



Still life with collage

Leaving something unexplained

Like Disney's Frozen, artist Mitzie Green's mantra is letting go. Sandra Smith meets the painter in her Berkhamsted studio surrounded by her fresh and vibrant depictions of places, spaces and flowers



'FOR THE SAKE of a painting, it's better if you're not in control the whole time. Accidents are a good thing. Allowing mistakes to happen can improve the outcome.'

When initially greeted by Mitzie Green, I'd mistakenly assumed high-level control to be an integral part of her make-up. Her Berkhamsted home, after all, is beautifully presented and the sunny studio in which we're sitting – its copious windows and skylights letting in a big wash of natural light – houses well-ordered stacks of work in progress, neatly-arranged brushes and walls adorned with white-framed paintings. Compared with her creative process, however, I soon learn such characteristics are mere superficialities,

cosmetic symmetry which in no way limits the eclectic vision of this talented artist.

'I paint every day,' Mitzie reveals, 'usually in the afternoon. I like to paint on paper or MDF. I used to prefer oils but they take too long to dry and are incredibly messy. When I found oil on the bread in the bread bin, I gave up! Modern acrylics are amazing, with a range of pigments available. Learning to mix them, that's when you get the results.'

The Hamburg-born artist came to the UK in 1963 with the intention of working as an au pair for a year, but within three weeks she'd met her future husband and things took a different turn. She stayed and raised a family as well as turning her attentions to the visual ▶

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arts. She had always had an interest in art but was dissuaded from attending art college by her father, who insisted a secretarial career would be more lucrative. After the birth of her children, an interest in pottery was followed by textile study before she convinced herself that painting would reach a wider audience.

In her converted garage studio, what is immediately striking throughout the range of subjects – from townscapes in Herts and beyond to local woods and fields brimming with wildflowers – is a vibrancy of hues.

'Sunshine makes a world of difference,' Mitzie explains. 'I love colour, as well as light and dark. Some of the artists I admire, such as Kurt Jackson and Kandinsky, are all very colourful.'

Herts Open Studios, the major annual show organised by Herts Visual Arts of Hertfordshire artists in their creative spaces, provided Mitzie with her first public show in 1997. Since then, her award-winning compositions have

been shown at London's Mall Galleries and accepted by the Royal Academy. Locally, she has exhibited at Hemel Hempstead's Old Town Hall and accepted Ashridge College's invitation to showcase her work. Her popular workshops in Northchurch and Harpenden attract beginners alongside more experienced artists.

Her subjects vary, yet a looseness of style is another common denominator.

'I love flowers and gardening, but people want other subjects, too,' she says. 'Sometimes I paint with a sponge then flick water at it.'

This technique enhances the feel of spontaneity which links her work. It also adds a textural quality. Yet she readily admits it's not always as spontaneous as it seems. 'Sometimes a painting stays unfinished for months or years.'

I ask to see an example of a shelved piece. The woodland painting she chooses portrays depth and atmosphere. But it fails to fulfil her brief.

Rape field, Pouchen End, Hemel





Left Chinese lanterns
Above Old Hemel Hempstead
Below Hornfleur, France
Far left Rapeseed field, Pouchen End,
Hemel Hempstead
Opening pages left Still life with collage
Opening pages right Berkhamsted

'This is too pedestrian, too well defined. There's no surprise,' she says. 'I want something unexplained. Sometimes I just move on to another subject. There are always so many other paintings I'm working on.'

She prefers to paint indoors from her own photographs of places she has visited. Whether focusing on Hertfordshire, Cornwall, Yorkshire or overseas destinations, her eye-catching paintings share a brightness and hint of playfulness which has an aura of optimism. There's movement, too, even in the small, abstract examples, for which sketchbooks are a conduit for the evolution of ideas.

'An abstract painting may not take long but includes a lot of work beforehand,' Mitzie explains, adding, 'Listening to music helps because I play with the rhythm and beat. All my paintings are about letting go – freeing up to and going beyond the line rather than just filling in shapes.'

As I continue to explore Mitzie's portfolio, our talk embraces shapes – 'I think squares are exciting' – the tones of rust and gaining a diploma in counselling.

Her engaging images reflect a passion for her adopted country and leave me admiring the synergy between a willingness to experiment and independent approach which together shape this intriguing artist. ♦

Mitzie Green will be exhibiting at Harpenden Arts Club's annual exhibition from November 9-13 at Harpenden Public Halls, and the Berkhamsted Art Society Christmas exhibition from November 20-26 at Berkhamsted Civic Centre.

