



At the top of his game

Artist Jeremy Houghton's work conveys a powerful message of unity, freedom and togetherness, says Tracy Spiers, and this month his latest residency will see him capturing the energy and high drama of Wimbledon

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A flamboyance of pink birds elegantly flies across a wide canvas. I can almost hear the flap of flamingo wings and loud squawks as they go. It's as if time has stood still and yet the movement defies that, suspending them between the then and now.

As I look more closely, not one line defines these flamingos; instead the energetic gesture of brushstrokes creates a glorious mingle of colours and shapes with powerful impact.

Next to them an arresting image of

racehorses stampedes before me in a limited palette of blue ink, and I sense their hurried pace. While the faint gasp of a fisherman is almost audible as he swings his rod in anticipation of his next catch, beautifully illuminated in light. This is artistry of movement and it's the work of well-acclaimed artist Jeremy Houghton, who is held in high esteem in the world of sport be it motor racing, cycling, sailing, polo or horse racing, as an artist who captures action, speed and the thrill every spectator loves.

Jeremy enables the viewer to fill in the gaps.

He is keen to capture what most of us fail to see – the in between. It's as if he, the artist, stands in a corridor, leaving one room yet not quite entering another, suspended in time. His figures or animals have that timeless quality too. They are doing what they are made for, yet captured in time for us to appreciate the energy and effort involved in such activity.

Jeremy achieves this ability to communicate liminal space by flicking between figuration and abstraction so boundaries dissolve and freedom reigns. Similarly, Jeremy balances the two sides of his working life, between studio time as solitary painter and being out on location with a business head on. The in between, or the gap in this sense is equally important. This is spent running or in the gym, relaxing with family and recharging the batteries so he is mentally, physically and emotionally at peak form to tackle both studio and out on the field challenges.

He has in many ways the mentality of a sportsman, setting goals to take him out of his comfort zone, trying to stretch and challenge himself beyond the now to ensure his work stays fresh.

"Keeping fit for me is so important. There is such a tiny margin between what makes a good athlete into a great one, and this is the same between a good painting and a great one," he says.

"For me it's all about energy, if I have been up with the children or eaten a big Christmas lunch, I am not as productive in the studio as I could be."

Setting monthly goals is a key strategy for Jeremy, who aims to have an exhibition a month, be it six paintings in a shop, or a big show in London.

"If I have one thing in the diary that I am working towards, it keeps me going."

Over the years Jeremy has earned a reputation as a high profile artist in residence. He was the official artist for the London 2012 Olympic Games; a year later he served as artist in residence at Highgrove and in 2014 took up the challenge at Windsor Castle. Last year he was official artist for the James Hunt 40th anniversary and as I meet him at his studio – an 1880 barn on his parent's farm near Broadway – he is working as artist in residence for Land Rover Ben Ainslie Racing and the America's Cup.

But perhaps his July residency has caused the green-eyed monster to rise amongst his friends. As thousands of tennis fanatics flock to Wimbledon for 14 days of outstanding ball play, Jeremy will be there amongst them, armed with sketchbook, watercolours, pencils, camera and 'an access all areas' pass.

"I have many offers to hold my paintbrushes and

I have a queue of people wanting to be my assistant right now!" he tells me.

Unlike Jeremy's previous residencies which can last months, if not more than a year, his Wimbledon residency will be compact – just two weeks. It is also not often he gets given a brief to work to.

"Normally past artists at Wimbledon have been asked to capture what happens behind the scenes, but they want me to produce six paintings of all the finals for their collection."

"I have got two weeks to enjoy the tennis, take down all the information I need in my sketchbook and then I will give myself a break from it, so I can return afresh to then edit what I need."

Like the rest of us Brits, Jeremy is hoping Andy Murray lifts the trophy and that his painting can immortalise the winning match. Art residencies carrying such calibre and prestige surely must be a little intimidating and overwhelming at first, especially with a historical event such as the London 2012 Olympics? Yet Jeremy responds in the way he knows best, allowing himself the time to soak in the scene, keeping his eyes out for the unexpected and the narratives that others may miss. And then there is the issue of translating that into a composition which captures that sense of being there and the thrill of the moment.

"There is often too much to see, too much content. Sketches are my essential aid and then there is the process of editing. I have to work out what the real nuggets or kernels are before I start deleting."

When he does start removing detail, something magical happens. Somehow

'I have got two weeks to enjoy the tennis, take down all the information I need in my sketchbook and then I will give myself a break from it, so I can return afresh to then edit what I need'





Jeremy manages to create a timelessness to his images, as if a set of negatives have been taken out of an old Box Brownie. He adds to this effect by often using a limited palette.

Jeremy is keen to find the untold stories, documenting moments to share with others who wouldn't necessarily experience them. What I'm itching to know is what did he consider the real nuggets of the Royal households of Windsor and Highgrove?

"It was amazing to be in a castle steeped in history. I ended up painting the castle through the eyes of the horse. I felt there was an interesting parallel of the horse having both a private and a personal role which echoed that of the Royals," he replies.

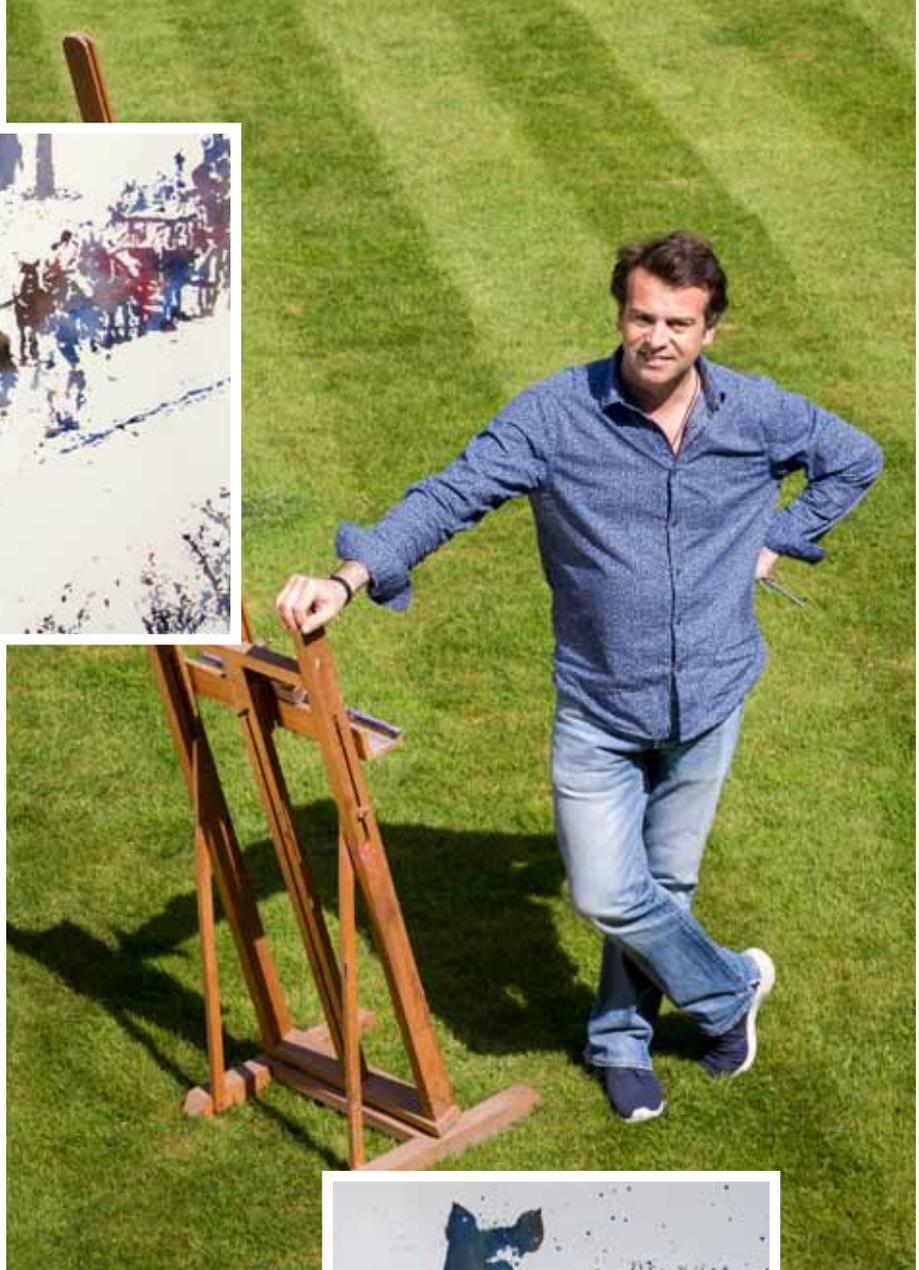
In terms of Highgrove, where he spent 18 months and was given a blank canvas, it was HRH the Prince of Wales who inspired him.

"I wanted to capture beyond the garden fence and tell the untold stories. His vision was my inspiration."

As I stand in Jeremy's studio barn surrounded by a plethora of work, the commonality between each painting – whether it is done in biro, ink, acrylic, pencil, or oil - is the tremendous sense of light and movement they portray. They also convey a powerful message of unity, freedom and togetherness – something which is very much needed in today's world.

"It's why I love painting birds in flight. A wild bird flies freely and the global boundaries put up which are manmade and artificial are redundant. I think we can learn a lot from nature," he says.

A Cotswold lad, Jeremy still lives in his childhood town of Broadway with his wife and two young daughters, who create their own masterpieces for him to frame. He originally studied law, but his first passion was art. As a child his mother taught him how to use watercolours and at boarding school he spent many an hour in the art room to keep homesickness at bay. His university holidays were spent painting and travelling in a camper van. Jeremy has been painting full-time since the mid-2000s

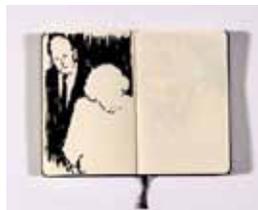


Above left: Royal Procession, by Jeremy Houghton
Above: Jeremy Houghton ready for Wimbledon
Right: Groveling at Highgrove, by Jeremy Houghton
Below: The Queen, by Jeremy Houghton

and his portfolio is both extensive and impressive. Yet this is an artist who is always looking, always pushing to improve and learn. Indeed he has just obtained an MA in Fine Art by research from the University of Gloucestershire. And now with his studies behind him, he is looking upwards – quite literally – for his next dream project.

"I would love to do an art residency for the Red Arrows because for me it encompasses everything I love: sport, flight and the military."

As I look back at the canvas which first caught my eye – I can easily see a red bird formation rather than a pink one. However Jeremy's priority right now is to keep his eye on a bright yellow ball to ensure he doesn't miss the winning shots at Wimbledon. ♦



www.jeremyhoughton.co.uk