

Judy Tate - Painting in the Open Air

January 2013

We began the year with an illustrated talk from Judy Tate about working out of doors – ‘En Plein Air’ is the proper term. She is dedicated to the realism that this brings to a painting, quoting John Constable – “When I am to paint the first thing is to forget I’ve ever seen a picture.” “Trust your vision” he said, and Judy added – ‘there are no rules, so paint what you see - you are in charge of what you draw and what you do with it. Be spontaneous in portraying the irregularities of nature.’

JOHN CONSTABLE SKETCH FOR HAYWAIN

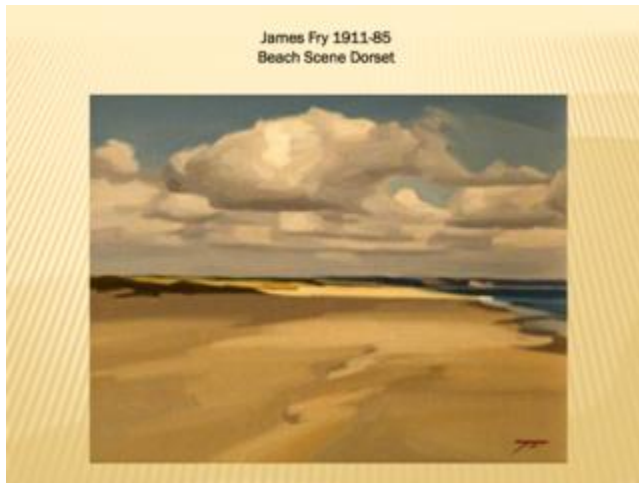


Judy explained how everything changed for the artist in the 1870s with the invention of tubes of paint and the use of portable easels - ‘it was so much easier to work outside - anywhere. Then came the camera, Degas used photography as an aide. Look at the picture by Pissarro, painted in Hyde Park - it has everything, sunlight, perspective, colour. The way that Lamorna Birch used colour in 1921.

LAMORNA BIRCH 1921 IN OUR OLD WORLD VALLEY



James Fry painted near Holmebridge not far from Wareham – he died in 1985 - look at the misty distance.



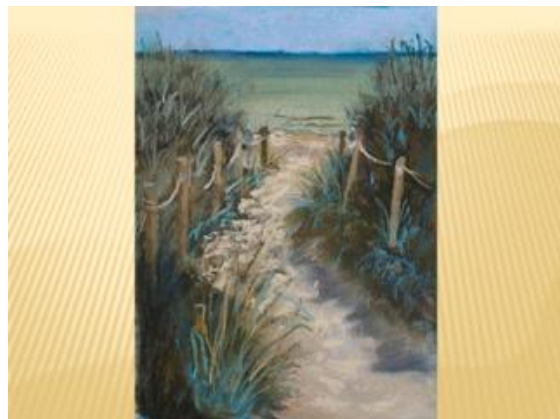
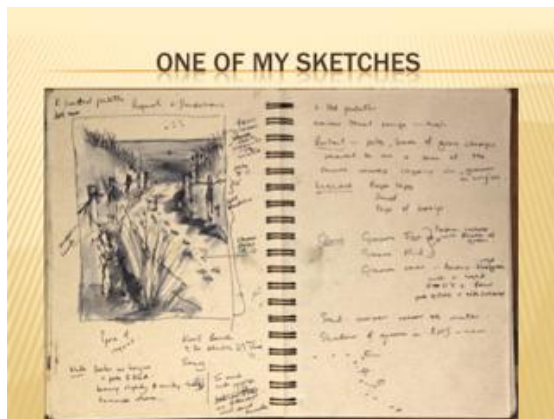
And then in the 1990s we had digital cameras when it doesn't matter how many pictures you take – and they're instant. Here's an example – Ken Howard's 'End of the Day' - would you call this a sketch or a painting ?



There are pitfalls in using a camera. The shadows are often too dark and the highlights washed out. The photo is distorted as you may have *everything* in focus, which is not how the eye works. The colour and temperature may be wrong. But nevertheless how useful it is to take little thumbnail photos and then you can use software to manipulate the picture to make an even better painting by bringing colour into the shadows. Crop your photos to have less extraneous material, then crop again before you paint - remember *why* you took the picture and what it is you want to paint.

Now we have I-pads. Really portable with great downloadable apps - you can make any part of your picture any colour you want and make whatever marks you like, They're no good in direct sunlight or in the rain, and the battery life is limited, but they are such a useful tool to have.'

Judy then showed some of her own paintings using a variety of techniques - a Venice fish market, lots of different shots of Studland beach - 'zoom in on the buoys.



It's all very informal, like a sketchbook, but the photos will tell you what's darkest and what's lightest so when you paint back home it'll remind you of how it was.'

'Here are my top tips for painting *en plein air*. Don't be self-conscious - people will want to watch and see what you are doing. Go out with friends or with a group. To start with choose a view you know well. Decide whether this is a sketch or a painting. Develop a kit bag of your materials - paper, pens, crayons, water pot, food, sun cream, raincoat, a hat, stool, camera, insect repellent, thermal handwarmers, sticky masking tape, sponges, water spray for slowing down the drying time, a favourite Rotring Art pen, and so on. For oils you'll need a pochade box - boards, paints, towels, rags, palette knives, brushes, handwipes.' 'I have a most valuable tool - a plastic viewfinder which is a variable frame called a 'view catcher'- a fiver from SAA. I wouldn't be without it.'



‘On location ask yourself - how long have I got ? Am I going to do the same view at different times of the day ? Or from different viewpoints or in different formats ? I can vary the horizon line, zoom in or out, or do some thumbnail sketches, paint into the sun or with the sun at my back.’

‘Finally, be clear as to what the painting is about, get the horizon straight, paint the things that are not moving first. Remember that the distance is less distinct, and is blue- even the trees that you know are green are blue – and establish your darkest darks and your lightest lights.’

‘Painting out of doors – so many opportunities.’

Robert McLeish