

A woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a green top and sunglasses on her head, is driving a light blue convertible car. A brown dog is sitting in the passenger seat, looking out towards the ocean. The car is parked on a beach. In the background, there are two tall palm trees, a clear blue sky, and a city skyline with various buildings and a lighthouse. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a tropical vacation.

IT'S A DOG'S LIFE MIKE FRANCIS

PANTER & HALL

Mike Francis

It's a Dog's Life

30th September – 10th October 2014

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Dear Viewer!

I've had many relationships with dogs over the years, most have been more memorable than those with people! All unforgettable for their varied personalities and undivided devotions, forever happy to see one from morning until midnight (or later) watching my 'exasperations' at the easel or 'humblings' to sounds of Mulligan, Baker, Martin or J. J. Cale which keep me entertained.

Reactions to changing moods are either thumping tail-bashings to my old sofa or, ears cocked at my cursings, scurrying from the room looking back quizzically with an 'it wasn't me, I didn't do it' look!

From my very first doggy friend, Smudge, a black mongrel 'street urchin' who would call for me every day to play ball, or accompany me and my mates on various visits to parks or devotedly trot along with me delivering papers or milk.

Our present addition, Django, a loveable but Jekyll and Hyde-like Jack Russell acquired from our usual Battersea source of canine orphans. Our previous family member, Molly, also a Jack Russell, had been ill-treated, unloved and abused like Django, both resulting in having attitude problems. However, patience, love and trust has in both cases reduced those problems, all caused by humans who profess to have greater intellect!

Whatever dastardly or depressed mood one suffers, the greeting by one's dog seems to lift the spirits, a yelp, a wagging tail, or in Django's case a nuzzling wet-nosed exuberance of sliding down our hallway to place his ball at my feet!

Lastly, owners should remember that in fact dogs, in many ways, own us! We feed them, take them to the park, play with them, etc. But of course in return we get their constant loyalty and they make life a happier place!

Most of the dogs depicted in these images I have known or know.

Mike Francis



CAT NO 1 **Hamilton's Holiday** acrylic on canvas 40 x 50 ins (102 x 127 cm) £8,850



CAT NO 2 Dog, Lovers acrylic on canvas 19 x 16 ins (48 x 40 cm) £2,850



CAT NO 3 Doggy paddlers acrylic on canvas 31½ x 12 ins (80 x 30 cm) £3,850



CAT NO 4 **Having a Ball** acrylic on canvas 40 x 30 ins (102 x 76 cm) £5,850



CAT NO 5 Doggy Diva acrylic on board 24 x 20 ins (60 x 50 cm) £4,250



CAT NO 6 Time ladies, gents, doggies, please acrylic on canvas 30 x 20 ins (76 x 50 cm) £4,850



CAT NO 7 **Dog Day Afternoon** acrylic on canvas 36 x 24 ins (90 x 60 cm) £4,850



CAT NO 8 Stay Charlie, Stay boy! acrylic on board 20 x 24 ins (50 x 60 cm) £4,250



CAT NO 9 Meet me at the bridge acrylic on canvas 30 x 24 ins (76 x 60 cm) £4,850



CAT NO 10 Top dog acrylic on canvas 40 x 30 ins (102 x 76 cm) £5,850



CAT NO 11 No! Django, no! acrylic on board 20 x 24 ins (50 x 60 cm) £4,250



CAT NO 12 **Mr Jarman and Pinch** acrylic on canvas 20 x 16 ins (50 x 40 cm) £2,850



CAT NO 13 Pete and Jackie, Night Watchman acrylic on canvas 30 x 36 ins (76 x 91 cm) £5,850

Mike Francis

Mike Francis was born in Mitcham, Surrey in 1953. He left school at 15 and a few short months as a porter at Covent Garden persuaded him he should pursue his love of art, which given his meagre financial situation meant the commercial world of Soho. He found a position at Rome Studios, one of the big four illustration studios at the time, where over the next twelve years he worked his way up from messenger boy to full time illustrator with a brief interruption for National Service.

With the studio's demise Mike joined Illustrators of London a group based in Great Marlborough Street run by the artist Ivan Rose whom Mike acknowledges as a significant influence. At this time he was introduced to Tony Tenser the founder of Tigon Films, an independent British film production and distribution company that specialised in low budget horror and exploitation films. Tigon proved a regular client as did their rivals Hammer Films although his film work remained a small proportion of his overall output. In 1973 Mike and Ivan Rose left the studio to set up an in-house illustration unit for a company in Hatton Garden while continuing to produce film work for Warner Bros and MGM.

In 1974 the National Gallery launched a nationwide open competition to design a poster to celebrate the gallery's 150th anniversary. Mike was awarded first prize, achieving both the honour of being the first contemporary artist to feature on a National Gallery poster and enough prize money to allow him the freedom to go freelance. Throughout the 1980s Mike enjoyed success as an independent illustrator and although the film illustration market was in decline he produced some of his best known work, notably for *The Terminator* in 1984. By the early 1990s the demand for original artwork had dried up with the advances computer graphics.

From his earliest days Mike has balanced his commercial career with that of fine art. In the early 1950s he attended classes at St Martins and Central School of Art and was showing with the Furneaux Gallery by the 1960s, holding his first London solo exhibition there in 1964. Undoubtedly his most important gallery relationship was with the great proponent of Superhumanism, Nicholas Treadwell, one of the most colourful and brilliant gallery owners of the 1960s and 70s. Treadwell was an anti-establishment figure who had begun by touring England in 1963 with a double-



decker bus and two furniture vans serving as mobile galleries. Eventually expanding into several galleries both he and the exhibitions he mounted proved tremendously popular with the public and were predictably dismissed, although not ignored, by the mainstream art press.

Mike exhibited and sold successfully with the Treadwell Gallery from 1974 until its closure in the UK in 1990. He hung in the *Superhumanism* exhibition in 1982 at the Arnold Katzen Gallery in New York where his paintings were included in a group of work acquired by the publisher Malcolm Forbes. He was also included in *Aspects of British Realism*, the landmark Ikon Gallery exhibition in 1976.

In an art world of changing fashions and tastes Mike has consistently held his position at the forefront of his profession. Now in his seventies he has continued to hold regular solo exhibitions over the last few years with some of London's leading private galleries. Every generation of new collectors have been drawn to his immaculate realist technique and charmed by his natural warmth and humour. Mike is an important artist and a member of a significant British art movement of the 1960s and 70s that is ripe for re-evaluation.

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