



Hugh Webster

## Hugh Webster Painter, Felixstowe, Suffolk

Hugh studied Drawing and Print-Making at Marlborough College and Colchester Institute. He completed a BA (Hons) degree at the Norwich School of Art.

Hugh holds exhibitions every three years. Working largely with oils, his paintings express the tidal landscape of the area and the people who live and work within it.

### - What are the sources of motivation in your life ?

*Feeling free in spirit. Living, working and sailing on tidal waters; the warmth and love of family, friends and my girlfriend, who is a fellow painter; this wonderful community here at Felixstowe Ferry and boatyard, the port town of Felixstowe and its neighbour Harwich; the Walton backwaters and the four rivers; paint, music and strong gin and tonics late into the night. I have a pathological need to be independent. I mistrust authority, big industry, profit, money and the quicksands of success and applause. I hope to be a positive influence in the world. And with happiness and fun, I hope to discover 'the secret in each day.'*

### - How does your work reflect who you are ?

*I am a vulnerable human being, and all the more so for opening up to the possibilities of true, free self-expression - putting these marks and feelings on show, both when painting (this studio resembles a gold fish bowl with many in-lookers walking the beach) and when exhibiting. My work is largely concerned with tidal landscape and those people who live and work in it, their stories and myths. These factors are a huge part of my soul, character and way of being. I surround myself with drift and 'found objects' walking this tide-line. All of these feed into my work, alongside the studies painted, drawn and photographed.*

### - What does your job look like on a day to day basis ?

*Generally perceived as sitting in my large studio window or on the driftwood porch outside, gazing up the river. Drinking, contemplating, absorbing, philosophising and listening to random river people's stories; 'feeding the well'; putting off the moment of getting down to work and painting. Then, on some days, late in the day and on into the early hours, painting and pushing the creative 'flowing bowl'. Now and again a framing session is required or preparing surfaces for painting. These are disciplined weeks or 'factory days' involving power tools and process, a must need for self-control and safety.*

### - What does freedom mean to you ?

*Individual freedom is the bedrock of my life. When I was seventeen a Careers Advisor came to school to interview us 6th formers. After half an hour with me she was tearing her hair out. My outlook on life was so bleak, I just wanted to be alone to daydream and escape reality. "Where are you least unhappy?" she finally asked in desperation. "In the art room" I replied. "Then find your career there!" she said. I look back thirty-five years later and it has been the most defining force in my life - the need to feel free and to live and work for myself, and not be directed or constrained by others. Let freedom ring!*

### - How much of what you do is the result of others ?

*I owe everything of what I am and do to so many people who support and encourage me - not only by buying my work, but also with their advice, interest, love and understanding, friendship and mirth. This starts with family and friends, and their friends, and then the whole community around you, as you settle to live and work.*

### - How important has it been to you to be resourceful and seek out influences ?

*It is hugely important to listen to people and share ideas, thoughts and feelings. Do not isolate yourself and sit confident in your own narrow inexperienced opinions. As a creative being you will be fed off and feed on those artists and people around you who inspire*

*you, both living and dead. It is a very healthy melting pot of shared creativity. And on occasions the experience will be life-changing and hugely energising.*

### - Apart from the technical dimension of your work. What other skills have enabled you to be a professional painter ?

*It is very important to learn to be independent in terms of creating studio conditions and making your own frames. As is running all aspects of your own self-employed business as a painter. It is courting disaster to leave the business side of things to others - learn to do it yourself. Register for tax, employ a sympathetic accountant and pay your tax (efficiently!). Self-motivation and the skill of being prepared to change gear and work very hard under pressure to meet a deadline, is crucial. Not being able to afford luxurious holidays, a pension scheme and retirement in this life of creativity, is, however, coupled with a philosophy of relaxing in each day. Remember to take time out in each day for yourself. The skill of listening to good advice and accepting help when you make mistakes and feel lost, is also important; as is the skill of living and working on next to nothing whilst remaining honest and true to your core values. Trusting to good fortune, keeping an emotional and psychological balance while walking the tightrope of pursuing the freedom of self-expression in such a harsh world.*

### - What are the challenges of your work and how do you overcome them ?

*The nature of being a painter is to set your own visual challenges, puzzles and to resolve them. In doing so, hopefully, you will open doors for further paintings. At best, starting with a sound framework, idea, feeling and story - I hope to be surprised by what comes out, on to the work surface. The turning point in my understanding of creating, was the realisation to look out for, embrace and positively respond to accident and 'chance occurrence' in the act of making your marks and engaging with the paint. The biggest challenge over the years is keeping fresh in your approach and feeling for your work. Try not to let the need for money dull the vitality that started you off in this life as a creative being.*

### - What does it take to find a meaningful and fulfilling career, do you think ?

*Above all follow your heart. If you are not sure now in your young life, delay the moment - travel, meet different people and work with your hands. Try not to own too many things. Don't have a mortgage. Rent and develop a good sympathetic understanding - and hopefully friendship, with your landlords. Be honest with them and make sure to pay on rent day. Be wary of taking on big responsibilities not all people are cut out for this. Marriage and bringing children into this world are huge life decisions, the more so now in such a difficult and harsh financial world. Do not ever sign a 'zero hours' contract. Do not sign a contract with a gallery or dealer - they take 50% or more of your money and guarantee nothing in return. Be very careful of the level of debt that inevitably you will need, or be willing to embrace in order to achieve your desires. Remember, the chances of winning the lottery are 40,000,000 to 1. The odds at the bookies or the financial houses are stacked against you, and can become insurmountable. Be wary of trusting to modern technology without also keeping in touch with the old ways of doing things, communicating and thinking for yourself. Be flexible - these days a job hardly ever means for life.*

**- What advice would you give to anyone considering a career ?**

*"For god's sake don't do it!" No, seriously, follow your heart, defy gravity - the gravity that the whole adult world around you presses you with. There was an ennobled member of Thatcher's government in the 1980's who I heard a recorded interview of on the radio, saying "If you are over thirty and on a bus, you are a failure in life." I heard that at the age of thirty-eight. Careless and sitting on a bus, I smiled. It is so important that you are happy in your work place and life. If you can possibly achieve that you are a success.*

**- Why paint ?**

*I love the freedom of expression that paint offers. My drawings act as a scaffold on which to wrap my brush strokes. Oil gives me the most freedom and I have experienced its qualities right back to making the paint on a small industrial scale from pigment and oil for Arthur Boyd. To paint really freely is to release that wild five-year old child from within. Oil paint is wonderfully luscious, rich sensual stuff with stunning depth of colour. It allows a very direct, immediate form of self-expression. It is very versatile, exciting, dangerous, messy, glorious, physical, splashy, slurpy stuff that I immerse myself in using my hands as much as my brushes.*

**- What is your favourite quote ?**

*"Before the reformation, life was supposed to be about contemplation, philosophy and the intelligent use of leisure."*



In 1988 Hugh was awarded a David Murray Studentship by the Royal Academy. From 1992-97 he worked as a part-time assistant to the late Australian painter, Arthur Boyd

Since then he has worked as a full-time painter and has held twelve one-man exhibitions.

Hugh's studio is in a converted boatshed on the edge of the River Deben, Felixstowe, Suffolk. Two mornings a week he runs a renowned art workshop.