

Rupert's paintings capture the spirit of the landscapes

DOZENS of umbrellifers appear to float in ethereal eloquence, poetically dancing against a deep blue background.

Just the flick of a palette knife and they appear – the final touch in the composition, prepared like a well-thought out stage set waiting for them to appear.

They are a distinguished feature of the Cotswolds, as are the sheep, cow parsley, wild flowers and limestone grasses.

I have seen many landscape paintings, but these energetic, rugged, gestural works by artist Rupert Aker capture a truth about this familiar countryside.

The rural wildness, the merging boundaries between sky and land; light pouring over the hills and thus defining the edges; dark clouds and rain showers shrouding the land in a dark purple cloak or warm summer sunshine leaving the same landscape in a Ready Brek glow; are all captured by this self-taught artist.

I meet Rupert at the Gardens Gallery in Montpellier Gardens, Cheltenham where he has exhibited for many years. It is a stunning setting and a perfect context for Rupert's paintings, which act as windows on to a beautiful world we know is there but don't often appreciate or really look at.

"People ask me where a particular place is like Juniper Hill and then go out and find it. In a way my paintings are like gateways to the Cotswolds; they look at the landscape in a different way. Every corner of the Cotswolds has something interesting about it which you can try and paint," admits Rupert.

"I try and create movement and energy and make sure the paintings don't look too laboured. What I am interested in is capturing moments."

I am intrigued by two Cheltenham-inspired paintings which hang side by side. The palette is Rupert's trademark sap green, yellow ocre, blue ultramarine and burnt umber with cadmium yellow or crimson red occasionally making their appearance to pronounce a warm sunshine or vivid sea of poppies. To the left is a vibrantly coloured portrayal of Pittville Park, light shines down in dramatic fashion and colours are pronounced as the spotlight from the late evening encapsulates them. This is my favourite. It is sold so I am not alone in my attraction to the accentuation of hues. To the left is a more subdued variation of the same palette – this time provoking a sleepy misty atmosphere. It is an early morning scene in Lansdown Crescent and one can just make out two figures with push bikes. Suggestion rather than pronouncement works well here – something that Rupert and his palette knife are particularly gifted at.

Throughout the summer, Rupert is organising a number of "pop up" shows in various church



halls and public buildings. He will be exhibiting at The Tolsey House, a 16th century building, once the meeting place for medieval merchants, this Friday; May 3 and May 10. On April 14 Rupert will be putting his easels up at the 17th century Market House in Tetbury and hopes to do similar pop-up shows in other venues throughout the Cotswolds.

Rupert will also be one of many artists taking part in Stroud's popular Site Festival – a contemporary arts festival, now in its 17th year, which brings a full and dynamic programme of visual arts, performance, music, screenings, open studios, artist talks and workshops to the Stroud Valleys for the whole of May. During this month, he will be the first artist to exhibit work at Sofas and Stuff at the historic former piano factory at Woodchester, founded by Andrew Cussins, guru of British, hand-made and designed sofas since the 70s. The Woodchester showroom is the latest to open and has the perfect setting for displaying art.

"We feel it is so important for business to support the arts – and we have the perfect space here at the Mill for the display of Rupert's beautiful work," says Pamela Miri, new manager of the Woodchester showroom.

"We hope to support another artist in the same way next year."

It is an example of how businesses are embracing and supporting the arts. Mills such as Woodchester are testimony to hard-working inventive individuals who have made work for other people's pleasure. Rupert's oil landscapes and cityscapes have travelled far and wide. During the time I am with him, one person comes in to pick up a painting and another couple debate which one will suit their home best.

On his website are two well-known faces: Jamie Oliver is a proud owner of a Highland Cattle painting and Jonathan Dimbleby has a Hereford Cattle painting.

Rupert has had a love affair with the land since childhood. Brought up in a Devon surrounded by fields and woods, Rupert says he had a "very rural backwater upbringing".

Although he loved painting, he chose to study land management at the Royal Agricultural



College in Cirencester and has stayed in the Cotswolds ever since. The former woodland manager currently works for the environmental charity Soil Association – his employer for the past 15 years. One of his tasks has been to paint water colour sketches of 100 farms all over the country.

He is currently one of the five artists at the Painswick Centre and has been chairman of Painswick

Arts Festival for the past two years, coordinating the different art events that take place during the summer including the sculpture exhibition at the Rococo Garden; Art Couture and the Arts Trail. He has been exhibiting as a solo artist for the past 10 years and enjoys the personal contact with the audience.

"I love hearing the stories behind why they like a certain part of the landscape. One lady bought a painting because it was the view she remembered when she used to take her children for picnics when they were small. It meant something to her. I enjoy talking to the people who come; it means I have a link with them especially if they buy a painting," added Rupert. There is a timelessness about Rupert's paintings. The subject matter is one which has been there for centuries but the viewer has to stand still to fully appreciate the composition. It's as if one sees the countryside again with fresh eyes, drinking in the beauty, the depth and detail which are so often missed. As a landscape artist Rupert sees the importance of immersing himself in the landscape and by doing so captures the spirit of the place in a remarkable way. To see more of Rupert's work visit www.rupertaker.com

Tracy Spiers



● Rupert Aker at work and, below, some of his paintings.



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