

Painting in the genes of local gallery owner

Long line of artists in Petley-Jones family

By Cheryl Rossi, Vancouver Courier May 14, 2010



Gallery owner and painter Matt Petley-Jones says unlike his famous uncle Llewellyn, he's more of an expressionist, as evidenced in his Exuberant Coast series on display until May 20.

Photograph by: Dan Toulgoet, Vancouver Courier

Now 56, local gallery owner and nephew of internationally known painter Llewellyn Petley-Jones, Matt Petley-Jones is more comfortable about mounting his own solo shows at his South Granville gallery. "Now I feel confident that I have a niche to fill and I've got my own energy that I want to create images with," said Petley-Jones, owner of the Petley Jones Gallery, which specializes in 19th and 20th century Canadian, European and American paintings, collections and original prints.

His Exuberant Coast series of sea-to-sky vistas is on display at 2235 Granville St. until May 20. It follows his first solo show of Alberta landscapes at the gallery a year and a half ago. Petley-Jones always looked up to his famous painter uncle, Llewellyn. "I think that's one reason I stopped painting, at first, was because I would go and visit him and I'd see that the only thing in the world to him was painting," the affable Petley-Jones said. "He didn't drive a car, everything he talked about was artists he knew or painting, and he was up at 6 or 7 in the morning, out painting, everyday, unless it was pouring rain and then he'd build stretchers in the studio, or something. Petley-Jones experienced that he, too, could become obsessed with painting when he first completed art school in 1978. He didn't want to isolate himself and the current resident of Kerrisdale wanted to live more comfortably than most artists do, so he took a job in the tax department with the B.C. government, buying and selling paintings on the side. His parents wanted him to work a stable job with a pension, but it wasn't the life Petley-Jones wanted. He opened his gallery, first at West 57th Avenue and East Boulevard in Kerrisdale in 1986, the same year Llewellyn died, and moved it in 1989 to South Granville, keeping his technique alive by restoring paintings by Emily Carr and Jean-Paul Riopelle while building his collection of 40 guitars that date from the 1850s to 1970.

Petley-Jones hails from a long line of artists. His great, great, great grandfather, Robert Petley, produced lithographic views of Canada in the 1800s, some of which are displayed at the National Gallery of Canada. Llewellyn hobnobbed at the Dome Café in Paris with the likes of Picasso and Matisse, was commissioned to paint portraits of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh by the Alberta Government for its legislative building, painted for Max Stern of the Dominion Gallery in Montreal, enjoyed sold-out shows in the 1950s and has work in the National Gallery of Wales.

Another uncle, Stan, who lives in Victoria, continues to paint at age 99, and Petley-Jones' parents made their livings as photographers. His father, William Melville, or Mel, shot portraits of Alberta premiers and was commissioned to do numerous hand-tinted murals for the government building in Edmonton.

Petley-Jones says Llewellyn, working with watercolours, told him if you didn't complete a sky in three minutes, it wouldn't work out. Petley-Jones took that advice to heart and, like his uncle, aims to create skies and landscapes that flow. The sky in his "Clouds of Blue" acrylic work that hangs across from the entrance to his gallery includes pale, puffy clouds and roiling black ones. Another painting incorporates unexpected dashes of purple on a beach while Petley-Jones says his cliff/sea depiction, "Solid Formation" includes clear, concise areas of colour.

Unlike his famous uncle, Petley-Jones says he's more of an expressionist and less of an impressionist. He loves colour and tries to achieve harmony in his work. Petley-Jones says he's sold a number of pieces and a couple from New York is interested in his latest work, but he's not content with it yet. "At least after working so hard and seeing so many paintings throughout my whole career, I feel like I know where to go, and it's just going to take a lot of work to get to it, but it's going to be there eventually," he said.

crossi@vancourier.com

© Copyright (c) Lower Mainland Publishing
