

Christine Allison.....my work. The Malthouse October 2016

“ Curiously, although my work depicts birds, animals and fish, I don’t consider myself of wildlife artist or a naturalist. I have only kept a few animals in my life, cats and dogs, chickens, pheasants and a special gander to whom I was particularly bonded and yet – and yet – I am moved, deeply moved when in the presence of an eagle or an owl or a falcon or a hawk. I am intrigued by them. Not so intrigued that I wish to own or train such a creature, but intrigued by their awesome presence and their energy. They seem to touch something deep inside me, something raw and emotional.

When the Emperor stag was shot on Exmoor in 2010 that same raw part of me was touched. I just knew I had to paint him. How else could I express my respect for such a wonderful creature? After all, I am an artist and painting is my language. I wanted to celebrate his life, his energy, his presence. How could someone wilfully shoot such a handsome beast? What right did they have? So I painted him in all his glory, with his fourteen point antlers and nine-foot stature. A testament to nature at its most magnificent.

To be in the presence of a majestic bird or animal is like standing before a great masterpiece – a Michelangelo, Botticelli or Rodin. I want to look closely. How was it made (the painting, sculpture AND the creature)? I feel the power, the energy, the pulse of the brush mark, the mould of the clay, the artists’ thumbprint, the pattern of the feathers, the sharpness of the talons and the deep stare of the golden eye. To stand before greatness is awesome and inspiring. I do not need to own a Leonardo da Vinci or an eagle to appreciate their powerful beauty. Indeed, stewardship of such a thing or beast would be overwhelming. No; I would rather visit, bow down before them in reverence and come away blessed.

I have no desire to make pictures with every feather or hair exquisitely in place. I am not deriding my fellow artists who do. I can admire their skills. But I want to see something different in my work.

Yes of course the creature must be recognisable, but I want to add something more - a glorification, a sense of power and energy that is FELT within the work and emanates from it.

My tools are composition, scale, colour, brush marks – the basic elements of all artists. My challenge is always, always, always: how? How to use my tools and skills to say something MORE about my subject?

It is a constant challenge. Each painting is a journey of discovery. This is how I am doing it today but how will I do it tomorrow? What more is there to say and how can I say it in paint? There is always something more to discover. Satisfaction comes not from the complacency of knowing what I CAN do but from finding something I didn't know I could do.

My paintings of birds have taken me to distant shores; to the Middle East, where they now hang on opulent palace walls and in prestigious offices of corporate companies. I have been honoured as a guest at Royal farms and falconries, I have met interesting and beautiful people and had adventures which would not have happened had these birds not got under my skin and entered my soul.

These creatures have helped me to hone my senses, to FEEL the pulse of my subject and then somehow, somehow, capture their essence and portray it on canvas.

I feel I have just begun even though it is forty years since I left St. Martin's School of Art in London with my portfolio under my arm ready to take on the world. Now I fear I might run out of time as I have so much more to do! I want to paint elephants and armadillos, flamingos and bulls – who knows what? The birds have opened something in me that knows no bounds, beyond the parameters I might unwittingly impose upon myself. “