



# ODIHAM ART GROUP DEMONSTRATION REPORT

## **A Cayman Island Schooner under sail – oil demonstration by Geoff Hunt, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2016**

Geoff Hunt is a renowned oil painter who specialises in portraying historical representations of square rigged sailing ships. He has also written a very entertaining diary of his struggles with plein air watercolour whilst painting with the Wapping Group, published in The Artist magazine – how many of us would love to ‘struggle’ and achieve what Geoff manages to paint on a bad day!

His chosen subject for the demonstration was a Cayman Island Schooner which he planned to create from some tiny rough sketches (about 3” x 5”) he had done whilst on the Islands as well as a couple of reference photographs he’d taken. These formed the ‘idea’ of his subject but he did not use them slavishly, preferring to take them as a starting point for the painting rather than dictate the finished scene.



Geoff told us that his favourite colours for seascapes were Cobalt Turquoise Light for tropical seas, whilst a mix of Cobalt Blue and Raw Sienna gives a good range of blue/greens that are best for English seas (i.e. cold ones!). He tends to use Zinc White as a mixer white although he does use Titanium White for larger background areas. He mentioned that Cobalt Blue had become very expensive and suggested that Ultramarine Blue mixed with a tiny bit of Prussian Blue can work as a substitute but warned it will not mix with other colours as well.

Geoff roughly mapped out the composition on board primed with a mix of Titanium White, Ivory Black and Venetian Red which results in a soft warm pale grey - he usually works on linen canvas for commissions, some of which are huge. He noted that he finds black very useful as it is a true neutral tone, but said that the trick was to use it sparingly. He sketched out his idea for the painting with a pale blue/grey mix just slightly darker than the background and spent some time making sure he was happy with the composition. He also noted where he wanted the light to come from as seascapes are better when lit from either right or left – if you have the light coming from ‘behind’ you, face on to the sea, it is much more difficult to paint definition in the water.



He spent a considerable time working on the composition and just when your correspondent thought it was sorted – he declared himself unhappy with it, wiped it all off and started again, cheerfully stating that he enjoyed the stressful dynamic of winging it!

This time Geoff concentrated on getting tone on to the board then used a rag to wipe out highlights, followed by sketching in rough shapes with a brush. His sky was a soft mid tone to balance the rest of the painting, then he added Ultramarine Blue and Permanent Rose to his palette for dark warm tones on sails out of direct sunlight. He added dark tones to the foreground waves (muttering “Getting better – that’s a relief”!) and to differentiate the foresail used lighter tones to show reflected light, constantly considering where to add colour and tone to bring the painting to life.



Geoff always paints the rigging last on his commissioned paintings, as the fine lines would not work on anything but a dry base. He advised those attempting it to always use a fine brush in new or mint condition and a ruler for straight ropes, or a vague series of dashes to indicate a curve – rely on the eye of the viewer to fill in the gaps. Not to put you off but Geoff did say that he spent days, sometimes weeks, researching the rigging for historically accurate paintings of famous sailing ships but that is only to be expected from someone who has made his name through his seagoing paintings.



He spent some time painting the schooner, ensuring he was happy with the outline and shape of the vessel and one thing he did say was that if the boat is painted well the viewer will automatically think the bit below is waves! Taking a step back from his painting towards the end he commented that the painting was very 'blue green' and he dropped a little pink into the sky as well as a pop of bright red for the jumper of the helmsman in order to offset the blue of the waves.



The end product was a wonderfully lively painting of a schooner under sail over a choppy sea and the fifty or so members who attended all thoroughly enjoyed seeing a relaxed master of his craft at work. Our thanks go to Geoff for a fabulous demonstration and a great way to end our year.



And finally, Merry Christmas to you all and may 2017 bring you health, wealth and happiness.

Christine Sharp