

3. Twelve Years in Devon

I began my career in Devon a month before Margaret Thatcher became prime-minister. Her victory in the election of 1979 would change my life in two ways. Firstly, it meant an end to teacher autonomy in state schools and the establishment of a national curriculum policed by inspection. Secondly, almost all local authority spending was devolved to schools forcing education authorities to 'market' any additional services they chose to provide. Colleagues became 'clients', a change whose meaning I summarised as follows: 'a colleague is someone you serve to the limit of your resources; a client is someone you serve to the limit of his.' Ultimately these developments would cost me my job but for a dozen years I devoted most of my energy to the creation of an educational resources service that would make it easier for good teachers to lead by example.

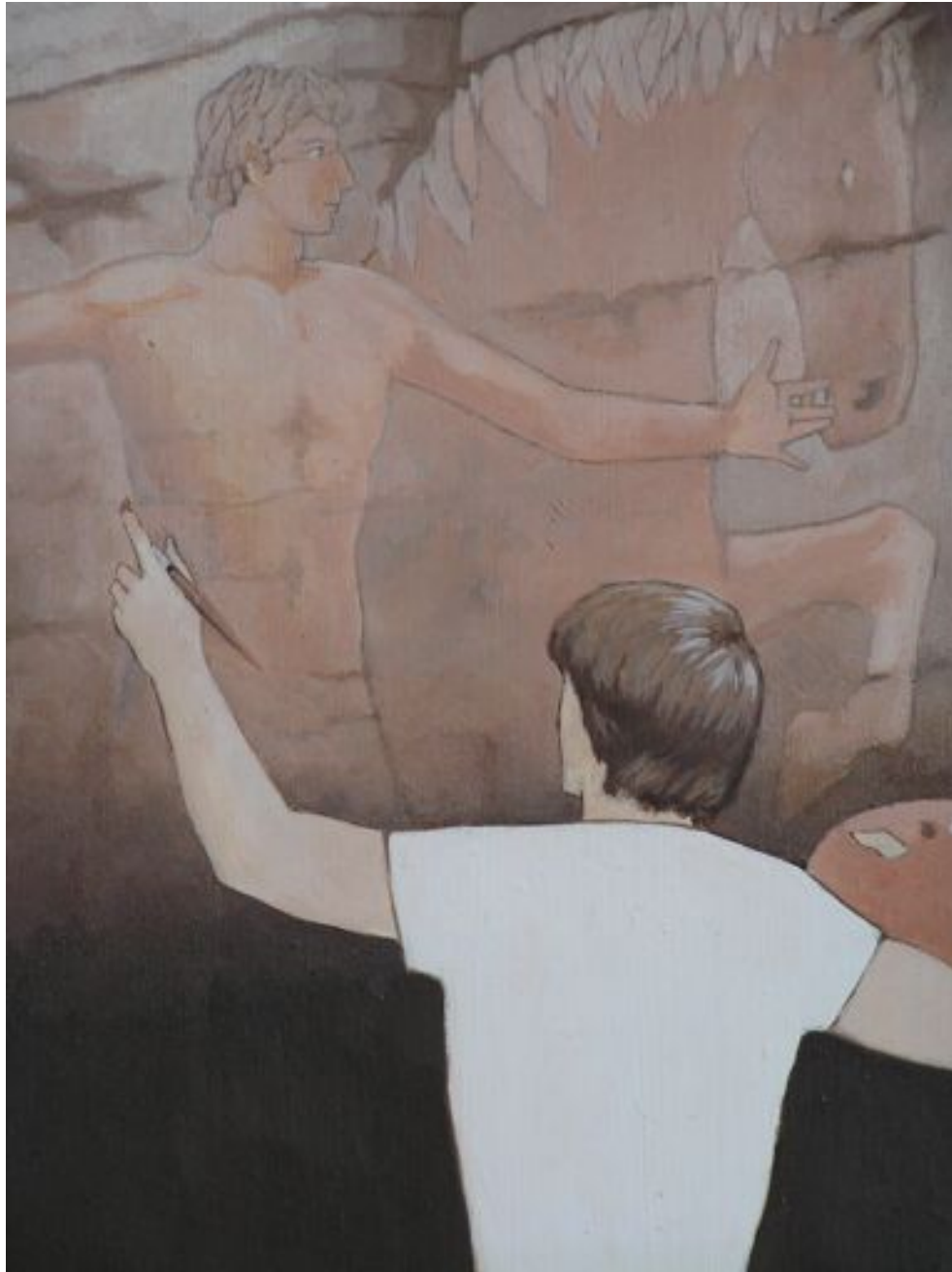


1. St Francis and the Leper (2010)

Inevitably my artistic life became caught up in this project: the number of successful 'easel' paintings I completed in these years diminished still further, especially as the decade wore on. Although the Marriage Box remained incomplete a diptych illustrating the life of St Francis of Assisi reflected my enthusiasm for Franco Zeffirelli's film *Brother Sun and Sister Moon* (1) whilst the young Stephen Weeks' *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* prompted my first major work in acrylic (2). At the same time I made a fresh attempt to create a psychic myth of my own devising - the conflict between Egos (energy) and Auton (intellect).



2. Sir Gawain at the Green Chapel (1981)



3. Auton, lord of horses (1985)

Like *The Book of Aten* there was to have been a series of illustrations complementing the text. The first (3) shows myself as the artist creating Auton on the wall of what the text called the 'mind-cave'. In contrast to Egos who exists eternally Auton is brought to life when an individual human mind becomes aware of itself and begins to create goals for its existence beyond the needs of the moment. His epithet 'lord of horses' is an echo of Hector's in the *Iliad*: Auton may tame the energy of Egos but he needs it to live. Auton's greatest achievement is society, an entity greater than the sum of its parts. However society can also be a prison and the means by which some lord it over others and the majority are made poor. Danger lurks in such a situation as 'The Throne' (4) reminds us.



4. The Throne (1985)

It is not only lives that are lost when ambitious individuals battle for power: high-minded men and women come to distrust themselves as well as others. The result is a society divided against itself and individuals who are racked with guilt. To justify actions of which they are ashamed they may be tempted to invoke noble causes, destroying others and themselves in the process. In such circumstances the mind can only find peace in oblivion, a healing goddess 'who comes when she will, not when she is bidden.' (5) The message seems bleak but it reflected a period in my career when I found myself faced with jealousy and obstruction and forced as a result to appear two-faced and devious. For more than three years I had to deal with the hostility of those who should have been my closest colleagues whilst the local authority made up its mind how to structure its curriculum support services.



5. Oblivion's Angel (1985)

In the end matters were resolved in an incomplete way that would leave me exposed when new men took over the direction of Devon's education department. Meanwhile there was the compensating pleasure that came through telling bedtime stories to my sons. One of these stories, an epic called 'Hero', evolved into a long narrative poem in which the boy of the title sets out in search of fame and fortune, only to learn by bitter experience that these things are not to be had easily. Little by little he overcomes what he sees as his weaknesses, only to discover that what we might (inaccurately) call his 'feminine' side is in fact his soul. Fortified by this knowledge he goes on to take his rightful place in the world, eventually retiring to find true contentment in the eternal things of life. At the age of thirteen Chris Leedham wrote a tone poem entitled 'Hero' that perfectly captured the joys and sorrows of the original.



6. Hero series 1: Death and Fate play chess (1989)



7. Hero series 1: The fight in the castle (1989)



8. Hero series 1: The emperor and his vizier (1989)



9. Hero series 1: the return (1989)

For most of the years covered by this period we took our annual holidays in Rye. Here in relaxing and inspirational surroundings I painted a number of small landscapes and interior views (8 and 9).



10. Interior of the Studio. Rotherview (1989)



11. Fairfield Church, Romney Marsh (1987)

Despite the pleasure I took in these modest little pictures landscape has seldom attracted me for its own sake. Figures almost invariably make their appearance as in (12) even when they have no 'story' attached.



12. Dartmoor view (1985)

Apart from the church tower in 'Dartmoor view' which was based on Widecombe 'Dartmoor view' is imaginary. However it did have a specific origin – a journey which took me across the moor on a day after snow had fallen. It was a day when I took some big decisions, Nature herself seeming to give me courage.

In April 1990 I attended a conference in London entitled 'Realising Human Potential'. Consciously or unconsciously I came away feeling that my potential was not being realised through the job to which I was devoting so much of my energies. Maybe this conditioned my reaction to the events that unfolded that summer, making me more obstinate in the defence of my staff and my principles than I might have been. I certainly did not behave in the way that my 'superiors' thought I should, believing that my record of achievement would protect me from the consequences of disobedience. It didn't and by the summer of 1991 I had effectively been dismissed by Devon, though accorded a 'golden handshake' and the vague promise of re-employment after a year spent in Higher Education. I hardly painted at all during this critical period, uncertainty about the future suppressing the joy that I might have felt at being freed from the burdens of management. There was however time for one last Rye painting (13).



13. View of Rye from the studio balcony, Rotherview (1991)