



Different Strokes

THE IMPRESSIONIST PAINTINGS OF ARTIST CHRIS MCMORROW.

Originally from Santry, but now living in Celbridge, Co. Kildare, Chris is a self-taught artist who never studied art at school, although he recalls drawing with crayons when he was a child after being inspired by his talented mother. 'My mother was very artistic and loved calligraphy. She was the only one that I can remember who was creative back then. She was really talented at seeing an old chair and making a beautiful piano stool out of it, being artistic like that.'

With this creative influence in his life, it didn't take long for his artistic talents to be recognised. 'I had always been dabbling around in painting as a child but when I was 13 my sister put one of my paintings into a local community competition. It was an album cover painting of Jimi Hendrix standing in a graveyard and it came first!' This spurred the young artist on to continue painting and over the next few years he would sketch pencil drawings and portraits of musical legends for his friends. Even in his jobs as a civil servant and later as an installer of phone lines for Eircom, he never stopped painting and sketching. 'I did a night class in water-colours and the rest I picked up from books, visiting galleries and just trying different things. I am inspired by the old masters, I love the Impressionists such as Edgar Degas and Edouard Manet. I feel that impressionist paintings are very interactive. It is like they are not quite finished and the viewer finishes the image themselves. Every time you look at an impressionist painting, you see more.'

For his subject matter, Chris is influenced by the world around him. 'I'm inspired by many different things especially by what is around me. Different phases ensure different influences and so you go off on a different track.' His paintings range from reflecting the hustle and bustle of city life in his interpretations of College Green, Halfpenny Bridge and Moore Street Market as well as the picturesque and dreamy scenes of the country. He recalls his childhood fondly in the countryside, which has influenced a collection of traditional Irish scenes such as countrymen reminiscing in a sunlit grassy field or working the land. 'I came across a load of old photographs in an old book of life in the west of Ireland before electricity. It was a real blast from the past, a different era and you don't see that anymore. Those people were like a different breed. My parents were both from the country and I remember a lot about that time especially the old bicycles which were called 'old nellie's'. My mother used to go everywhere on hers and so when I paint images like that it reminds me of my childhood and I get very nostalgic.'

'However the Tuscan and Poppy paintings are complete figments of my imagination. I love to do big paintings like these for a complete change from the 'busy' city paintings and the only references I use might be some photos of poppies. There are no lines to deal with or drawing involved. These types of landscapes look great on really big canvasses and they are a joy to get stuck into. I usually start off with a rough idea of the vista and slap on loads



of colour and thick paint and rough attempts at foreground, middle ground and background. Then I start to see shapes that may become bushes or trees or fields – I sometimes put in some of the sky colour that may become a lake or a river or even a winding road! I just keep at it until I am satisfied and it gels together as a pleasing painting.

'The inspiration for Tuscan Dream is all the impressions I have seen of that area and I wanted to try to capture what an idyllic Tuscan scene might look like. I have been painting poppies and daisies for years – they are like old friends and every now and then I go through phases where I will put them in my paintings.'

Preferring to use acrylic paints, Chris feels that by using this medium he can create a better atmosphere in a scene. 'I prefer to use acrylics because as they are water based, they dry quicker than oils and this enables me to work faster with the painting which in turn gives it more spontaneity and means I will be less fussy with it. When I am painting a street scene, I think that the acrylic paints give a great sense of wet and night and more of an atmosphere.'

'I take anything from three days to two weeks to complete a painting depending on size, subject matter and amount of detail. Sometimes I put an almost finished painting in a frame and hang it on my sitting room and live with it for a while, anything that is amiss or out of kilter in the painting will reveal itself after a while! I will then rework the painting until I am happy with the finished result.'

Although Chris is now a full time artist he recalls when he began selling his paintings at Merrion Square back in the early nineties. This area of Dublin is transformed into a street art gallery at the weekend where artists display and sell their work and everyone turns out including potential customers. It was here that Chris was approached by the previous South African Ambassador for Ireland, Pierre Dietrichsen who bought six of his paintings.







Following this he started approaching galleries. The first to show his work was the People's Art Hall at the Powerscourt Town House in Dublin and the Waldock Gallery in Blackrock. It was then that he felt he should concentrate solely on being a full-time artist. 'I had been selling commercially for 13 years so I took the plunge and went full time.'

One of his greatest achievements was when he was approached by Irish Rail to paint the Enterprise which in turn led him to paint a picture of Connolly Station which was presented to the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. 'Initially I was approached by Irish Rail to paint the Enterprise and then they asked me to do a painting of one of the regular mainline trains. I was then asked to paint Heuston Station which was presented to the Minister for Transport, Seamus Brennan and then one of Connolly Station, which was presented to the Taoiseach. Irish Rail made prints out of all the paintings which they now present as a gift to those who are retiring.'

2008 will see Chris McMorrow's paintings continuing to show at galleries all over Ireland. Currently his paintings are showing at the Arkhangel in Listowel, Co. Kerry; The People's Art Hall, Powerscourt Townhouse, Dublin and later at the Cork Art Fair (September 26th-28th) and The Art Ireland Show (November 14th - 16th) at the RDS.

So where does he hope to be in ten years? 'I hope to expand my paintings into different countries and exhibit them in galleries further afield. I would love to exhibit in New York and Paris. I would love to paint there and have a gallery show my work. It would be a great excuse to go there and have a working holiday!'

For more information on Chris McMorrow visit www.chrismcmorrow.net or phone Celbridge Co. Kildare 016 288832.

C O M P E T I T I O N

Ireland's Homes Interiors & Living magazine, together with Chris McMorrow is offering one reader the chance to win a painting worth £1,000/€1,350 entitled 'Rainy Day People' (34"x28").

How to enter

Answer the following questions:

- 1 What age was Chris when his sister entered one of his paintings into a local competition?
- 2 What was the painting of?
- 3 Name one of the Impressionist painters that have inspired Chris?

Send your answers, name, address and phone number marked **April 08 Artist** to Ireland's Homes Interiors & Living magazine, PO Box 42, Bangor, County Down BT19 7AD or Ashgrove House, Kill Avenue, Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin OR EMAIL: competitions@ihil.net with the name of and month of the feature, your name, address and phone number and the three answers. NB. One separate e-mail is requested for each competition.

Entries to be received no later than Friday 11th April 2008.

One entry per household. Judges decision is final.

No cash alternative. Prizes are non transferable.