

# Stephen Bishop: Impressions of Dorset

Jeremy Miles meets the Poole artist who revels in Impressionism



Stephen painting on the Dorset coast



Wading

Stephen Bishop holds up his palette knife gazes intently at the distant horizon. "I love the colours you get, the light shining off the sea," he murmurs, before returning to his painting.

This Poole-based artist, who featured on the BBC2 *Show Me The Monet*, is in impressionistic heaven. With his easel anchored firmly into a sand dune at Studland Bay he is doing what he loves best – enjoying an idyllic slice of coastal scenery and painting his beloved Dorset.

Bishop fell in love with the county as a child during his family's annual camping holiday to Langton Matravers. He subsequently moved there 12 years ago. "As an artist you keep a kind of childlike inquisitiveness about you, and the link of having been here as a child is all part of the process," he tells me.

With a passion for painting landscape from nature and working in all weathers, he doggedly continues painting whatever the elements throw at him. In high winds he ties his easel and canvas in place with guy-ropes. In torrential rain he carries on until the oil paint no longer sticks to the canvas. "I rather like the idea of suffering for my art, I feel I'm paying my dues." Being baked by the sun, lashed by rain, and buffeted by wind and sand can also add some

intriguing effects to his paintings.

A keen Flamenco dancer, he performs regularly with his girlfriend, Julie, Stephen also calls on the rhythms of flamenco music. "It's a really strong living art form, its rhythmical qualities and sense of composition definitely overlap with my painting," he enthuses.

Catching the Sandbanks ferry to work, Stephen can regularly be found painting in remote coastal locations. Leaving the albeit upmarket urban sprawl of Poole behind he pitches up in a landscape that time seems to have forgotten. "Every day I feel that I'm going into a slightly different world and of course that's what my work is driving at – the link with nature, the link with the past." Sometimes it's the Purbecks, sometimes it's the further reaches of west Dorset. He tells me there's a lifetime's work in the Dorset landscape.

Bishop says he also finds inspiration in two of Dorset's favourite novelists – Thomas Hardy and John Fowles. The overarching influences though remain his painterly heroes – masters of landscape, colour and imagination like Constable, Turner, Monet, Matisse and, perhaps above all, Van Gogh. "Van Gogh has



**The Ledge**

With his easel anchored firmly into a sand dune at Studland Bay he is doing what he loves best



**'Dissolving', which featured in the BBC series *Show Me The Monet***



**The Cry Through Time**



**Roll Up, Roll Up,  
It's Showtime**

always been incredibly important to me. His attack, his emotion, the way he worked from nature was incredible. He almost feels like a brother to me. I've looked at his work and read his words so many times that I feel that I have a real connection with him."

Bishop wanted to be an artist from an early age. His mother it seems knew even better and apparently insisted that her son should be called Stephen with a 'ph' rather than a 'v' because it would look better as a signature on a canvas. After training at the Berkshire College of

Art, he worked as an architectural illustrator, but being a slave to the demands of clients always rankled and four years ago he finally broke free and became a full-time artist.

"I wanted to be as creative as possible, to have the freedom to work without anyone sticking their oar in. I don't believe in compromising and in that way I haven't made things easy for myself, but frankly I've never been looking for a comfy ride. I absolutely love what I'm doing now."

He has mixed feelings about

appearing on *Show Me the Monet*, which offered the chance to submit his work to the scrutiny of three major art critics, with the chance of featuring in an exhibition at the Royal College of Art. Unfortunately the experts, Charlotte Mullins, David Lee and Roy Bolton, collectively known as 'The Hanging Committee', couldn't entirely agree about Stephen's work, entitled 'Dissolving'. Even though it beat 1,200 other works to make the final shortlist of 90, and inspired David Lee to quote the poetry of John Betjeman, it didn't make it to the exhibition.

"That was really disappointing," he says, adding that his aim when he entered the competition was to get

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through to the final. "It would have been a brilliant platform for my work. At the end of the day though, the judges were looking at my painting for a matter of minutes and had to make a decision. I think my work takes a little while to have a conversation with people."

However, that aside, Stephen is convinced that the exercise was a good business strategy. "To actually have critics giving an opinion on your work, having several cameras trained on you and having to respond instantly was a very useful experience. It will put me in a good place to deal with this kind of thing in the future." □

*Stephen's work will feature in the Summer Exhibition at the Artwave West Gallery in Morcombelake until 6 August. You can see more of his work at [stephenbishop.co.uk](http://stephenbishop.co.uk)*