

Brighton belle

FAYE WHITTAKER IS A SUCCESSFUL PAINTER WHO STRADDLES BOTH THE FINE ART AND THE COMMERCIAL-ART MARKETS. HER "ALL OUR YESTERDAYS" COLLECTION IS DISTRIBUTED INTERNATIONALLY IN LIMITED-EDITION PRINTS AND ACROSS A WIDE-RANGE OF PRODUCTS. BEHIND THESE NOSTALGIC IMAGES LIES A SHARP BUSINESS MIND WHICH HAS BROUGHT HER A LEVEL OF SUCCESS ACHIEVED BY FEW CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS – ALL WHILST TRIUMPHING OVER HER HEARING-IMPAIRMENT. KNIGHT HOOSON CATCHES UP WITH HER IN HER BRIGHTON STUDIO.

THIS ISSUE OF reFRESH has a section about inspirational women. How do you feel about being included? Very excited indeed.

Who or what inspires you? I am inspired by the sunshine and the colours – the blue sky. I just love the sea and being by the shore. It fills me. Wherever I live, I am by the sea.

Tell me about your art training? I trained at a small art college outside Liverpool – Southport College of Art, from the age of 15. I was the only girl in the school, so I loved it!

When you finished college you moved to San Francisco. What was that like? That was really fun! I was only 20 or 21 at the time. I just fell in love with San Francisco. There is something about it, once you get off the plane you feel welcomed. They just love their art – I sold lots of pictures around Fisherman's Wharf.

What advice would you give to young artists? If you see any artists that you admire, especially living artists, see if you can get any information on how to market your

work. I started as a street artist. If there was an office free, with a shop window in the town centre, I would find out who owned that place and say "can I have a display?".

Were you born deaf? I was born with it. I always say it is more an asset than a hindrance. I am proud of it.

Why? Because for each sense that dies in the body, or is a little bit lessened, you make up for it. So I feel that my intuition and eyesight have helped me throughout my life. I can see everything, and my intuition is quite strong too.

Why did you choose Brighton to settle in? I think after living in San Francisco and living in the South of France, and loving England – it is like putting the three together and I can't find another place in England that encompasses everything together.

PICTURED CLOCKWISE FROM FAR RIGHT: FAYE IN VENICE; WINDY DAY; SWEET DREAMS; LORD STREET 1908



Do you have much interaction with the large gay community in Brighton? Yes. Some of my best friends are gay.

Are they supportive of your work? I find a lot of my work is sold to the gay community – I seem to capture something they like.

How did your licensing arrangements come about? This came about over 10 years ago when I had a gallery in The Lanes. The people from DMC (a 250-year-old company which services the €15 billion international craft market) saw my work there and they wanted to put it into stitch-kits. At the time, I refused. They said "please, just let me do one stitch-kit for you in your designs," so I said yes. Within one year, I was the best-selling designer in Europe.

What other licensing arrangements do you have? I have cups, books, clocks, thimbles, etc. I go to New York twice a year especially to tap into the American market.

How do Americans react to these English scenes? They just love it. I do find that my work seems to sell well all over the world because most people have children and that is how they want to remember their own childhood. They love to reminisce and say "when I was a girl, I used to stand by the sea." The American market is so good for me because it is such a big place, so for every single licence I get there it is like 10-fold what I get here.

How many of your licensed products are sold annually? I can't say exactly, but I have sold millions of prints. It's a wonderful business!

What does the future hold? I still want to do more in the American market and I am leaning more and more towards the selling of original and limited-edition prints – what

I call the higher end of the market. I will be doing exhibitions. That is where I am headed. The commercial side sits pretty much on its own – I don't need to do much at all – but with the fine art, that's where my passion is.

I have a book coming about in October – a Faye Whittaker book of the cross-stitch designs. It is the first of a series of books – there's going to be one every other year. And I am writing a book on my own story; basically it is about how to make your art pay. How do you deal with criticism? I just turn my hearing aids off!

If you weren't a painter, what would you be?

Something off-beat, like an Astronaut! I have quite a wacky side to me. I like flying and I like speed... it doesn't really go with my pictures does it?

Do you like fast cars? Yes. And jet-ski! I am kind of a 50 year old woman trapped in a 20 year old mind!

Do you have any famous collectors? Princess Diana bought a picture once. It was a picture of two little boys – it was when William and Harry were little and the picture reminded her of them. I wish I had been there to meet her!

Tell me a secret? Treat life as a game! That's what keeps you happy and successful!



Receive an invitation to one of Faye's exhibition openings by emailing her at faye@fayewhittakerarts.com