

Countdown to ArtsFest

In a series of articles, Anthea Simmons discovers the fascinating back stories behind some of the artists participating in this year's ArtsFest (September 17th to 25th). This week she meets Pam Allsop, whose evocative mixed media paintings can be seen in Rummage and in Serendip Books and Lal Quilla Restaurant during ArtsFest.

What is the history of your involvement in the Arts?

I had done watercolour and drawing classes while working in London years ago. However, when I moved to Lyme in 2005 I had more time to devote to art. I lived in a chalet overlooking the bay. How could I not be inspired? Those fantastic dawn skies! The light playing on the sea! I was overwhelmed by the compulsion to paint. I felt, deep down, that this was it. Paint now or never. So I painted solidly for days...dreadful pieces! I would cringe to see them now but I know it was all part of the process. I had to go through that to get to where I am now....and it never stops. You keep moving on and developing. Art is very much about changing and growing. I work very early in the morning because that is when I feel my creative energies are at their peak and I'm not hindered by the distractions of daily life. I joined a number of classes to explore different techniques, including Kat Swann's life classes in Seaton. I also worked with Linda Whiteman and Lynda White and had mentoring with Christine Allison, which was invaluable when I received a commission to provide images for a book, "*Symptom as Symbol: A Language of the Transpersonal*". I was excited, flattered and, I admit, scared. The fourteen pieces are the result of working with mixed media and experimenting with paper, paint and tissue until the finished pictures emerged as if by some alchemic process. It was challenging but fun.

Why Lyme and what did you do before you came here? I went to the USA in the '60s and lived in New York and California, only returning to the UK as my father was very ill. I met my husband, got married and worked in Personnel in Esso Petroleum and then Exxon's head office in London. I then became a UKCP reg. Transpersonal Psychotherapist and later qualified as a Deep Memory Process Therapist. I also developed an interest in life coaching. I found that my skills were very much in demand in the business world, where people began to sense that there was something fundamental missing from their lives which, in material terms, were about as good as it got. I used a range of techniques, including drawing, to help people understand their inner world and begin to express their authentic Self. But it wasn't all about the corporate world. I also ran workshops for unemployed people in Hackney, where I learned a lot about knives from young black youths. What a contrast with the workshops and personal development sessions at the Savoy Group hotels, where at one time, I got champagne instead of afternoon tea! And why Lyme? I went to swim with dolphins in Hawaii and that triggered a real compulsion to be by the sea. I had only been to Lyme once before but I just could not get it out of my head. I knew I had to come here. My London friends were flabbergasted! Why leave London where I had a

thriving private practice? I just knew it was right for me and I am so happy here. It is such a special place with tremendous creative energy.

What are your sources of inspiration?

I am inspired by colour and light. That's why I love the Impressionists so much. I have loved them since I was a child. When I started my own work I was very much inspired by Mike Bernard who mixes collage and paint so wonderfully. I love Kurt Jackson's work...the colours and the energy. Similarly, Stuart Edmondson, a Devon artist who paints outdoors and incorporates whatever the weather throws at him. I love work with a sense of mystery, something to be discovered by the viewer and these artists go way beyond the purely representational.

If you could own any work of art and spend a weekend in any gallery, what would you choose?

Well, I'd love to own Monet's 'Water Lilies'. That painting moves me deeply. And I'd love to spend a weekend in his garden at Giverny...in Spring.

How long have you been involved in ArtsFest and how would you like to see the event develop?

I've been involved for four years. It's wonderful that there is an event which involves pretty much everyone in Lyme. It has grown organically and I think that's good. It's amazing what energetic people with a knack for networking can achieve!

I would like to see more young artists involved and it really would be great to have a show all along the railings on the seafront...like the Sunday morning shows round Hyde Park and Bayswater Road.

What are you looking forward to at this year's event?

I know everyone says it, but the buzz around town is great and I love it! Beyond that, I am determined to get round the open studios. The variety of work is so exciting and inspiring. I am really looking forward to hearing SaxSation on Sunday 18th. I met Carolyn Fry through swimming! When I heard that they just got together and played in a field, I knew we had to have them here at ArtsFest! What a fantastic group of women!

I'll also be going to Hugh Dunford-Wood's film evening and doing Christine's dawn sketching again. I thoroughly enjoyed it last year. I will also be sure to go and hear the organist in St Michael's playing that fabulous organ.