

Louis Turpin, Life And Times

I spent the first years of my life on the sixth floor of a block of flats guarded on the ground floor by a cadaverous concierge, Mrs. Timms peering from her office in the foyer and forbidding us younger occupants access to the lift. The views, vista of bombsites from the top floor were dramatic and once a year the London to Brighton vintage car rally passed below our windows. In this situation the parks and squares of London



were a source of wonder and liberation to me. I played in the bombsites and scrambling through the shells of buildings loved the wild flowers that struggled through the rubble and the sight of great mushrooms bursting into this far from barren land. We explored and fought and ran wild and returned home dripping blood from wounds inflicted in these playgrounds.

Christmas '55 and we move into a grand Regency house with stable block and hayloft and lions' heads on the doorframes and a garden full of magic. There was a pear tree big enough to eventually accommodate a two-story tree house and a red brick path buried under grass and awaiting discovery. Sycamore saplings sprouted everywhere and I collected a farthing a go for their removal. My interests were fired and the following spring I discovered the beauty of forsythia and magnolia, marking as they did, the advent of spring. Both grew in the small Victorian garden outside Brixton Library donated by Henry Tate to a society thirsting knowledge. The strength of the yellow forsythia (and the wonderful name) and the sheer size and blush of the magnolia on its otherwise naked branches took my breath away.

In 1965 I came back from a three-month trip to America and began studying architecture in London. In a Damascene moment I was overwhelmed by both the sheer tonality surrounding me in Oxford Circus. The buildings were radiating colours and I saw clearly that while I loved all the two-dimensional aspects of my work I could not see an abiding interest in extending this into three dimensions. After 4 terms I changed direction and worked on a coal wharf in Shoreham Harbour loading coal into sacks and onto lorries. Amusing until work fell off in spring, when I altered course again and made hand built articulated and painted wooden toy soldiers.

Then to art school, Guildford for Foundation and student dissent and Falmouth for fine art painting and latterly film making. On my return to London I worked as an Architectural modelmaker and then in the film industry before moving to the Kent Sussex border to make a World Health Organisation animated film on contraception, with my father Digby.

In 1975 I started to concentrate on painting and in an intense three-month period I moved from abstraction to figuration. My studio was the large bedroom upstairs in my cottage and the view from this window was a hop garden. This hop garden was the pathway through to figurative painting for me, at first informing the abstract paintings and then by degree letting in the view. At this time my wife to be Davida moved in with me and became my muse and the subject of a series of paintings. Our life revolved around growing vegetables,

feeding chickens socializing in local pubs and with artists, musicians and writers living around Rye and Hastings. I started a fruitful series of commissioned portraits and at the same time continued to produce my own work. In 1980 I was awarded the South East Arts Major Award and they purchased a painting of Davida in bed 'Patchwork' for their Permanent Collection, housed in the Towner Art Gallery at Eastbourne. This award allowed me to complete a series of 'Provincial Interiors' which made up the nucleus of my first solo show in Oxford in 1981. This exhibition was timed to coincide with the inauguration of Green College, Oxford. By now Davida and I and our young son Aaron had moved from the country into nearby Rye.

In 1983 I visited for the first time Vita Sackville-West's gardens at Sissinghurst. In those early days there was no one around except Pam and Sybille who had been head gardeners since Vita's time. This visit changed my painting direction. The series of walled gardens perceived as a series of 'rooms' offered me an unleashed version of the interiors I had been working on. Two years later in 1985 with a collection of paintings that reflected this new interest in horticulture alongside my enduring interest in the figure and landscapes, I made a trip around the UK. My VW van was loaded with a suite of paintings. I had appointments to meet the best provincial galleries and my starting point was Odette Gilbert Gallery, Cork Street London who asked me to exhibit with them.

Exciting times, this trip marked the start of a succession of solo shows, Rye Art Gallery in '85, Beaux Arts, Bath '86, Bohun Gallery, Henley-on-Thames '87, Grape Lane Gallery, York '88 and on. 1986 was a busy year, our second son Theo now a practicing artist, was born. A painting of Davida was selected for the 'National Portrait Award' exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery and I was commissioned to paint Miss Pears. Paintings were also purchased by Bath University and for the John Radcliffe Hospital in memory of Emanuel Lee. The following year my painting of Miss Pears was unveiled on TV AM's Wide Awake Club, happy days. In '88 I was included in the publication 'The Painted Garden' by Anthony Huxley and in '90 the Chairman of the National Westminster Bank purchased a painting for their Head Office.

1993 arrives and with it the first time that I was selected to exhibit at the Royal Academy Summer Show. Another first was my involvement with the National Garden Scheme. This resulted in a series of exhibitions over the coming years involving gardens in Yorkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Cumbria and Berkshire. It also consolidated my understanding of how disparate the experience of British gardens, at their best, can be and also how fulfilling. By 1995 this exploration of National Garden Scheme participants resulted in a feature article in the Sunday Express Classic Magazine. In the previous year '94 I was again exhibiting at the Royal Academy and I had the first of many showings with the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. The following year '96.... but I really don't want this turn into some droning on list, so suffice to say I was busy. Glyndebourne got in touch, I painted their gardens and the landscape. I was commissioned to produce a suite of paintings by a Cornish hotel, The Bedruthen Steps. 6 paintings each 6 feet wide, on the theme of the three seasons. Hastings Museum and Art Gallery gave me a retrospective exhibition which, from where I stand now seems a touch premature.

And the millennium was approaching. It is at this moment that I can briefly introduce my parallel universe in the shape of my first CD, 'The Allotment Tapes'. Named after the painting reproduced within its sleeves it was recorded at Chris Difford's Heliocentric Studio. For more information on this aspect of my creative journey you will need to refer to my website www.louisturpin.com.

Dame Stephanie Shirley commissioned me to paint two arch-topped paintings for the headmaster's study of the splendid school for autistic children, Priors Court. America called- I had my first show in Greenwich Connecticut. I was invited to Sissinghurst to paint the gardens and in 2003 I moved to new studios at Wittersham on the Isle of Oxney. In 2004 I had my second show in Greenwich Connecticut and produced my second CD, this time with Roger Hubbard. Its title 'House Up On The Hill' came from one of a series of paintings I had made of the beautiful Palladian 'Leasam House' that sits astride the landscape overlooking Rye and graces the cover of CD number 2. The following year I was invited to put on a solo show at Rona Gallery in London's Mayfair. I also explored the remarkable relationship between Gertrude Jekyll and Edward Lutyens. This triggered a request for me to exhibit at Hestercombe, one of the Jekyll Lutyens gardens. The paintings were exhibited in the splendid 17th Century Orangery

In 2007 Fred Olson of Olson Cruise Lines made contact and bought a suite of six large paintings for his Cruise Liner Boudicca, I had my final exhibition with Rona Gallery before they moved into new premises in Bloomsbury at the Langham Gallery on Lambs' Conduit Street. Somewhere in all this I started producing Indian ink drawings drawn almost exclusively with brushes and featuring the landscapes around Rye. The three valleys Rother, Tillingham and Brede offered fertile subjects for these drawings, as did the sheep patrolling these landscapes. Fosse Gallery, Stow-on-the-Wold began exhibiting drawings before moving on to the paintings and eventually my solo show, Landscape Journeys with them in 2015.

The move to Bloomsbury opened another subject for my paintings. The gallery is close by the Inns of Courts and moving through these I began to explore the glorious squares and their flanking architecture. The architecture as a backdrop to the mature gardens changed again the way I was thinking about my paintings. Starting with the Inns I moved out from Bloomsbury eventually visiting some of the gardens from my childhood. Amongst them was Cleveland Square where I played while my parents discussed the beginnings of the I.C.A. My interest in allotment gardens also continues. All around are the plots expressing fiercely each toiler's individual take on life. 500 plastic bottles adorning 500 canes to protect the gardener's eyesight. In Hastings the sea offers a dramatic backdrop and as I stand there I see clearly the continuity of human endeavor, marching in parallel with the indefatigable spirit of nature. An uneasy alliance in which nature always has the final laugh, ah but the journey...

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES (red text denotes solo show)

Fosse Gallery with Mick Rooney RA	Stow-on-the-Wold	2020
Rye Art Gallery (was Easton Rooms)	Rye, East Sussex	2018
Fosse Gallery	Stow-on-the-Wold	2018
Bohun	Henley-on-Thames	2017
Royal Academy Show		2017
Ukelele project, The Great Dixter Journal article		2017
Royal Academy Show		2015
Commission Rye Hospital Window		2016
Great Dixter	Northiam, Kent	2016
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	2015
Fosse Gallery	Stow-on-the-Wold	2015
Released 3rd CD 'Heading out to Sea'	2014	
Royal Academy Summer Show		2014
Langham Gallery	Belgravia, London	2014
Royal Academy Summer Show, Saturday Telegraph Feature Article		2013
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	2013
Langham Gallery	Belgravia, London	2012
Fosse Gallery 'Sheep' Exhibition, Langham Gallery, 'Greys Inn' Show		2011
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	2011
Rye Art Gallery Permanent Collection plus Exhibition		2010
Kentmere House Gallery	York	2010
Royal Academy Summer Show	London	2009
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	2009
Royal Academy Summer Show	London	2008
Hybrid Gallery	Honiton, Devon	2008
Discerning Eye Exhibition Mall Galleries London first showing at Fosse Suite of paintings purchased by Fred Olson for Olson Cruise Liner Boudica		2007
Rona Gallery	Mayfair, London	2007
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	2007
Discerning Eye Exhibition Mall Galleries London invited artist		2006
Royal Society of Portrait Painters Mall Galleries London		2005
Hestercombe	Honiton	2006
Easton Rooms Rye Art Gallery	Rye	2006
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	2005
Rona Gallery	Belgravia, London	2005
Gallery Lydia Corteille Paris, Brewery Arts, Cirencester		2004
Feature article in '25 Beautiful Homes'		2004
Greenwich	Connecticut	2004
Released 2nd CD 'House up on the Hill'	2004	
Moved to new studio, Wittersham, Kent		2003
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	2003
Royal Society of Portrait Painter Mall Galleries London		2002
Invited to paint at Sissinghurst Gardens, Featured in book 'The Art of Priors Court School'		
Greenwich	Connecticut	2002
Royal Society of Portrait Painters Mall Galleries London		2001
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	2001
Royal Society of Portrait Painter Mall Galleries London		2000
Exhibited at Valley House Gallery Dallas Texas		2000
Commissioned to paint arch topped paintings for the Headmaster's study at Priors Court Schoolm Thatcham		2000
Released 1st CD 'The Allotment Tapes'	2000	
Easton Rooms	Rye Art Gallery	2000
Beaux Arts	Bath	1999
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	1999
Royal Society of Portrait Painters Mall Galleries London		1998
Oddfellows Gallery	Kendal	1998
Easton Rooms Rye Art Gallery	Rye	1998
Invited to paint at Glyndebourne		1997

Beaux Arts	Bath	1997
Bohun Galleery	Henley-on-Thames	1997
Royal Society of Portrait Painters Mall Galleries London		1996
Commissioned to paint a suite of major paintings for Bedruthen Steps Hotel, Cornwall		1996
Hastings Museum and Art Gallery Hastings		1996
Oddfellows Gallery	Kendal	1996
Feature article in Sunday Express 'Classic' Magazine		1995
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	1995
'Making a Mark' Drawing Show Mall Galleries, London		1995
Royal Academy Summer Show	London	1994
Royal Society of Portrait Painters Mall Galleries, London		1994
Easton Rooms Rye Art Gallery	Rye	1993
Royal Academy Summer Exhibition London		1993
First exhibition with the National Garden Scheme at York		1993
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	1993
Grape Lane Gallery	York	1993
Exhibited at Hilton Head Island South Carolina USA		1993
Venice Beach Los Angeles USA		1992
Bank Street Gallery	Sevenoaks	1992
Rye Art Gallery	Rye	1992
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	1991
Easton Rooms Rye Art Gallery	Rye	1991
Works purchased by the chairman of National Westminster Bank for their Head Office, International Contemporary Art Fair, London		1990
Grape Lane Gallery	York	1990
International Contemporary Art Fair London		1989
Easton Rooms Rye Art Gallery	Rye	1989
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	1989
Featured in publication 'The Painted Garden' by Anthony Huxley		
'Self Portrait Exhibition' at Bohun Gallery		1988
Beaux Arts	Bath	1988
Grape Lane Gallery	York	1988
Commissioned to paint Miss Pears 1986 unveiled on TV AM		
Gallery artists show Odette Gilbert Gallery Cork Street London		
'Day Book Picture show' Smith Gallery, London		1987
Bohun Gallery	Henley-on-Thames	1987
National Portrait Gallery 'Portrait Award 1986' London		1986
International Contemporary Art Fair, London		
Painting purchased by Bath University		
Painting purchased by John Radcliffe Hospital and Mrs Lee in memory of Emanoel Lee		
First exhibited at International Art Fair London		1986
Beaux Arts, York		1986
First exhibited at Odette Gilbert Gallery London		1985
Easton Rooms Rye Art Gallery, Rye		1985
Featured in TVS arts documentary 'Putting on the South'		1984
New Ashgate Gallery, Farnham		1984
Guildford House Summer Exhibition, Guildford		1983
Painting purchased by John Radcliffe Hospital		1982
Award winners two man show at the Maltings Farnham with Chris Drury		1982
Drew Gallery	Canterbury	1982
'Ten Years On' Falmouth Cornwall	1981	
Stable Gallery Green College	Oxford	1981
Awarded South East Arts Major Award and work purchased by South East Arts for their permanent collection Gallery, Tonne, Oslo, Norway, 1980. Rye Art Gallery purchase 'View from the Studio' for their permanent collection, 1979. First exhibited at Rye Art Gallery, 1978. Painting purchased by Fondation Elebor, Romainmotier, Switzerland, 1977. Moved to Kent Sussex Borders, 1974. Dip AD Honours Degree, Falmouth, 1971. Studied Fine Art Painting Falmouth School of Art, 1968-1971. Art Foundation course at Guildford Art School, 1967-1968. Studied Architecture at Regent Street Poly, 1965-1966.		

Chronology

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