

A SPECIAL TALK AT BURTON LIBRARY ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

# 'Being An Erotic Artist'

by Jackie Adshead



Well the 8th March was International Women's Day and I was honoured and delighted to be asked to do a talk about being an Erotic Artist at the Library at Burton on Trent in celebration of it, alongside designer Mariama Tushemeriirwe, author Janet Bennett and singer Hayley Di Rito who was accompanied by Blue Yates on the guitar. The audience was very appreciative of our talks, which were very inspirational for many of them. It was interesting for me to hear the other speakers talk about aspects of their lives, and to hear the positive affirmation of striving to follow your dreams, overcoming hardships, finding people who inspire and help your creativity, finding support through like-minded people, and being brave enough to tell others about it and finding how much they appreciate the fact you do! Wow! What a night.

Various friends had rung, emailed or texted me to wish me good luck before hand, which was really sweet that they were thinking of me and wanted to wish me well with their support, I really did appreciate it.

I arrived a good hour early and was met by the positive and ever helpful Janet, who works at the library, who introduced me to the lovely Mariama. We were shown the set up; the stage and seating for the audience. Okay, it was relaxed and informal and the emphasis for the evening was on the word 'fun'. I'd been practising my talk for a few days beforehand, and hoped that I wouldn't dry up during it! I was on in the first half, after Mariama had spoken. Then there was to be an interval for coffee and then Janet would speak, followed by Hayley singing. I'd met the delightful Hayley briefly in somewhat different circumstances, since she was at the house of a friend of mine the other week, and we'd said 'hi' over a game of Trivial Pursuit!

There were enough people in the mostly feminine audience for me to still feel that I could relate to them as individuals and I was delighted that they came to speak to me both before and after my talk, and at the end of the evening. Some were inspired enough to want to talk to me about the possibility of me

doing commissions for them, some wanted to talk about the prints I'd taken with me, and some wanted to talk about their interest in art. All of them were interesting, as ever, and it was really nice to interact with them as friendly people. The head librarian asked me afterwards how many times I'd given my talk before and was surprised when I said it was the first time. He said that it sounded natural and I told him that I'd been practising it out loud for the last few days. So I'm glad that I did, even if the cat was a little bemused by my actions!

It was interesting for me to try and sum up my life so far in a succinct talk lasting around twenty minutes, to complete strangers. I looked at the 'who - what - why - how - where - when' aspect to help me put it in order. And it really served to focus me again on what I do and who I am. One woman told me afterwards that she was enthralled with my talk, so that was great to hear!

And for those who missed it - what follows is the basis of my talk.

**I'm Jackie Adshead and I'm a landscape painter.** I also paint portraits of humans and animals, houses, scenes and various objects, cats and dogs, horses, tigers and other big cats, children, mythical beasts, and fantasy pictures. But you're not interested in that, because no one ever is! I don't know why, but people are always far more interested in the fact that I do 'erotic art', more than anything else! And for some reason, I always seem to sell more erotic art than the 'normal stuff'. But then what is normal? For me, erotic art is normal.

I've spent all my life painting. I've never stopped since I first picked up a crayon as a toddler. I had my first commission at the age of thirteen for my history teacher at school, and I've painted many things for many people, but the artwork has changed a bit since then! I've always had the talent to paint within me, but I like to push my boundaries, I like a challenge and I love to be creative, so for that reason I am probably unusual in that I will paint any subject matter. I don't limit myself to just painting flowers, or landscapes, or people. Or to a certain style. I love to paint in watercolours, acrylics and oils, and to draw with pencil, pen and ink. And I do surreal, abstracts, fantasy, camouflage art, as well as representational. I am a 'painter' rather than an 'illustrator', in that I try to catch the essence and feel of the subject rather than a totally true representation. You can use a camera for that. But the image will be more stark. Painting is softer and more accepting, accentuating the good bits, and lessening the bad.

I know I am unusual in that I am a woman doing erotic art. But I love doing it, as an artist painting other people and making them look good. I love to see women in art, and painting art for women, as a female artist. I believe all women can look erotic, regardless of their age or body size. We all like to feel attractive, it's that that I try to find, to pick up on, and put the essence of it into the painting.

I am most inspired by Caravaggio for his dramatic use of light and deep darks. And I also love the work of Dali, Jack Vettriano, Boris Vallejo, Frank Frazetta, Josephine Wall and Jim Warren.



I must admit, as far as jobs go, there aren't many where it's perfectly normal for people to take their clothes off for you – but my job is one of them! People feel at ease when I draw them. They take their clothes off, and I just keep the eye contact, and whatever they look like is okay. They will only find it strange if the response is negative. To me it's a positive experience.

Having said that, as far as I'm concerned drawing a human body is just the same as drawing a bottle or a vase of flowers, I look at the lines, and the tones, the form, where the light is hitting the body and work out the best composition. People sometimes ask me if I'm turned on by looking at the erotic images, and are probably surprised when I say that I am not. It's just work for me! Because it's just an object I'm drawing regardless of what it is. But, what I have to bear in mind when I draw an erotic image is that I don't feel sexy when I'm drawing the picture, and the model might not even feel sexy if it's a difficult pose and they're trying to keep still for me. But, what I need to capture is that certain something, the essence, that will make the viewer feel erotic when they look at it. And that is such a subtle thing to capture, and is something that may be different in all of us.

The way I think of 'erotic' is that it is something that makes you wonder . . . what has that person done beforehand to now be in that position and place and time, and what are they going to do next? The way I describe

'erotic' is this – if I draw any one of you sitting here as you are now, it would be a portrait. If you were sitting here in the same position stark naked, then it would be a life drawing pose. If you were sitting here stark naked doing something graphically sexual (and I'll leave that to your own vivid imaginations) then that would be pornographic because it leaves nothing to the imagination. But what I draw is the 'erotic' – the sensual, the sexy and the suggestive. And I can draw an erotic image where the woman in it is fully clothed, because it may just be the look on her face that makes it 'erotic'.

And erotica is becoming ever more acceptable in mainstream art. We're all used to seeing erotic images in magazines and on the telly – and don't tell me that Nigella Lawson isn't promoting the 'erotic', because she is! Her cooking is a by-product! It's the enjoyment of sensual things – whether it's food, sensual experiences or erotic art.

I started being an erotic artist by attending life drawing classes about ten years ago, and I found it a strange experience to start with, until I realised that although the room was full of people, and one of them was totally naked, it was all quite normal, and the naked woman was an object, like a beautiful vase, and not something that was considered dirty and rude. So I just got on with drawing, as was everyone else in the room, and I realised how difficult it is, because if you draw a tree, it doesn't matter if the trunk is a little too wide,

or if one of the branches is too long, but it does if it's a human body, the measurements have to be right, and the arms and legs need to look like they are all connected to the body and that the head sits on the shoulders.

After a few weeks of being at a life drawing class and looking at the work I'd done, I wondered how I could make it look more interesting, and life-like, and I realised that it was what I was leaving out that made the picture more interesting, as it leaves it to your imagination. I drew with white crayon on black card instead of black pencil on white paper, which made it more dramatic, and it evolved from there.

I love it when someone contacts me and wants me to paint their passion, because then I can put my passion into creating it for them. And it doesn't matter if it's erotic or not, I just love painting!

As well as erotic art I love painting secrets – and have done some erotic landscapes (I told you I was a landscape painter). I had a commission a few years ago from a chap from Windsor, who asked me to paint a picture of the New York skyline at night as the typical picture, but with an erotic couple hidden within the painting so that people viewing it wouldn't know unless they looked closer or had it pointed out to them. That very same week (there must have been something in the air) I was commissioned to do a painting for a woman in Dorset who wanted an erotic picture to hang over her bed that her four-



year-old son wouldn't recognise as anything other than a landscape. She wanted me to paint an erotic landscape where the couple are actually the geography of the land – the picture was based on Lands End – there is sky, sea, cliffs, a beach, sand dunes, a cave, and a tree, and a bit of a phallic lighthouse in the distance. And to innocent eyes, this picture is nothing more than that. But to less innocent people, it is far more. You can see the man and the woman within the picture, and you can see what they are doing. It is both erotic, and a landscape. And it's the thing that I am most proud of, because it took three months of hard work to design it; innocence only sees innocence in my work.

I love hiding the subject matter within my art too – like in the set of erotic feminine abstracts that I've painted that just look like brightly colourful abstract shapes, but are actually a very intimate picture, although most people looking at it wouldn't have a clue – which makes it the ultimate conversation piece as far as I am concerned!

A female sex therapist told me that a lot of her patients have issues with their body image, and seeing my beautiful and positive paintings might help them to overcome that. They have empowered the women who have participated in them, since they find them therapeutic and spiritual, and a little bit naughty as well. They are currently hanging on walls in America and England, and a woman contacted me from New Zealand in raptures over them and what they stood for. I love the fact they are affecting women worldwide. I painted one for a woman in Canada whose young stepson described it as 'the sky diving picture', because that was what it looked like to him. Again, innocence only saw innocence . . .

And from doing those pictures I was asked by a woman in California to paint a body portrait of her in the style of the feminine abstracts. She rang me specifically to tell me

which tones and shades of which colours she wanted in it, and which she didn't. That's how I developed my 'Living Flame' pictures. They are pastel colours glazed one on top of the other to create pretty and translucent shades which everyone seems to find very appealing. I've painted a chap from London in this style, as well as a couple which I sold to a collector of my work, in Chicago. I love the fact that one painting might lead on to another one because of one aspect that evolves into another and so on. The ideas for the art flow on and I love that aspect.

I like to hide messages within my art too – like when I was asked to do a watercolour painting for a couple from London of a particular village in southern France that they had visited a lot, and I suggested that they might like their initials hidden within the buildings itself. They loved that idea, as it made it far more personal to them, but I knew we were going to have a problem, as did the woman when I mentioned it. So, I had to just put in their initials, and not the 'and' part – since otherwise it would have spelt out 'M&S' or worse still 'S & M'!

I have exhibited a lot in the East Midlands, and with the Guild of Erotic Artists who are based in St Albans, Hertfordshire. I am featured in their second book. It's an international group and they actively try to promote the acceptance of erotic art. Having said that of course, erotic art is becoming more and more acceptable, and can be seen in most glossy

magazines, or adverts on the television. It's a really nice friendly group to be part of and they are very supportive to everyone in the group. I have exhibited twice at Erotica (the liberated lifestyle event) at Olympia in London, which was an eye-opening experience and great fun! I got chatting to a guy there who asked me, "Why is a nice girl like you exhibiting here?" The answer I gave him was that if I could sell enough 'vanilla' artwork then I wouldn't need to sell the erotic stuff!

But, I do love doing it, because it's difficult, and the most challenging of art to do, and because of the subtle nuances of it. It's my niche market, and it's one I love.

I am also on Facebook. I have a website which promotes my art worldwide, and I write a blog about being an erotic artist, and some of the very strange conversations I have with people. Someone once thought I was an 'erratic' artist. And someone else thought I was a 'neurotic' artist – I don't know how one of those paints, very shakily, I suppose!

I have had a number of people brought to tears through a special commission that they've asked me to do, and when that happens I know it's because I've touched their soul with mine. I know that people like to see what they look like through another person's eyes, and I know I have been good therapy to some of the people who I have drawn, because they've told me so, with emotion in their voices. Someone I drew with a perceived lack of confidence says I'm good therapy

because she was surprised I wanted to draw her and that she was so inspirational for me. Her elderly mother got emotional because when she saw the image as it reminded her of how she was as a younger woman. I have seen within them and it's deeper than looking in a mirror.

I'd like to think that I have brought a lot of pleasure to people through my art. I know I have done so far, and I hope to continue to do so. I try to touch people's hearts and hope that they feel more enriched through knowing me. And I hope that I am an inspiration.

What I love most, and try to paint, is the thing that I think is most important in the world. And that is the power of communication – whether it is through the spoken word, touch, empathy, painting pictures for other people's pleasure, or for my own, the written word, or just the look between two people. And as a woman, I think that's important for us all.

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Jackie Adshead is a member of The Guild of Erotic Artists and writes a regular on-line blog about her art and her life as an erotic artist.

