

Archie Davidson – my painting career

I had no intention on retirement in 1996 of picking up a paint brush, although I had a lifetime love of art galleries. The Monet exhibition of 1957 at the RSA, which filled the entire building, is still very memorable.

All I wished to do was build miniature locomotives. My fixation with the steam engine matched that with art. However, in 2003, I discovered a painting by Robert Easton Stuart, 'Maule's Corner After Rain' (1925), in the City Art Centre Collection. It is the scene from the Caledonian Station, looking towards what became Binn's (1931) then Frasers (1953) and now, presumably, the Johnny Walker Experience Corner, which doesn't seem quite right. The station closed in 1965. It was a view dear to my wife and I, and provided the motivation to attempt to paint it.



Not so much a learning curve, more a line asymptotic to infinity (there's a mathematical term which the politicians have yet to discover!). I quickly found that a lifetime of looking at Great Art does not teach one how to apply pigment to canvas, but W&N's water-soluble oil paints, a triumph of the chemist's Black (and coloured) Arts were a big help. The result was 'Binn's Corner from the Caledonian Station'. After that the model engineering interest was resumed, with an occasional painting, until some years later I lost the sight in my right eye and the 3D vision essential for precision engineering. A 2D canvas is more manageable.

I mostly paint requests from family or friends, so they have no theme, and the paintings are scattered all around. There's an 'Eileen Donan Castle' in NE China. I don't embark on large canvases in old age. I am afflicted with a derivative of that medical condition which afflicts the elderly, Green Banana Syndrome.

I have many favourite painters, too many to list, but The Colourists, The Glasgow Boys, Dundee's James Mcintosh Patrick and Edward Hopper would be included, as would Jim Nicholson and, of course, Robert Easton Stuart, although 'Maule's Corner' is his only work I have any awareness of.

While he would not qualify, I do wish the RSA could forgive Jack Vettriano his fixation with erotica and grant him a tiny corner in their galleries, but I suppose he consoles himself with his vast wealth and the knowledge that the Glasgow Boys were also once excluded.



I am unaware of artistic interest in my late family. If there was any latent talent it was kept well hidden. The art teacher at Daniel Stewart's College was the eccentric George Salveson (of The Leith Whaling Company). Younger pupils were slightly in awe of him. His fine studio was located away from the main building and he mixed minimally with colleagues. Had I stayed on to senior school I think I might have enjoyed his mannerisms and shared his recluse tendencies.

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