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FIVE MINUTES WITH...

Clifford Blakey, artist

Can you describe your work and style for those who are unfamiliar with what you do?

I like to describe my work as a kind of contemporary romanticism, I look at the landscape and its vast scale and paint my responses to that. My paintings use a range of techniques from layering, glazing, scratching, splashing, stippling, pretty much anything that will give me the results I want from the painting. They're about weather, light, what it feels like to be out in the landscape. I attempt to paint the sheer beauty I see in front of me – that's the joy in what I do.

Your work is clearly influenced by the landscapes you see around you, especially in the North East. Do you have a favourite scene in the region to paint?

I paint mainly Northumberland landscapes and seascapes, although I will paint wherever I find myself in the world such as Italy where I've been for quite a bit of this summer. Choosing a favourite location is very difficult, as this region is full of the most beautiful scenery but I have to make a choice for you – can I say two places, the Cheviot Hills (especially College Valley) and the coastline looking out to the Farne Islands – unbeatable in my opinion.

Continuing with the North East theme, where is your favourite place to find inspiration?

Inspiration is a funny word, it conjures up the notion that there is a flash of light which makes sense of everything in an instant. I think inspiration is a much slower, more purposeful notion so I spend as much time as I can just looking at the light over the sea where it is at its purest. As I live in Whitley Bay I go down to the beach there as often as I can, it's so peaceful and when things are difficult with a painting, that's where I go to think. The light there in the early mornings can be spectacular.

When you're working on a landscape painting, if you do

take sketchbooks out with you (as I've read you do) what challenges does the northern weather present you with?

Well, I have good waterproofs, essential for anyone out in the hills of Northumberland. My sketchbooks are very important to me. I can record my observations of the landscape in minutes and use the experiences back in the studio. The challenge is to capture the colours that come and go as the light changes. The weather can change quite quickly especially if I'm out in the hills so I use very small sketchbooks and a set of watercolours that fit in my pocket, that way I can make a quick getaway if the weather does turn.

Could you describe your studio for us? Is there anything that you have to have there while you work, like a mascot or even just a cup of tea?

The studio is generally a mess. Paint on the floor, paint on the walls, paint on my sketchbooks, and my collection of catalogues and books. Somehow I have a little clean area by my computer and I have no idea how it stays that way. I wouldn't change it, couldn't change it, we've kind of grown together over the last ten years. Even my painting trousers stand up on their own; they are so encrusted with paint.

I don't have a mascot or anything like that, I'm not superstitious, but I do play music constantly while I'm painting. Mostly classical, Vaughan Williams, Stravinsky, Henryk Gorecki, Jean Sibelius, that kind of thing and a lot of guitar music as I have a passion for classical and flamenco guitar.

Do you have a favourite among your own paintings?

Picasso once said his favourite painting was the one he was about to do and I think that sums it up. I don't know how other artists feel but the painting I have just started is my favourite until it is finished. It remains my favourite until I start the next one. What drives me is that the next painting will be better than the last, I will have learned more, experienced more, experimented more.



Cliff Blakey

Where have you most enjoyed being exhibited, and where would you like your work to be exhibited in the future?

I only exhibit at two galleries in the region: Off The Wall Gallery in Corbridge where my new exhibition will be at the end of October and The Framehouse and Schoolroom Gallery in Alnmouth. I love showing at both these galleries, they are so friendly and approachable to the public. It excites me that we have such a good relationship and I can do the work I really want to do for them. I show in Cumbria, Yorkshire and Scotland as well, but my real ambition is within the work itself.

Would you mind sharing a few of your favourite places in the North East with us?

The Cheviot Hills are without question one of my favourite places along with Newton by the Sea, the Roman Wall at Housesteads, Alnmouth on a cold winter day, Seahouses in the middle of summer with all the tourists and the boat trips, walking by the river at Corbridge and Hexham and not forgetting some culture I love going to The Sage in Gateshead.