

# A PEMBROKESHIRE LEGEND

## JOHN KNAPP-FISHER



John Knapp-Fisher in his studio Image © Heather Bennett

It is difficult to know what to include in this profile, as listening to John Knapp-Fisher presents a multi-faceted experience of a richly lived life. It would be easy to write a book around this artist.

Born in London in 1931, there is a strong life force in John which defies time as he generously shares the core of his artistic drive and beliefs. He trained in Graphic Design at Maidstone College of Art, where he found himself strongly drawn to the works of the British Artists – especially John Piper and to the qualities he recognized in Van Gogh. These artists and his father's encouragement drew him into the world of Fine Art. John's father was Head of Architecture at the Royal College of Art and lived long enough to see his son's success in his chosen world.

Van Gogh remained a formative influence as John, painting a windmill in Ramsgate, was aware that Vincent had lived there briefly in his youth. He likens his time there – living through a bitter winter in a Victorian apartment block, frozen and shivering in front of an old gas fire – to Van Gogh's garret studio. Here, painting became his life.

John's first serious exhibitions at Kensington Art Gallery rapidly bought recognition and sales, confirming his belief of 'Yes, I can do this'. Other early exhibition spaces were The Coffee House, Northumberland Avenue and The Archer Gallery – both important spaces in the history of 20th-century art.

National Service intervened, and two years of stage design where the theatre and its hard-working people opened up a new world. Daytime stage sets sprang into different and magical life lit by spotlights at night, and began a lifetime's exploration of what light does to form and colour. Asked what drives his unique talent, part of his reply is 'The presence of ever-changing light, particularly in land and seascapes'.

In earlier years, John painted outside in oil on canvas, but he grew to prefer making sketches and rudimentary notes on colour/light and form; these were then worked up into finished paintings in the studio. More exact sketches often failed to materialise into these as they felt complete in themselves. The looser, notated, more rapid ones somehow held more of the artist's first emotional response to a scene. They were often small parts of a subject:



Tenby Luggar

© John Knapp-

# PROFILE

## by HEATHER BENNETT *photographer*

planes of walls and odd corners, offbeat things, light and dark skies, and ever-changing images of weather. His sketch books are sometimes included in his exhibitions: he likes to see those of other artists such as Graham Sutherland, for sometimes they tell him more than finished works.

Work in the studio is concentrated mental and physical effort, seeking to bring to life a relationship between what John sees and what he wants to transmit emotionally. Colour is important. Asked about his palette, he says 'It is of earth colours in low tonal ranges with a touch of primary creeping in now and then to surprise'. I find his work captivating, and ask if he enjoys it. His response is that during the process he is completely engrossed in creating the feeling of place and time he has experienced. There is a determination there which would drive him to a space of exhaustion as he searches for completion.

Painting is like breathing to John as he unites landscapes, people and boats into haunting and memorable images. He speaks sadly of what the world of art is now, with painting often being considered a poor relation, but as we talk about Oriel y Parc bringing new hope to this area of Wales he is cheered and hopes the pendulum will swing away from Brit Art and back to a more crafted and skilful scene.

John lived and worked on a seagoing vessel early in his career, and boats appear in many of his works. He left his boat, drawn to Wales by his friendship with John Seymour, the self-sufficiency guru. He and his then wife lived initially in Carmarthenshire, in a cottage up a track on the side of a mountain; the postman trudged across fields to deliver their mail. They stayed for two years: a time for of recognition that changing weather – here the fine rain and mountain mists were new experiences – would form a lifelong inspiration. Recognition that they needed a gallery drew them to John's present space in Croesgoch, where he has been for the last 42 years. The sea is close, the weather is changeable and here is everything John needs to inspire his work.

This is an artist who has exhibited in most major galleries in the UK and has pieces in collections like Amgueddfa Cymru–National Museum Wales, as well as private collections worldwide. He has been filmed by TV companies and written about in many publications, and yet he is open and accessible and genuinely interested in other people and the world around him. He is an instinctive communicator at all levels.



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See John's work on [www.john-knappfisher.com](http://www.john-knappfisher.com) or at Trevigan Gallery in Croesgoch, open 10.00 am to 5.00 pm Easter to September; or outside these times, call 44 (0)1348 831374 to arrange an appointment.