleys And Gardens*



4. *'Towards Rye'*

LANGHAM GALLERY  
22<sup>nd</sup> March to 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012

# *AN EVOCATIVE IMPRESSIONISM:* LOUIS TURPIN'S PAINTINGS OF RIVER VALLEYS AND GARDENS

'Every morning, looking out from my studio, I don't know what to expect. Often there is smoke, or occasionally mist, rising through the trees across the valleys. The appearance of the fields changes throughout the year, from day to day, even hour to hour.' Louis Turpin's studio is based in a converted barn close to his home near the small historic town of Rye in East Sussex.

Born in south London in 1947, the son of artists, he studied Fine Art at Guildford and then at Falmouth School of Art, moving to Sussex in 1974 to paint full-time. He feels 'grounded in rural Sussex, attached to this locale', and many of his paintings are set within the three valleys of the Rivers Brede, Tillingham and Rother which all meet at Rye. Painting always has precedence for him but he devotes time too to performing as a singer/songwriter and blues guitar player. He enjoys 'the good balance between the solitary

activity of painting and playing music to a hall full of people'.

He finds the confluence of the three rivers at Rye 'very beautiful. In the summer I do go and look elsewhere, including the West Country, but more in search of gardens than landscapes. But I am always happy to come back here, there is so much to inspire; it is home territory, endlessly changing. My studio overlooks one of the valleys.' But there are also gardens within this 'home territory' as inspiring subject matter, 'such as the grand gardens created by Christopher Lloyd at Great Dixter; the creativity there is extraordinary.' He finds affinities between East Sussex and St Ives in Cornwall (he often holidayed in the latter with his parents, who knew local painters) in the brilliant clarity of light distinguishing both places.



*Louis Turpin*

‘When I first moved down here, I lived on a sheep farm. At first I was a purely abstract painter. But I suddenly began to paint figuratively.’ There is, he notes, an intimate parallel between his early use of abstraction and his more mature figurative style – ‘in the way things build up on the canvas – mark against mark – resulting eventually in a very dense imagery. The most important thing is the way colours and forms sit against each other.

‘When I’m walking in the local landscape, making pencil drawings in a sketchbook, I get a feeling for the painting that I will make later on in the studio. There I rediscover the source of my inspiration [rather like Wordsworth’s notion of ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’], integrating the original vision into the colour and shape of the painting. I love a garden’s colours in full flood! In the winter, when there is clear sky here, the sunsets have fantastic tints of orange and amber, dropping down to deep indigo.’

In his painting ‘Leasam Ewe’ (2012), the incisive wintry light – which sparingly highlights russet and purple hues amongst thickets of trees and house and barn roofs – renders the landscape harmoniously luminous, rather than chillingly bleak. The stalwart ewe transfigures us with its searching stare. Since living on the sheep farm, he has enjoyed painting sheep. ‘It’s good to draw sheep because they don’t move a lot. It’s when you have to move them out of a ditch, soaked in water, that you realise the physicality of them. In winter they are much less nervous of people, and look at you in anticipation of food. They appear as cold, fairly blue shapes. In winter, I get moments of intensified feeling – everything around is ostensibly pale yet there is underlying colour.’

He says that ‘gardens offer a great source of colours and forms and shapes’. He delights in the fecund beauty of the sub-tropical gardens at Trebah on the Cornish coast, built by a Victorian plant collector, where ‘you can walk through a wood of gunnera, and at the bottom of the garden is a secluded sandy beach’. His painting of ‘Trebah’ (2011) evokes an intricately dense

concatenation of exotic trees and plants – yet the overall effect is serenely lush and abundantly tranquil rather than jostling. What is noticeable is the precise (but not over-literal) acuity with which Turpin delineates each plant and tree species. He says ‘there is a tight linearity in the painting, which is quite detailed but also made up of areas of vibrant colours’. He is not aiming for meticulous realism, however, but rather an evocative impressionism so that ‘if you know your plants, you would be able to identify them all here’.

Only in the last few years has he started making quite extensive ink landscape drawings, the disciplined spontaneity of which has helped nourish what he calls ‘the calligraphic marks’ in his paintings. Until then he only drew in pencil, which he also finds a satisfactorily fluid medium. It was looking at Samuel Palmer’s visionary ink drawings (many of the best of which were made in the mid-to-late 1820s when Palmer was living at Shoreham, a village in Kent) – that rekindled in Turpin an interest in ink drawing: ‘There are wonderful darkneses in Palmer’s drawings. I decided that this was the way to go.

‘The brush offers a hugely fluid line, one that can cover the whole page without running out of ink. It’s a great pleasure.’ In his ink drawing of Winchelsea the hilltop town appears diminutive on the horizon, its miniscule snow-covered roofs appearing as pristine as the broad empty paper expanses demarcating glistening white fields. Diverse pressures of ink on the page – ranging from deep black for copses fringing the town to pale delicate washes for meandering tracks through the fields and foreground impressions of bare trees – are subtly attuned to almost infinitely various fluctuations in light and atmosphere.

PHILIP VANN

*Philip Vann has written books on a number of 20th century and contemporary artists, and is author of ‘Face to Face: British Self-Portraits in the Twentieth Century’ (2004). He lives in Cambridge.*



26. *'The Harbour, Low Tide'* Indian Ink



8. *'Oxford Spires'*



11. 'Leasam Ewe'



1. 'Trebah'



12. 'Vegetables and Flowers'



10. *'Black-faced Ewe and Folly'*



2. *'Peasmarsh Valley'*



24. 'Winchelsea Town' Indian Ink





15. *'Rye Foreign'*



14. 'Dixter Teazles'



5. *'The Apple Orchard'*



25. 'The Water Tower' Indian Ink



7. 'Towards Burton Agnes'



6. 'Seedheads at Scampston'



23. 'Sheep in a rolling Landscape' Indian Ink



3. *'Flowers for Ottoline'*



9. 'City Garden'



In 1980, Louis Turpin won the South East Arts (SEA) Major Award, and SEA purchased 'Patchwork', a painting of his wife Davida. Five years later, inspired by Vita Sackville-West's garden at Sissinghurst in Kent, he embarked on the first of a continuing series of exhibitions of garden paintings. In 1986, one of his portraits of Davida was selected for the 'National Portrait Award' at London's National Portrait Gallery. 1997 saw a commission to paint the gardens and landscapes at Glyndebourne.

In 2008, he began exhibiting a series of ink drawings on paper of valleys around his hometown of Rye. In the same year, and also in 2010, he contributed paintings and drawings to exhibitions inspired by the subject of London's historic Inns of Court and their gardens, held nearby at The Langham Gallery in Lamb's Conduit Street.

In 2010 he had a one-person show in Yorkshire devoted to gardens in that county.

*'For Turpin, the more certain is the brush "blow" the more certain the impact. He works across the canvas re-marking from the miniscule to the almost violently broad brushstroke.*

*The colour is sometimes surprised at its own audacity but the end result is of an intensely cultured and cultivated image.'*

**Mick Rooney RA**

## LIST OF EXHIBITS

1. 'Trebah'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	20" x 22"
2. 'Peasmarsh Valley'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	20" x 48"
3. 'Flowers for Ottoline'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	22" x 24"
4. 'Towards Rye'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	28" x 26"
5. 'The Apple Orchard'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	26" x 26"
6. 'Seedheads at Scampston'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	24" x 22"
7. 'Towards Burton Agnes'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	20" x 22"
8. 'Oxford Spires'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	24" x 22"
9. 'City Garden'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	24" x 26"
10. 'Black-faced Ewe and Folly'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	12" x 11"
11. 'Leasam Ewe'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	20" x 22"
12. 'Vegetables and Flowers'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	36" x 38"
13. 'Country Garden'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	40" x 34"
14. 'Dixter Teazles'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	38" x 38"
15. 'Rye Foreign'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	20" x 24"
16. 'Tillingham Valley in Snow'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	46" x 42"
17. 'Hundred House Hill'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	16" x 15"
18. 'Distantly Rye'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	12" x 11"
19. 'Windmill'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	16" x 14"
20. 'Vegetable and Flowers II'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	18" x 16"
21. 'Lindisfarne Wall'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	16" x 16"
22. 'Long Border, Newby Hall'	<i>Oil on Canvas</i>	12" x 10"
23. 'Sheep in a Rolling Landscape'	<i>Indian Ink</i>	16" x 14"
24. 'Winchelsea Town'	<i>Indian Ink</i>	20" x 30"
25. 'The Water Tower'	<i>Indian Ink</i>	16" x 18"
26. 'The Harbour, Low Tide'	<i>Indian Ink</i>	17" x 14"
27. 'The Glasshouse'	<i>Indian Ink</i>	20" x 20"

For further information please contact Dominic at  
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13. *'Country Garden'*

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