



ODIHAM ART GROUP DEMONSTRATION REPORT

Demonstration of watercolour technique by Steve Hall – 5th November 2016

The first post-Exhibition demonstration was a great success. Fifty nine members attended, more than have for many years. There were also three new members and five visitors so the hall was buzzing.

The demonstrator, Steve Hall, has been with us in the past. He is very at ease and chats away as he paints, you needed to concentrate as words of wisdom were scattered throughout. One of many gems was “Artisans are those who practice a skill which is taught, whilst artists paint from the heart”. He classed himself amongst the former but we thought he also fell into the latter category.



Steve's first career was as a builder. He retired early and has been painting for twenty years. He said that “You should spend more time thinking than painting, composition is all important”. Steve does not do much initial drawing, which he says would result in colouring in shapes on the paper. However, he does make a rough ‘road map’ for his painting but it is not detailed, just a few swift lines across the paper to show the main areas of the image. He said that “In painting there has to be a level of belief”, so go for it!

Quite early on his unstretched Fabriano 140 paper is covered with a wet wash; blue ultramarine, raw sienna and a touch of alizarin crimson, all very, very loose. He paints from the back of his landscape moving forward to build up a three dimensional illusion. A mop brush is used, along with a reservoir brush with some long fine hairs, a sponge to dab his brush on and a palette knife for scratching out. The colours he used were blue ultramarine, and autumn shades of brown madder, burnt umber, burnt sienna, raw sienna, cadmium yellow and hansa yellow, the latter from Daniel Smith. Other manufacturers used included Schmincke, Rembrandt and Winsor & Newton (both Artist and Cotman ranges). Steve was once a purist but no more; the means must justify the ends and if the colour is right, use it.



He says to paint with your entire body which gives energy; not just arms and hands. “Quite crude marks can be enhancing, do not try to be exact. Many painters are afraid of dark. The use of darks will add body and bite; both dark against light and light against dark. A painting is of lights and darks.” There were gasps as he loaded his brush with ‘shadow’ and swiped it across the foreground, giving the scene instant depth. The finished painting showed a sunlit autumn afternoon in the country.



The second painting was of boats and a shoreline and here is where Steve's past as a technical chap caught up with him; he agreed that “some degree of accuracy is required” when painting boats. A more detailed drawing was needed here, using a 4B pencil. Whilst he was sketching he noted that an artist should not slavishly follow a photograph, instead we should try to “extract from a photograph only that which is required” – excellent advice.



He usually stands whilst working on a support of approximately 40 degrees, finding it makes for a looser painting. He does not stretch his paper but will occasionally wet the surface with water 10 minutes in advance of starting a painting. He never uses masking fluid because the edges are too hard for his style of painting, preferring to rely on his control of the washes to create lines and light in the image. Odd white spots and gaps should be left for ‘sparkle’.



Steve talked about composition whilst painting. Even when doing a 'technical' subject like boats he said that "Too much detail equals twee" and suggested that directional lines from the bottom corners to the centre of the painting or to the focal point will draw the eye to the main subject, whilst a couple of human figures will add interest. He recommended making shadows with dark purple or with other colours in the painting and ensure that shadows should be darkest next to the object and soften with distance.

Throughout the demonstration Steve was relaxed, kept up a running commentary and answered questions from the floor. Everyone enjoyed his demonstration and marveled at the two finished paintings achieved. All together it was a very worthwhile afternoon. Maureen Ashworth, who had introduced the speaker, thanked him at the end and we hope to welcome him back in the not too distant future.

