

The Rakish Gent - Interview questions for Ian Rayer-Smith

1. Introduction

- **Can you give our readers a brief introduction to who you are and what you do as an artist?**

I'm a full-time painter. I focus on raw human expression. I'm always looking for the subliminal aesthetic, which is a constant visual exploration. Importantly, I never strive to represent reality. I always look for something that feels unreal or, if it may feel vaguely familiar, it is actually unrecognisable.

2. Inspiration

- **What inspires your artwork? Are there any specific themes, concepts, or experiences that consistently influence your creative process?**

Painters have always borrowed from the past but should produce art for the era in which they live. For me, inspiration comes from so many different places and experiences. Over the years I've been inspired by the Abstract Expressionist movement, and I love expressive painting. Also, and highly importantly, personal experience counts for a lot - by working in an unguarded expressive way I find that the unexpected can emerge.

I'm not interested in creating images of anything "real". I'm drawn to abstract painting for its sheer energy, and the emotional impact that it can deliver. It's something that will also reflect my own emotional state at the time. I can therefore sometimes create paintings that are darker, or quieter, than other times. Freedom is the key.

I have a large studio which I've had for several years which has elevated me (and my work) in so many ways. I can work on many oversized pieces at once and just move things around and have less fear of the "tightness" that artists really dread having when working on one solitary piece. Also, I will sometimes deliberately sabotage a piece I'm working on to change its direction. That can create a massive window of excitement. Having the large studio space gives me the freedom to experiment, to take risks and to work freely.

Over the years I've constantly explored the emotional process, eschewing intellectualisation. I arrive at my studio very early in the morning when all is quiet. From

that point on, even if I had arrived with intentions about what I was going to do, I can sometimes end up doing something completely different. I like to just go in and start painting. I go in with no specific intention of completing a piece, but just wanting to make it look better than when I arrived. That really works well for me. Also, for this reason, no piece is ever safe from being reworked until the day it has left my studio.

• How do you maintain your inspiration and creativity, especially when facing challenges or creative blocks?

It's funny these days - I don't generally experience big creative blocks. I think that's because I'm not overthinking things. I'd like to think any artist can reach the point where intuition plays a large part in the creative process.

3. Journey to Becoming an Artist

• Can you share with us your journey to becoming a full-time artist? What pivotal moments or decisions led you to pursue art professionally?

I started painting relatively late in life. I had painted as a child, but I don't really remember much about that. As an adult, I have worked for myself ever since my early 20's, and I have had several business endeavours such as in distribution and in the juice bar industry.

I had reached the stage where I felt stuck in a business that was decent, but which I just wasn't enjoying. In fact, it was making me unhappy. I was on holiday with my partner in California and we were buying a painting in a gallery. I kept looking at the painting and I suddenly thought that I needed to do that. At that stage, I wasn't even telling myself that I wanted to be an artist. It was just that I was dying to be more creative. When I returned from California, I contacted a friend who is an art teacher and said to him I wanted to paint, but I'd never done it properly before. He came round, got me started for an hour or so, and then left me to it. I then just painted and painted and couldn't stop.

Within a year, I had started to change my direction in life. I left my adopted home city of Bristol and moved up to a rural house in Shropshire with an art studio.

- **Tell us about your training to become an artist and what that involved.**

After moving to Shropshire, I did an art degree in Manchester. After four years I decided against doing an MA in art, as everybody I knew who had done that had told me it had disrupted their work and made them overthink things.

So, on graduating, I decided just to get a studio in Manchester, lock the door and paint. I bought a commercial unit which I thought I would turn into a Gallery space for shows twice a year. Then, within just a few years, things started to happen that I didn't ever expect. I was getting a lot of interest in my work from galleries, art consultants and designers and there were lots of opportunities that were very different and varied.

- **Were there any obstacles or doubts you faced along the way, and how did you overcome them?**

I've become a firm believer in taking risks. Risk-taking and failure are the twin pillars of an artist's life. They are essential components of my own development as an artist. What is the point in playing it safe? Sometimes things don't quite work out but sometimes they really do. Being an artist has been the clearest and most natural thing for me to do. Painting makes me happy.

I've been a full-time artist now for 11 years. Painting is the essential to me, although in fact the process of applying paint to canvas is only part of what I do. The business side takes up rather a lot of time and thought. Thankfully, my business background means that I'm not phased too much by all that.

4. Style and Technique

- **Your artwork features a distinctive style and technique. Could you describe how you developed this unique style over time?**

I don't have any fixed process or technique. I'm always working in many different ways. It enables me to combine different techniques. I'll leave myself open to discovering more. This means that with the paintings I have in my studio sometimes something happens and then I realise that it can work on another painting that I have on the go. And so, in a way, a lot of my inspiration comes from my previous work.

- **What mediums and tools do you prefer to work with, and why?**

I like to use lots of different things, but mainly use acrylic and oils. I don't just use brushes. Fingers, rags, squeegees, you name it. Mixing things up does create more interesting results.

5. Influences

- **Who are some artists, past or present, that have influenced your work the most? How have they impacted your artistic journey?**

When I first started painting, I was very much inspired by the Abstract Expressionist movement that immediately followed the Second World War, which was mainly based in New York. I really was inspired by the well-publicised macho painting thing. But over the years I have come to realise that in fact most of my favourite painters are women. There are many female painters in history who I love, but for me the most inspirational and moving work is by Joan Mitchell who was a brilliant second-generation abstract expressionist.

- **Beyond other artists, are there any other sources of inspiration—such as literature, music, or travel—that influence your artwork.**

I always listen to music whilst I paint, but absolutely nothing with lyrics. I totally need to be immersed in beautiful music while I work. I like to create a feeling of serenity in my studio from the moment I enter it, and when I leave the last thing I do is to turn off the music. It's not so much an inspirational thing, it's more an addition to help create an enjoyable experience in the studio.

As for other influences – I hope it isn't trite to say that life and my own personal experiences always influence what I do, and how I create.

6. Challenges and Success

- **What have been some of the biggest challenges you've faced as an artist, and how have you navigated them?**

Over the years I've had some difficult situations, as anybody does with any type of endeavour. All the time, I'm experiencing things I've never experienced before. It's really when you look back that you appreciate that these things just make you grow. I always try

and focus on the positive things that are happening rather than getting consumed by the bad things. That is generally what we all need to do.

I'm learning what to avoid doing too much of. Over the last few years, I've taken on some projects which, whilst enjoyable and artistically rewarding, have been quite challenging. For instance, very large commission paintings. I sometimes deliberately take on projects that are out of my comfort zone, and this brings new experiences and skills.

Also, dealing with the corporate world and with red tape in other countries can sometimes be quite a challenge.

• On the flip side, what achievements or moments of success have been particularly meaningful to you in your artistic career?

Being invited by art galleries who love my work, to do shows in countries where I've never been before, is always a great experience.

7. Advice for Aspiring Artists

• What advice would you give to aspiring artists who are looking to establish themselves in the art world, especially those interested in exploring the intersection of art and fashion?

Create work for yourself and keep going. Create as much as possible. The more you work on something, the better it gets. Use social media. Follow other artists there, and tell them you love their work. Do art fairs – they're a good place to market your work. Collaborate with other, different creatives. The intersection of art and fashion is a superb example of two creative disciplines enhancing each other. We are all putting on a show, after all.

• Are there any lessons you've learned throughout your career that you wish you had known when you were starting out?

I initially thought that starting out as an artist in my mid to late thirties would have made me miss out on something important. I used to wonder about what a difference it may have been if I had started off when I was young. Now, I realise that actually I just wouldn't have approached my art properly and I probably would not have been doing it at all well if I had started when I was young. Back then, I was too uncertain about myself, about who I was,

and my inexperience may well have left me without the ability to properly express myself. But now, my life experiences have made me motivated to do things the right way and make deliberate decisions that I would not have been able to make if I had started painting earlier.

9. Future Projects

- **Can you give us a glimpse into any upcoming projects or collaborations you're excited about?**

Watch this space..... or, to be more accurate, a large space in a grand London hotel opening soon.

- **How do you envision your art evolving in the future?**

Interesting question. The day I can answer it is probably the day I should hang up my brushes. I'm glad to be able to say that I genuinely have no idea how my art will evolve. What will happen will happen.

10. Final Thoughts

- **Is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers about your art, your journey, or your vision for the future?**

Let it happen at its own pace and enjoy the moment.