

## TRAINING ON THE JOB

Still life painter James Gillick publishes an annual newsletter – 2012 is his fifth. In this year's he proposes an interesting idea concerning painting apprenticeships after the old atelier style.

My wife says that I have three heads: the quiet, rather trivial, idle one when I am at rest is replaced by a fairly demanding, intense one when at work and a muddled vacillating mess of one when I can't choose between the other two. She keeps hoping that a bit of age will happily blend all three.

Once again I have been far too often a 'man at work' this year to have seen half the people that I really ought. A tremendously busy twelve months has led to such a portion of my time taken up with painting that I have been quite a stranger even to my own family. At best I am detached and thoughtful with my brushes in hand; the silence of the studio makes me so. This little written summary of my year is my fifth attempt to draw myself out of this quietness.

The fruits of my labours last Winter and Spring were a satisfying series of fourteen still lifes. They were displayed at the Chelsea Flower Show and at Jonathan Cooper's Park Walk Gallery in May and June and resulted in the biggest grossing exhibition in the gallery's 21 years. Jonathan worked his socks off with this very strong set of paintings and we ended up selling about double the number of pictures that were on show. 'Reprises' of the 'Originals' proved especially popular in their first outing in front of discerning London clientele.

With my artistic hat on it was extremely pleasing to have produced such a string of nicely formed paintings. Yet it was almost as pleasing to hear clients arriving at 2011's exhibitions boldly explaining, 'I have come to buy a James Gillick'. For years I have wanted to hear clients say this phrase with such confidence. Pictures are part shares in an artist's life. Seen as such they are rare objects of value. I have issued 350 shares so far and I'll issue between 600 and 800 in my lifetime. At the prices these shares already command this spoken phrase is therefore an explicit sign that the qualities of my work, my quiet thoughts are being accepted and valued. Importantly it also means that I am on course to get these pictures a primary market, auction house value in a decade or so. That is what my clients deserve and what I work so hard for.

Other highlights: I spent a delightful three weeks painting views around Castello della Racchiolsole, a client's estate in Perugia, which I have since turned into a large painting for them. I had a very public meal at the Ritz with the late Lord St John Stevas and his friend at which he was quite the lunchtime spectacle and a consummately beguiling politician in conversation. I'm sure he'll be missed by many. A detail from one of my paintings was used on the cover of the New York edition of Julian Barnes's Man Booker prize winning novel, 'The Sense of An Ending'. Brian Sewell called and asked if I'd be one of the artists to represent his selection at The Discerning Eye Competition at the Mall Galleries. A very fashionable Chinese couple, Jane & Dominique Chao-Lee, are arranging a major show of paintings in Hong King and mainland China – quite some adventure.

But, surprisingly, the most significant event of the year happened late one night last November. The trip home from the studio is only twelve, mostly rural miles, yet this particular journey will have lasting consequences.

I had been painting late. The studio thermometer told me that it had been -3°C at 10pm. Situated on the easterly side of a long ridge of chalk hills that rise from the flat Lincolnshire marshes, Louth is exposed to all the chill of the wintery North sea. It was brittle, mean

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Above: Silver Pot large clean 1, oil on linen over panel, 10" x 8"

weather and dark.

Warming up as I drove, my blower heater racing, I saw a figure walking briskly over the hussocked grass of the opposite side of the road. He had no coat on and was heading out of town. Before thinking twice I had slowed and stopped and offered him a lift. Without breaking his stride he replied, "No. I'm fine." "You sure, it's cold out?" "Nope. I'm fine, thanks."

Winding up the window I set off thinking how proud this young lad was. I was impressed but I still thought he was a fool. I decided to see how far it was to his broken car and make a judgement then about whether I should return. Sure enough, there was an empty vehicle pulled over fully two miles down the road, so I swung the car around and headed back past him. Turning again I pulled up alongside; wound the window once more and insisted he take the lift.

The abandoned car was not his, in fact. He was walking some four miles home in a thin jumper, shirt sleeves and indoor shoes. He was a Grammar School boy, who, having just completed three very good academic A Levels that summer was returning from a management course at the local supermarket. It had continued for much longer than he had been told.

In truth, he was a supermarket shelf-stacker on £5.79 an hour. But he expressed a strong hope to go into business management by working his way up the supermarket ladder. I guessed he had no Dad and his Mum had no car. This bright, well spoken boy could not afford tuition fees at university; a £45,000 debt for a degree was too much to pay.

I set him down close to his home, shook his hand and drove the slightly altered path to mine thinking about him and his peers, my own children and about education. I had been committed for some months to the idea of formalizing a kind of apprenticeship system at my studio in response to the increasing stream of enquiries I get

from young artists wishing to become interns. Until this point I had not really got to grips with the generation that I was to be working with. But this young lad brought it all within reach. His single-minded air of "Don't touch me. Don't talk to me. I'll be ok." was wonderful. I realised then that he was typical of much of his generation in that he knew that he had been let down somehow, felt an outsider, but was fighting his own way. His generation of youngsters, so widely vilified as nihilistic are possibly more independent minded than we recognise. They crave responsibility at a very young age and don't aspire to a life of ease. They seem to find their excitement in testing themselves. There is great merit in this, I think: after all, I have made a life from swimming against the tide as do most successful men.

In that short trip I resolved to see if I could tailor my apprenticeships to this need. Three flat months later, Christmas notwithstanding, I had solidified a plan to take on up to five 11-month apprentices a year. I had gained planning permission and building regulations approval for a major extension of my studio to house them and trialled and accepted three exceptional young artists aged 18-21. They start in November this year.

I am going to establish each Young Artist as a self-employed sole trader, teach them how to run and account for a small business as they bring in their own work. They will learn most things by helping me, be this with the labour intensive side of preparing my materials or exhibiting or with office discipline or with trips to the Big City and so on. They will learn all about how to make their paints, oils, varnishes, mediums, canvasses and panels to exacting standards just as I have done. For all this they will pay a very small fee which will cover their accommodation, food and materials, a fee they will have earned back by the time they leave.

You'll know that I hold lasting art to be a truly significant aspect of culture and social history; that it is almost dangerous for a country not to train its young artists. It would be wonderful for me if I could find and train one who adds beautifully to our understanding of this glorious, brief life.

I am working towards a show with Jonathan Cooper Park Walk Gallery in 2013, in the meantime you can see my work at:

**The CLA Game Fair July 20th – 22nd which takes place this year in the glorious setting of Belvoir Castle, Grantham, Leics. For tickets and more info visit [www.gamefair.co.uk](http://www.gamefair.co.uk)**

**The Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials August 30th – September 2nd which takes place in the magnificent Park of the Burghley Estate in Lincolnshire. A fine chance for a glass of something and a proper catch up. For further info visit the website: [www.burghley-horse.co.uk](http://www.burghley-horse.co.uk)**

