



A joining together of

5-MINUTE INTERVIEW

KERRY PHIPPEN AND MELVYN WARREN-SMITH

Two talented, established artists, Melvyn Warren-Smith and Kerry Phippen, are joining forces for an exhibition of drawings and paintings at Stroud Subscription Rooms this month.

The eclectic exhibition will feature an array of figurative subject matters, described as referencing 'Pre-Raphaelite ideas of ideal beauty along with darker fables and narratives'.

I caught up with the artists at Melvyn's home-cum-studio on Nelson Street in Stroud for a lively chat with the colourful creatives...

How long have you both been based in the Cotswolds?

Melvyn: We [Melvyn and wife Marie] moved about a year ago. We weren't planning to live in town - we used to have a barn in the middle of nowhere in Warwickshire - but I love it here.

Kerry: I grew up in Scotland, but have a cottage in the Slad Valley now. I've lived in this area for more than 20 years.

How did you meet?

Melvyn: I was visiting Stroud with a friend, and a girl came up and said "We must go to Pegasus" [the art shop that Kerry works in] as it's Kerry's birthday today, so we went down there to sing Happy Birthday...

Kerry: Yes, he just came up to me - a complete stranger - and said "Happy Birthday, babes!"

How quickly did you adjust to Stroud life, Melvyn?

You have to learn to slow down when you come here... I'm originally from Kingston, London, and I soon discovered that everyone's laid back. There really is a wonderful pace of life here.

I've seen a picture of you working in your Warwickshire barn - with very few clothes on, as I recall...

Ah, yes, the photographer suggested that. I had this model called Sophia who

Kerry Phippen and Melvyn Warren-Smith



EXHIBITION

Melvyn Warren-Smith and Kerry Phippen's joint exhibition runs from Saturday, December 10 until Saturday, December 17 (10am-5pm; closed on Sunday, December 11) at The George Room, Stroud Subscription Rooms, George Street, GL5 1AE, tel: 01453 760900, www.subscriptionrooms.org.uk Entry is free.

kerryhippenart.com

melvyn-warren-smith.com



Sophia, by Melvyn Warren-Smith

lay naked in the snow for me and so he said, "Melvyn, I tell you what I'm going to do - you're going to strip off and sit in the rocking chair. I'm just going to get the camera out of the car and will be back in five minutes." I thought, "Oh, my god... but if I expect her to do it, then I should."

The thing is, you've got to get people to your show, other than showing vases of flowers... you have to do something a bit more. Like Mr Trump, for example - how did he do it? He's a great PR man... it's extraordinary. We're all in the entertainment business.

But it doesn't necessarily come easily to all artists...

Kerry: No, I've had to push myself really hard just to come on board with Twitter and Facebook. It feels like showing off - you're not in fact; you're just showing people what you're doing. I quite enjoy it now as you get feedback from people.

Melvyn: Yes, it really is about believing in yourself.

You both teach, don't you - do you enjoy the sense of performance you get from that?

Melvyn: When I was about 35, I was incredibly shy, but a tutor once said to me "When you're up there, nobody wants to be in your position, so you have all the power." When I heard that, I thought that's it!

Watch out for

HANDS ON HARPS CHRISTMAS CONCERT: DECEMBER 10, 7PM

Get in the Christmas spirit by joining Hands on Harps for their harp orchestra Christmas concert. Tickets £3 in advance from the Village Inn pub or £4 on the door. Bar and charity raffle. Nailsworth Subscription Rooms, GL6 0HH. www.handsonharps.com



artistic forces



Red Fox, 2015, by Kerry Phippen



The Gunneras, by Melvyn Warren-Smith

Kerry: I used to get terrible stage-fright, but I'm not so bad now. When I used to plan all-day workshops I worried about it for weeks, then I'd start and all would be absolutely fine.

Would you say your styles have changed much over the years?

Melvyn: It's a bit like being a writer or singer; you might try other styles, but you always come back to your 'thing'. It has to feel natural...

Kerry: Yes, that's true, but you also try to push the boundaries a little. Going back to the music analogy, it's like when you go to see a band and you think, "I just want you to play my favourite songs; I don't want to hear the new stuff!"

Melvyn: That's true! [laughs] I went to see Bowie once and he didn't play any of his older songs. I walked out.

Kerry - I love your animal paintings with the wallpaper-style backgrounds. Will you be producing more of these?

Yes, I do keep veering back to these. Mainly I work in ink and have quite a lyrical, flowing style, and I do love pattern in art, so will keep returning. I can draw technically very accurately, I think, but that pins everything down too much, so I kind of disable myself by using ink, which will occasionally do something accidental. I love that the ink can do random things, and that I then have to work with it... I can see shapes in the forms and that's very good for me, I think. You have to work very

fast when putting the ink on wet paper.

The natural world is a common thread in your paintings, Kerry...

Yes, growing up in Scotland we used to go into the Highlands and the west coast often and it was always about fishing, climbing and watching wildlife. There was always a sense of excitement about seeing the ospreys and the deer. Before I was born, my dad worked at Edinburgh Zoo so he used to tell me all these stories about the animals he had to deal with.

How are you selecting what will be shown in the Subscription Rooms exhibition?

Melvyn: We've been discussing how we're going to do this as it's quite a big room. We were going to mix it all up, but now I think we're going to divide it down the middle.

Kerry: That's another random act in itself - you pitch up, hang a picture, think that doesn't look right there... that's a creative act, too. We've got a day to do it!

And what about direct inspiration for artwork... and passions away from it?

Kerry: I love walking in the Slad Valley where I live, watching the deer, buzzards and horses.

Melvyn: I play guitar and enjoy walking in the landscape, too.

And with that, I have to leave the warmth of the fire and of their company. I urge you to see the exhibition, and you may even get a chance to see the artists at work. Wonderful.

Eavesdropper

Overheard during the last month...

'I delivered the bread and everything... funny enough, I needed the dough.'

Jimmy Young quips about his childhood growing up in a Cinderford bakery. You'll be missed, Jimmy - BBC Radio 4

'To person who dropped two bags of pork scratchings into my basket in Sainsbury's: your pitiful Saturday activity backfired. I'm not Muslim.'

BBC Radio Gloucestershire's Manpreet Melhi is targeted while out shopping, but has the last laugh - via Twitter

'Brazen thief offers to return a rare Ferrari - but only if his jail term is cut!'

A Twigworth man appears at Gloucester Crown Court accused of stealing the £500,000 car and offers to arrange for its recovery providing his sentence is cut. Surprisingly, the judge replies, "It won't do any harm." Speechless - Daily Mail

'A new life! Tom Cruise 'has been spending time with daughter Suri and is romancing a British woman' as he settles down in England.'

The Hollywood star spends a couple of days' quality time in Bourton-on-the-Water - Daily Mail

'Strange one for our Street Wardens today. This porker was found in Whitecroft. If she's yours please call Fran...'

Last month it was the three long-haired miniature pigs running free near Cam, now we have an errant porcine in the Forest. People, look after your pigs, please! - Forest of Dean District Council via Twitter

