

# By Royal Appointment

Candia McKormack meets artist Jeremy Houghton in his studio near Broadway to learn more about his new paintings of the Highgrove Estate

**T**o say Jeremy is prolific is like saying that flamingos are a little bit pink. He always has at least two projects on the go, moving fluidly from one to the other.

“It’s quite a good thing,” he says, “as it keeps you fresh. If you have two bodies of work you can move backwards and forwards between each and it means that you can give thought processes a rest, sleep on it and then come back to it.”

As I speak to Jeremy, he’s busy preparing his Aston Martin exhibition for the Heritage Motoring Centre at Gaydon, Warwickshire, using his distinctive contrast-y style that has a definite look of aged photography to it.

“The monochromatic stuff is focusing on movement and light, and a lot of sports come into that field. So when Aston Martin asked if I’d like to take part in their centenary tour, it was something I jumped at. Aston Martin captures the speed, the movement, the light and the nostalgia, which is what I’m trying to get across with the monochromatic work. It’s quite nice having that broad definition with all the different sports; be it the Aston Martin cars, the work from Highgrove or the Olympics.

Ah yes, the Highgrove paintings which he’s currently working on - along with many others - is what I’ve come to his studio to learn more about today.

“This, however,” he says, nodding towards his blazingly vivid flamingo paintings, “is a different thing entirely. It’s just me mucking about with colour and is very liberating.”

He is, of course, being incredibly modest as his beautifully imagined and executed body of work is highly respected and sought-after. Not one to rest on his laurels, however, he’s constantly questioning and re-evaluating what he’s doing.

“I am trying to make the two styles collide so I’m doing a lot of monochromatic birds in flight. It’s interesting to have a collision of the two very different styles.”

He’s staging an exhibition of his famous flamingo paintings in January at Slimbridge, so it will be interesting to see



Top: Ploughing on the Highgrove Estate Below Left: Jeremy Houghton in his office near Broadway Below Right: Old Spot pigs on the Highgrove Estate, by Jeremy Houghton



how his distinctive birds emerge in the New Year.

“I think with artists it’s important to keep challenging yourself, to keep taking yourself out of your comfort zone, keep trying new things, and moving onto the next stage.”

There’s something very abstract about his flamingo paintings; fuchsia, baby pink, raspberry and cerise mix fluidly with azure, cobalt and ultramarine in an intoxicating haze of colour. The heat of the African sun distorts their myriad forms into a psychotropic, shimmering mirage of pink on blue. Stunningly mesmeric.

Although he has his family home nearby, which he shares with his wife and two daughters, Jeremy works from the farmhouse that his grandfather - Colin

Houghton, a well known and respected doctor in Broadway - bought in the 1930s, and in which his parents still live. Jeremy previously studied law from the back of his VW camper van while based down in Exeter - and he stuck at it for three years to gain his LLB degree. The camper van also fed his wanderlust and served as a mobile painting studio so that he was able to satisfy his real love - that of Art.

Recently he’s been spending time Burnham, Essex, where he has a gallery, and so he’s been focusing on his sailing pictures. His time back home in the Cotswolds, though, is filled with other sporting pursuits...

“I’ve been doing a lot of polo this summer, and racing is a bit of a theme for me too - there’s such movement, such ▶

energy to it, and being in the Cotswolds you can't really escape it so, yes, horses are a bit of a recurring theme," he smiles.

Jeremy's series of paintings for the Olympics last year covered almost every discipline, in his distinctive, bold monochromatic style.

"While I was doing the sailing work for the Olympics, I got on the back of the RIB with the sailing coach and it was almost like riding: you had to hold on tight with one hand on the RIB and one on the camera; they moved so fast, it was incredibly exciting."

So, how did he become involved with the Highgrove project?

"I did some paintings of the Gentlemen at Arms, the Queen's ceremonial bodyguards, as it was their 500th Anniversary in 2009. They wanted me to follow them to all the State functions, and so I went to venues such as St Paul's, Westminster, St James's Palace and Windsor. It was through this work that someone from Clarence House saw my work, heard I was a Cotswold boy, and approached me. I didn't think much of it until I got an email asking me to send my portfolio to Clarence House, and then I got the green light to go ahead and paint at Highgrove.

"It was a wonderfully broad commission in that there were no real dos and don'ts - I had a licence to roam and I was able to paint what I wanted to on the Estate."

Many people are familiar with Highgrove now as it has thrown open its gates to visitors from across the globe, but Jeremy wanted to see what was 'beyond the garden wall'.

"There's a whole massive estate there that is farmed organically, using traditional techniques: ploughing with shire horses, dry-stone walling, hedge-laying and other age-old techniques that are dying out. There are also all these great characters that are working behind the scenes that you don't really see or hear of, and for me it was more interesting to focus on that aspect of Highgrove rather than the façade most of us know.

And what did His Royal Highness think of Jeremy's paintings?

"I think he quite liked the idea that his vision had inspired my work. He'd seen my paintings of his mother that were done in a very traditional watercolour style, but I was keen to do the Highgrove paintings in this style," he says indicating a bold painting in shades of blue of a shire horse ploughing, "as I wanted them to be timeless.

"The style embraces the past as much as it embraces the future, and HRH is constantly reiterating his thoughts that we



'Girls Get In For Free', oil on canvas, by Jeremy Houghton

"In 2012 Jeremy Houghton spent 14 weeks at Highgrove, in Gloucestershire, and produced a series of paintings, some of which you will see at this exhibition. It is a splendid collection of unusual watercolours, that truly captures the spirit of Highgrove and Home Farm.

It is extraordinarily generous of Jeremy to offer these paintings for the exhibition, the sales of which will ensure that all proceeds will go towards the great work of the Countryside Fund, helping farmer and rural communities to protect our cherished landscape for the benefit of future generations."

**HRH The Prince of Wales**

should embrace traditional and organic farming techniques. In many ways he's showing us how we should learn the lessons of the past to help us with the future." ■

• Jeremy Houghton's Highgrove exhibition will preview at The Goring, London, on November 11, then return to his studio near Broadway on November 12, 13, 14 & 15. It will be open to the public by appointment; call 07981 655515 or

email [simone@houghtonart.co.uk](mailto:simone@houghtonart.co.uk) for more information and to book.

All proceeds from auctioning of the paintings will go to the Prince's Countryside Fund.

To see more of Jeremy's work visit [www.jeremyhoughton.co.uk](http://www.jeremyhoughton.co.uk)

• Jeremy will also be exhibiting his Flamingo paintings at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, in January 2014. Visit his website for more information.