

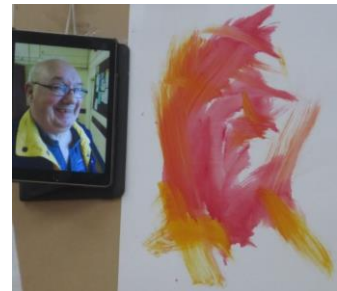


ODIHAM ART GROUP DEMONSTRATION REPORT

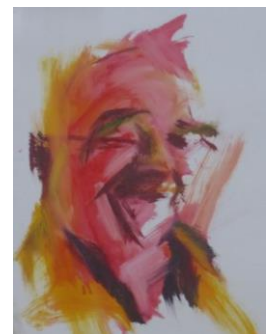
Peter Keegan – Expressive Portraits in Oils, January 2017

Peter introduced himself with a potted biography that started “I went to Cardiff School of Art for three years and learnt nothing - was told not to do portraiture as no-one made a living from it”. Luckily for us he ignored this advice and is now a very successful artist painting a wide range of subjects, based in his beautiful studio at Claydon House in Buckinghamshire. For this demo he had a willing volunteer in Bill Searle as subject. Peter took a number of photos of Bill on his iPad and then worked from his chosen image – this meant that Bill could enjoy seeing the painting take shape as well as everyone else. Peter stressed that when taking on a commission he usually took a long time to get to know his subject as much as possible before starting the painting, as he was trying to capture the person, not just an image, and this meant learning something of their character, likes and life.

Peter began the demo by taking us through the three basics that need to be taken into account when painting a portrait; colour, mark making and pose, all of which are integral to his style of expressive painting. He always splits his colours into warm and cool sections on his palette, with more warm than cool colours,, and his chosen colours for this demo were Titanium White then (warm colours) Lemon Yellow, Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Red and Alizarin Crimson, then (cool) Sap Green, Ultramarine Blue and Raw Umber. He never uses black, preferring to mix his own darks. He uses primed and sealed Daler Rowney canvas paper for demos as the storage is much easier than canvases and usually starts with a large 2” brush, gradually reducing the size of brush as the painting becomes more detailed.



Peter began the portrait by slapping on a very thin wash of warm reds and oranges then yellows to show the (very) rough shape of the pose. As he did this he chatted away, saying that he was trying to think of the shapes in almost a sculptural way to create a solidity to the image. He popped some green onto the paper to pick out shadow and form, along with a mix of Alizarin Crimson and Ultramarine Blue, which he noted made a lovely shadow shade.



Peter moved constantly whilst painting, stepping back and forwards to the canvas, all the time identifying key regions and areas of the face in order to catch a likeness. He used open brushstrokes, painting from the shoulder to keep the marks expressive not ‘tight’ and he always paints ‘Alla Prima’ – quick expressive marks, wet into wet. Interestingly he never washes the brush between strokes, just wipes it clean on a rag, as this means the paint is not diluted by any cleaning agent.



Peter used a rag to wipe out highlights, gradually thickening the paint in order to work from lean to fat layers of oil paint and then dribbling and splashing paint onto the image to keep it loose. He was now using a Rosemary & Co Filbert brush (no. 10) for more detailed work and he began to concentrate on the eyes, which he said are the secret to getting a likeness. Mixing Ultramarine Blue and Raw Umber he placed detail in the eyes and added the spectacles, using them as a grid to ensure the rest of Bill's features were in balance. The paint was getting thicker and thicker at this stage and the marks were becoming more considered as Peter fine-tuned the portrait. Squinting to eradicate detail from the photo he concentrated on finding the lights and darks on the face, stating that tone was everything to ensure a likeness. Moving on to a No. 4 brush he added yet more detail and stronger smaller marks. As he painted he told us that it was imperative to work from a model or photo with a strong light source from the side, ideally either from the top right or top left of the subject. Never use a photo taken with flash photography or have the light source from directly in front of the subject as it flattens out all the essential detail you'll need to capture the person.



Finally he stopped, stating that he never finishes a painting but just abandons it before he ruins it! Well, all we could say was that this was a masterclass in portraiture and watching Bill's smiling face emerge onto the paper was a revelation. A fantastic demonstration by a superb artist, thank you Peter.

