

## Five minutes with Sarah Graham

Monday, 08 March 2010

How inspiring to meet a local artist born and bred in Hitchin, Sarah has returned to Hitchin and is now after many years of hard work enjoying well deserved success.

I went to visit Sarah in her lovely bright studio in Bancroft and even on a cold wet morning her paintings were magical.

Q Were you always interested in art and who encouraged you?

A Starting from an early age I just loved to draw and paint, my father would come home from work bringing paint brushes, he was always interested in what I was doing and my sister and I spent a lot of time at home producing creative work. We didn't have a lot of money to spare but I look back on my childhood as a very happy time.

Q Did you go to school locally and were you able to enjoy your art classes

A I went to Oughton Head Primary School where my teacher Joyce Campbell spotted my ability and allowed me to paint the backdrops when any plays were put on at school. In fact she has followed my progress over the years and we have met up again since my return. She even showed me a thank you card I had painted all those years ago which I thanked her for being a brilliant teacher.

Q Did you enjoy secondary school as much as you obviously enjoyed your primary?

A Yes, I went to Hitchin Girls School and as well as continuing to enjoy art I progressed well academically, I actually thought I would accept the place I had been offered at Birmingham University to study psychology .

Q What happened to change your mind?

A My art teacher pointed out that I had talent and that it could be possible to pursue a career in art so I did a one year foundation course at North Herts College and then went on to do a degree in Fine Art at Leicester's De Montford University where I achieved a 2:1.

Q When did you sell your first painting?

A I had moved into a bedsit in Reading and desperately needed storage for the work I had done for my degree. A friend and I had been sharing empty rooms above a pub which were really unsuitable as there was no electricity or running water. With winter approaching we weren't sorry to be told the brewery wanted us to move and we had heard about a gallery called the Jelly Leg's Chicken .I walked across town carrying a 1m x 1.25 m beachscape I had painted to ask if they would store it for me . To my surprise they actually exhibited it and with in a week they had sold it for £1000.00 pounds &ldquo;what Joy&rdquo;.Q Selling that picture must have given you a huge boost, how did you progress from that point?

A Shortly after that sale I was lucky to get a part time job in a gallery at a low rent ,the gallery owners were friends with the owners of a flower shop who were relocating into a department store. They were looking for someone to occupy the empty shop and thought an artist might be ideal. All I had to do was sell the flowers they left at the front of the shop. This was ideal and more importantly for the first time I had my own studio space. .

Q How did you set about choosing your subject matter?

A While at university I had painted brightly coloured close ups of my fellow students, I realised the need to produce work that would appeal to galleries and a wider audience. My studio in Reading was situated next to an old fashioned model shop which was full of vintage toys. My love for bright colours and close up photography using the miniature toys and later sweets were perfect for my needs.

Q How did you manage to cope with the marketing of your work?

A Having my own studio and in between selling the flowers I built up a good body of work which enabled me to hold my first exhibition in a contemporary London Gallery and also my first A.F.F. (Affordable Art Fair).

Q The A.F.F. sounds great, did it prove successful in promoting your work?

A Yes, they were my main source of income, it enabled me to reach clients literally all over the world, in fact I was lucky to go to their first show in New York .My paintings have also been shown in Melbourne and Sydney.

Q So did you stay in your studio selling flowers on the side.

A Yes I stayed for nearly a year and then found a more suitable studio which I shared with fellow artist Charlotte Hardy,

we later became curators at the Jelly Leg&rsquo;d Chicken Gallery and continued to exhibit in galleries and fairs in London and Berkshire.

Q I know that sadly it was your father&rsquo;s unexpected death that brought you full circle back to stay in your family home, this must have been a very difficult time for you?

A Yes it was difficult but thanks to my Mum&rsquo;s support I was able to use my old bedroom as a studio and for the following three years continued to be productive. Eventually I moved to A Studio in a converted barn in Gosmore.

Q Did that work well for you?

A Yes, it was a lovely space with good lighting and I had only been there a month when I signed up with leading Fine Art publisher&rsquo;s Washington Green .

Q What impact did signing with Washington Green Have?

A It means that I can devote all my energy to my work knowing that my paintings are reaching a much wider audience. I have also moved into my lovely new studio in Bancroft, Hitchin. It has wonderful natural light and a separate room for photographing my models. An added bonus is there is enough space for my sister Elaine Graham to have her own studio in which to pursue her own painting and design work.

Sarah I have so enjoyed talking to you, I really appreciate you sparing me an hour of your precious time.

To see Sarah&rsquo;s work please visit her web sight at [www.sarahgraham.info](http://www.sarahgraham.info)

Interviewed by Marty Coe.