

The Allotment Painter

Emma Bond talks to Penny Richards about finding art and inspiration in a neat rows of cabbages

I was recently introduced to Penny Richards's paintings by a friend and was really drawn to her style as well as her subject. I went to meet her at her home in Keynsham where she showed me her work, currently adorning the walls of her house.

As someone who loves anything to do with allotments and sheds, I was amazed at the way Penny is able to create beautiful images from the everyday and mundane, including sheds, people gardening, old chairs and objects found on the allotment. Using acrylic paints as well as creating texture using found ephemera such as old seed packets or allotment flyers, she builds up layers of colour and texture to produce unusual and unique pieces of art.

Penny has lived and worked near Bath

for a long time and has painted since she was a small child. When she was growing up, her mother was an amateur botanical painter but Penny knew from her early years that she wanted to paint in a looser and more relaxed way. For many years she immersed herself creatively in sculpture, ceramics, weaving and printmaking then returned to painting as relaxation from teaching.

“Talk to Penny about sheds and her eyes light up”

Throughout her life she has attended many art courses. When her children were young she started helping out at the local infants school teaching art and later attended a mature teacher's course at Newton Park, now Bath Spa University, studying art and design. This course filled the gaps in her knowledge and she taught art in primary schools until she retired.

It's obvious from Penny's work that she loves texture and colour and she told me that she was very inspired by the beach huts in Southwold while on holiday there some years ago. This created for her the idea of uniformity as well as individuality and this informs her work, and is evident in the rows of sheds or houses she paints. Talk to Penny about sheds and her eyes light up! She is a woman after my own

Penny uses acrylic paints to create beautiful images from everyday allotment sights – bamboo poles, wheel barrows and contented gardeners



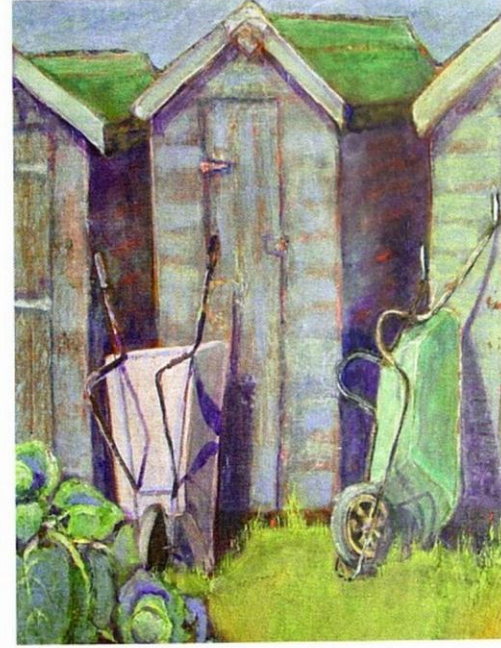
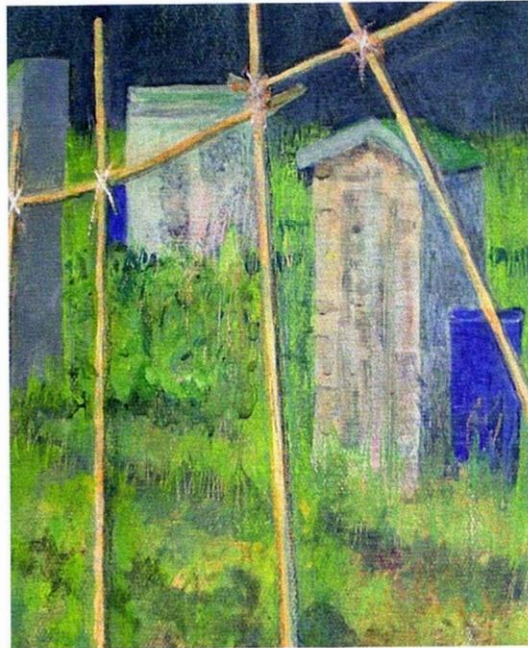
heart, and she also loves the diversity and originality in so many of the sheds found on allotments, the way that people personalise them, paint or restore them and put their own personal stamp on them. She feels the quirky nature of them reflects human nature and this is also evident in her paintings.

Walks and wanderings

Penny has always loved gardening and had her own garden as a small child growing annuals such as cosmos and nasturtiums. Vegetables are a new find and she loves growing food in her garden, particularly at the moment the dark green leaves of Cavolo Nero. She loves painting vegetables but not in a detailed botanical sense, more as a series of shapes and patterns. One of her paintings shows wonderful lines of cabbages, turning them from the everyday to things of beauty.

Although Penny does not have her own allotment she loves being in them and drawing them, she relishes the whole ethos of recycling, make do and mend, as well as the obvious vegetable growing. All appeal to her artistic mind: the neat rows of cabbages, the straight lines and rows offset often by mess and chaos.

During the spring and summer months, Penny organises walks and wanderings where she takes small groups of people on sketching and painting walks, either



around Hanham Court gardens, or along the Chew Valley, taking in the views and stopping periodically to sketch or paint trees or interesting cottages or buildings. She also plans walks near Widcombe Lock in Bath and Totterdown in Bristol, where the coloured rows of houses are particularly appealing to draw and paint because of their rhythmical pattern, this pattern which is repeated again and again echoed either in lines of vegetables or rows of houses or chimney pots. **BL**

• Penny takes commissions for her work. A selection of her paintings is available to view on her website. Go to www.pennyrichards.co.uk
Framed pictures start at £300.

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