



Pin-up 1968, David Freeman

A Life in Art

“ It is like looking back over the story of my life and is a reminder of all the wonderful things I have seen and experienced. ”

Firsts. Our first laugh or smile, the first small and unsteady first steps we take, the first hint of a tooth growing out of virgin gums, a nerve-racking first day of school, the awkward romance and unsure kisses of a first date, a first love that breaks your heart.

For most of us firsts are something that happen when we are young, when we are experimenting and growing. But for some of us, firsts are not something that happen first.

After 60 years of keeping his work private, this May saw local artist David Freeman exhibit what was to be his first and last public exhibition. Held at the Sam Scorer gallery 'A Celebration of a Life in Art' was an astounding success; an overwhelming testament to his talent and modesty.

With a life times worth of his work, spanning more than six decades on display, David's paintings, sketches and poems alike were received in awe and with high acclaim by those privileged enough to see them. This amazing collection was sadly followed by David's death eight weeks later.

Looking at his extensive collection, his life's work, David's story, his inspirations and passions are almost palpable. It is clear that David had a wonderful life, filled with family and friends, you can almost track his progress and movements as his paintings change landscape and style charting the course to his final art destination, the Life in Art exhibition



**As a father, he was gentle
and kind, totally consistent.
As kids we were always
encouraged to find beauty
in places you wouldn't
always expect to find it.**



Having been happily out of the public eye for decades, David was not the instigator for the exhibition as his son, David Motion explains. "It was an idea that came from my sister Katrin and her husband Ray in early summer 2010. They talked about an exhibition while our father was still able to be involved."

"My other sister Claudia and I thought it was a brilliant idea and lobbied our parents hard to get them on-board. The gallery had a cancellation for May which suited us and the rest was all about trying to keep everything as clear and simple as possible. Our parents put together a list of what they wanted to show, which was pretty much everything in their house, plus a handful of paintings they'd given to friends," David Motion said.

"Dad was also keen to present his poems and he prepared a list and a clip folder with all of them, we were surprised how many there were. As time progressed, we also thought it would be nice to show some of his sketchbooks. We came to the conclusion it would be impractical to show them under glass and decided to scan them and show them on a rolling video display driven off a laptop or a USB stick."

After the long months of planning, long days and nights filled with anticipation and clouded by emotion were to follow. With a combination of nervousness and excitement coursing through them, all the Freeman family could do in the lead up to the exhibition was wait.

"We were overwhelmed by the response," David Motion continued. "It proved to be a very successful exhibition, with very high footfall. Even people who knew him professionally and socially were surprised and amazed by how much he produced, its quality and diversity."

Having studied at Leicester's School of Art, David's passion for painting started young; when asked why art, David simply said it was something he could do. After training as a teacher David went on to have a successful career in education, becoming an art advisor for Lindsey in 1967 and later the art inspector for the whole of Lincolnshire.

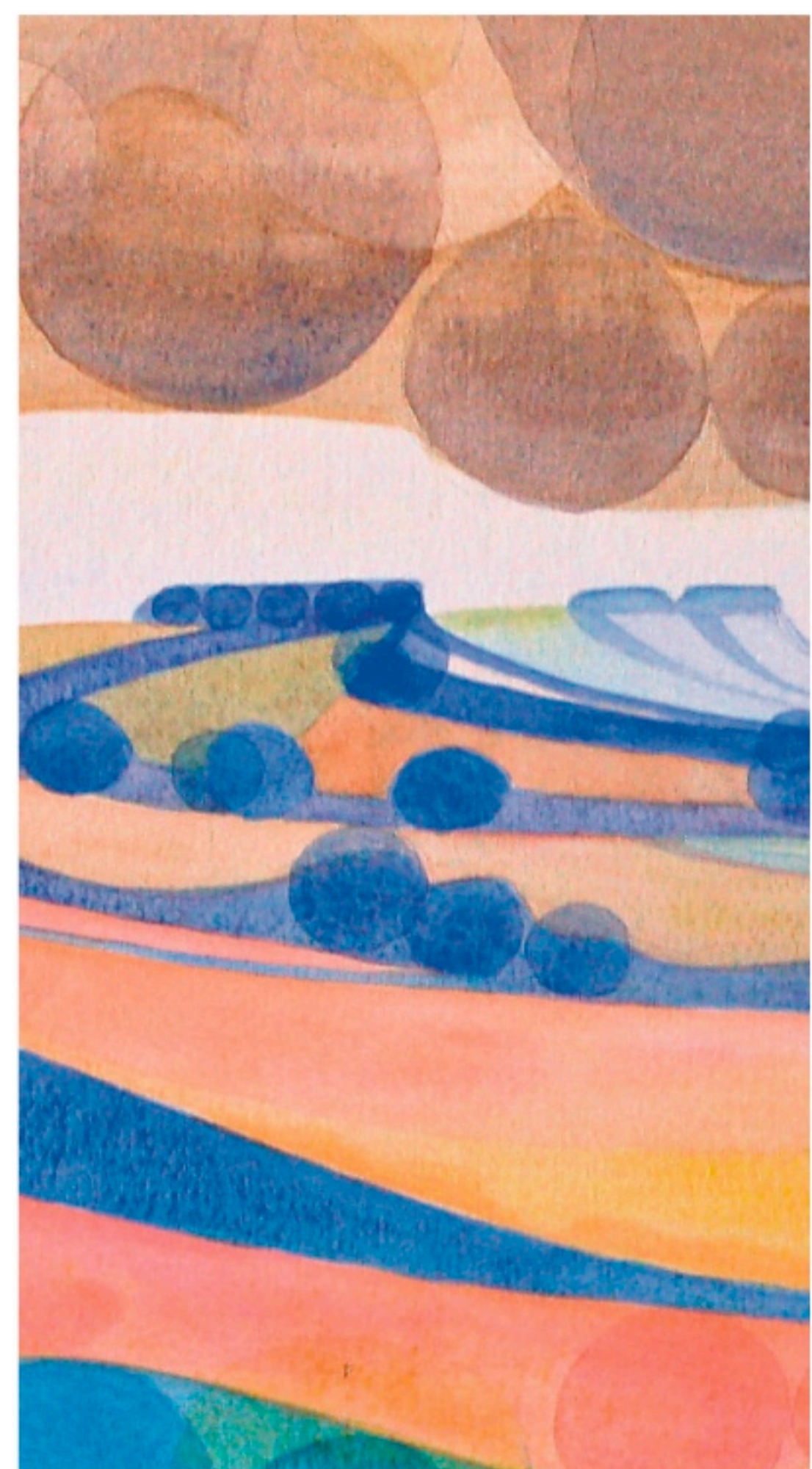
Until his retirement in 1994, David was responsible for the education of art design for the entire county, as well as being an active and enthusiastic member of the local planning advisory group and Chair to Friends of Lincoln's Museums and Art Galleries.

With a bright future in art education ahead, David never had to rely on his paintings for income, one of the reasons why his work stayed so private for so many years. David Motion said: "As long as I can remember Dad was an Artist, always sketching and painting."

But he had a full-time job in art education and didn't need to sell them to make a living. Also, our Mum liked the pictures too much and didn't want them sold. He was also sensitive about his position as art inspector where he would occasionally have to sit in judgement over other artists."

David married Inge in 1959, the same year that the first of their three children was born. Just as painting was second nature to David, so was parenthood; his unique vision and approach to life and art flourished, taking inspiration from his surroundings. "As a father, he was gentle and kind, totally consistent," David Motion explained. "As kids we were always encouraged to find beauty in places you wouldn't always expect to find it."

I also remember him suggesting that Art was anything you put a frame around.



A frame was a way of directing attention towards anything the artist chooses. Dad as an artist...it's hard for me to be objective. Having always been surrounded by his art, it was always the benchmark for me. Although he was always deeply modest, and often over-critical of his art, to me the work itself always seems very assured, quietly confident."

However over critical David might have been about his own work, others had nothing but praise for his art. Peter Moss, ceramic artist, trustee of the Sam Scorer gallery and family friend said: "His show was bloody good, it's took me years to get him to take part, and the show happened to coincide with his 80th birthday, not with his illness: it's just a shame that his illness coincided with the show.

But he got there on the opening day and he managed; he'd fallen down the stairs the night before he was absolutely covered in cuts and bruises. But we had such a good time."

Many influences can be seen in David's work, in his sketchbooks rough outlines of church organs, Lincoln Cathedral and views from steep hill embody an almost Ralph Steadman type quality.

However David's sketches are so much more defined; the fast and furious pen and pencil strokes and the energy present on the page bears so much similarity to the gonzo illustrator, whilst still containing individuality. "One of his central themes in education was visual awareness," said David Motion.

"He frequently revisited themes such as Lincoln Cathedral or views around Hamburg,

often he would pull out his sketchbook anywhere and everywhere; In a café, a restaurant, at the dinner table, or on holiday or while Claudia was having a piano lesson for instance. He would use his sketchbook where others might take a photograph." It is this quality, this sentiment that makes David's work ever so much more than a collection from an artist who simply didn't recognise his own talent. Not disclosing his art was a conscious decision, an unwillingness to share with the world things that other families are able to keep sacred and secret. It was a private collection, for him and his family documenting everything from childhood memories, holidays, the streets where his children grew up.

Looking at David's landscapes, towns and cities from Lincoln and London to Hamburg come to life. His earlier landscapes, bearing resemblance to the likes of Ivon Hitchens and his painting Curved Barn, David has experimented with shape, form and light. In his pieces depicting views from Hamburg, David brings a depth and ghostly light to the subject that art lovers could easily mistake for early pieces by William Turner.

Later paintings, while still embodying this Turner-esq quality, show marked progression with flashes of modern, abstract, expressionist and even Japanese influences featuring. Pin-up (1968) shows the influence of pop-art as well as leanings towards the abstract; the pastel colours, experimental form and play with shadow perhaps a nod to Picasso.

Almost ten years later, David's style jumps suddenly, almost mimicking traditional Japanese styles in View from the Usher (1976). The use of clouds and negative space in this particular piece perhaps eluding to the idea that people's view of Lincoln, as well as its art, was limited. The Lincoln Edge (1990's) painted around 30 years later shows a strong resemblance to the style and shapes made famous by Seurat. In some of his most recent work completed in 2006 and 2009 respectively, David seems to combine the two artistic styles favoured in his past work; illustrative elements intermingle and compliment the painted, slightly abstract elements of Walking up the Hill 1 & 2. The layer upon layer effect used here giving the impression that people and time are both passing by, yet all the while the landscape is represented as a constant, always remaining.

Known for being a man who provided support and guidance for the education of art, a man who harboured a true appreciation for the arts and those who contributed to them but David Freeman was also a man who, despite all of this, was blind to the strengths of his own talents, reserved and overly-critical of his work. David's loss is one that will be felt for a long time to come. But his life in art, his love and passion for art is something that will not be erased as easily as flesh and blood.



Pictures clockwise from top left: Walking up the Hill 2, 2009; The Lincoln Edge, 1990's and Self-portrait, not glum just thinking, taken from David Freeman's 1990's sketchbook.